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Three Artistic Versions of 'The Death of Glorfindel'

Sarah Beach, Patrick Wynne and Paula DiSante

As a special artistic treat in this issue, we give you three versions of "The Death of Glorfindel." This project began with an idea from Paula DiSante, who suggested to her friends, Pat Wynne and Sarah Beach, that each of them attempt independent renderings of an agreed subject. The idea was put forward at Mythcon in Vancouver, where a fourth party (one Paul Nolan Hyde) selected the subject. The choice was made by eliminating often-done scenes (such as "The Mirror of Galadriel"). The basic passage chosen was from The Silmarillion, Chapter 23.

There was a dreadful pass, Cirith Thoronath it was named, the Eagles' Cleft, where beneath the shadow of the highest peaks a narrow path wound its way; on the right hand it was walled by a precipice, and on the left a dreadful fall leapt into emptiness. Along that narrow way their march was strung, when they were ambushed by the Balrog because I wanted to focus on the conflict of good and evil. Also, I rendered them without weapons, focusing on the spiritual nature of the battle. I suspect I was influenced in this by what Gandalf says to Frodo in Rivendell, "You saw him for a moment as he is upon the other side." (FR, p.294)

Patrick Wynne: My depiction of "The Death of Glorfindel" closely follows the account given in The Book of Lost Tales, Part Two, p. 194. Using a highly stylized approach seemed a good way to echo visually the pseudo-archaic, mannered prose of BoLT, and it gave me an opportunity to indulge my love of curvilinear forms. Stylization also made it easier to achieve the sense of space I was after — the sweeping curves of the chasm walls, as though viewed through a fish-eye lens, convey (I hope) a feeling of vast height which would have been difficult to portray with a more realistic technique. The curling plumes of smoke owe more than a little to Tolkien's renditions of the campfire in his illustration "The Trolls" for The Hobbit (see Pictures by J.R.R. Tolkien, No. 2), and there are other visual references to the work of certain current Tolkien fan-artists (I will let you figure them out for yourselves). I felt there would be a great deal of dramatic potential in depicting not simply the death-plunge of Glorfindel and the Balrog but the death-plunge a split second before its noisy, and no doubt messy, conclusion. My Balrog is a rather corporeal-looking creature, more like a gigantic Orc than the dimly-glimpsed horror of fire and shadow described in "The Bridge of Khazad-dûm", and this is in keeping with the description of these monsters in BoLT (cf. Joe Abbott's article in ML 59). My love of the Elvish languages led me to include as an integral part of the composition a panel describing the

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Can one human being bear the Glory of God to another? Williams says yes — because the first and great Incarnation allows for all our lesser imaging and because that great and eternal co-inherence of the Trinity is the pattern for all our lesser co-inherences. As Beatrice’s eyes reflect the two-natured Griffin, “Romantic Love is seen to mirror the Humanity and Deity of the Redeemer” (Williams, 106). This divine and human experience is the goal and method of Williams’ Theology of Romantic Love.

WORKS CITED


—. The Figure of Beatrice: A Study in Dante. New York: Octagon Books, 1980

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Three Artistic Versions of ‘The Death of Glorfindel’ (continued from page 20) scene in Quenya. The over-all effect of the piece is that of a page from an illuminated Elvish manuscript. For those not conversant with the tengwar or Quenya, a transcription of the panel in the English alphabet with translation is provided. (Pat himself translated the English of BoLT into Quenya. -SB)

Si Laurefin'dil ar i Valarauko kostaner tanya akalalese or i i lie. Laurefin'dil orme hortane i Malkarauke tildelio tildemn, i kallo varna ho sruite latta ar angarakka laurua rembenen. Si palpanéro onno erakeasa, si aupelektane lataranko dimesse. San i Malarauko quanta kaueren kempe Laurefin'dilennia i nastane ve leuko rinke, nan er tuvieiro róma, ar i Valkarauke mápe so. San Laurefin'dil má hya yieto tuko skil i amba nastanéro onno súma terien, ar i ulundo urua ramne naikenen ar nallante akalalelo, mápala ohtaro lokse laurua nu karmn; ar yúio lantier yawvenna. Yé! Lantalto láma haltane ter i ambor ar quante Sornesféo yáuwe.

Now Glorfindel and the Balrog quarrelled upon that peak above the people. The Wrath of Glorfindel send the Balrog Flying from point to point, the hero protected from fiery lash and iron claw by golden mail. Now he battered the creature’s iron helm, now hewed away its whip-arm at the elbow. Then the Balrog, filled with fear, leaped towards Glorfindel, who stung like the dart of a snake, but he only found a shoulder, and the Balrog seized him. Then Glorfindel’s left hand found a dagger, which he trust upward to pierce the creature’s bosom, and the fiery monster roared in pain and fell backwards from the peak, seizing the warrior’s golden hair beneath the helm; and both fell into the abyss. Lo! The echo of their fall leaped through the hills and filled the abyss of Thorn Sir.

(The Variant Quenya forms for “Balrog” were coined by Tolkien himself, used here as synonyms for variety’s sake.)

Paula Di Sante: This version of the “Death of Glorfindel” reflects my interest in depicting physical and emotional aftermath. In other words, I like to show what happens after everything happens. The description of Glorfindel’s battle with the Balrog in The Silmarillion is quite brief — a mere two paragraphs that are very slim on specifics. So it was a creative challenge to provide visual detail that is not described in the text. I see Glorfindel as a “sacrificial savior” figure, and so took my inspiration from the Deposition of the Cross paintings of Peter Paul Rubens and Jacopo Pontormo. These paintings, however, were not so much compositional influence as they were emotional ones. Along with Glorfindel, the other characters portrayed here are Tuor, Idril, the young Eärendil, an unnamed elf of Gondolin, and the tail and talons of Thorondor.