

Death, Resurrection, Rebirth: Coltaine as Christ Figure in Steven Erikson's

*Deadhouse Gates*

Through symbolic imagery, allegory, and fantastic transformations, the character of Coltaine, a general or Fist in the Malazan Seventh Army takes on mythic or Messianic proportions in Steven Erikson's *Deadhouse Gates*, the second novel in his ten book series, *The Malazan Book of the Fallen*. The analogies to the miracles of Christ abound throughout the text of the book - the 'walking upon water' scene, feeding of the multitudes, the rescuing of the meek and the poor, the guidance and deliverance of the helpless (thirty thousand refugees across a hostile continent), and the sacrifice of himself to save his charges - raising Coltaine up to legendary martyr status. Erikson's deft use of imagery with religious or spiritual significance also imbue Coltaine with mystery and elevates Coltaine to a figure of mythic proportions. The employment of symbols such as the cross, the dogs, the crows, the arrow and the unborn but later, mysteriously wizened child, all create a resonance within the character, Coltaine, of the Christ figure, dying on the cross as a martyr for the weak and being resurrected or reborn. Similarly, his people, the Wickans, are persecuted by the Malazan army, reminiscent of the treatment of the early Christians at the hands of the Romans.

Erikson also employs fantastic transformations to elevate Coltaine to mythological status. Using crows and ravens as messengers of the gods, the fractionation and absorption of Coltaine's soul by thousands upon thousands of crows illustrates his almost demigod status when compared to the seven crows needed to

resurrect a warlock and the thousands of Great Ravens for the alien god of the tenth book, *The Crippled God*. In Steven Erikson's fantasy world, it seems size and number matter - at least in terms of resurrection. Finally, he reincarnates Coltaine into the unborn fetus who grows up to be the archetypal mystic child, Grub, in the sixth book of the series, *The Bonehunters* to further reinforce the significance of Coltaine as a character of legendary status. Coltaine, as Grub, is the heroic child who will be the future of man as revealed in the tenth book, *The Crippled God*.

This paper will attempt to enumerate and illustrate the means by which Erikson creates and fortifies his character, Coltaine, in the image of the Christ figure.