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The Ritual of Tellann: Immortality and its Refusal in Steven Erikson's *Malazan Book of the Fallen*

As opposed to Tolkien's naturally long-lived Elves, the T'lan Imass in Steven Erikson's *Malazan Book of the Fallen* only gain immortality following the Ritual of Tellann – a metaphysical endeavor born of their perceived inferiority to the tyrannical Jaghut and transgressing against the laws of nature by defying death, using immortality as a means to exercise power. Where Tolkien's Elves seek to fill their long lives with worthwhile endeavors, Erikson's Imass forgo culture in favor of eternal warfare.

Following Friedrich Nietzsche, who considers power to be the experience of overcoming resistance, and Alfred Adler, who expands on Nietzschean theory by pointing out the roots of power in the individual's need to account for its inferiority to life's challenges, I would like to discuss not only Erikson's conceptualization of an immortal people but also his vision of the cultural and individual ramifications deathlessness entails. Since their immortality is teleological rather than natural or incidental, serving the purpose of defeating a tyrannical species they see no natural way of defeating, the question of a meaningful life is answered for the Imass at large rather than by each individual member. Thus, in an extreme case of Adlerian Gemeinschaftsgefühl, the need for a people to overcome its oppressors supersedes and eventually replaces aspects such as culture and community, resulting in a unique presentation of life without death, decaying but never ending.

When the Imass eventually win their eternal war and eradicate their enemies, the Ritual of Tellann chains them to a purpose now devoid of meaning, leaving only two options: finding new tyrants to destroy, or giving in to the weariness of millennia at war and finally terminating the Ritual. What the Imass perceive as a continued dedication to the justice inherent in protecting the innocent from the despotic, the species who have risen in the meantime can only see as zealotry. To them, "to know and to understand that we all must die [...] is not to worship death. To know and to understand is itself magic, for it made us stand tall." Thus, Erikson recontextualizes the Imass' altruistic sacrifice with opposing views of refusing the power in such transgressions against the natural order, finding individual happiness in accepting the natural course of things.

My contribution seeks to examine Erikson's interrogation of immortality as both use and abuse of power, focalized via Nietzsche and Adlerian concepts of power and contrasted using my own dimensions of metaphysical power and refusal as categories. By presenting contradictory positions juxtaposing justice with natural progression, Erikson's works provide fertile ground for such an examination of power relations in the context of immortality. Leveraging the characteristic antimimesis of Fantasy storyworlds, I would like to facilitate a discussion of what being immortal entails when it comes to exercising power over others as well as the self, and what value may be found in refusing to do so.

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