Winter 12-15-1989

Three Artistic Versions of "The Death of Glorfindel"

Sarah Beach

Patrick Wynne

Paula DiSante

Follow this and additional works at: https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore

Part of the Children's and Young Adult Literature Commons

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore/vol16/iss2/16

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Mythopoeic Society at SWOSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature by an authorized editor of SWOSU Digital Commons. An ADA compliant document is available upon request. For more information, please contact phillip.fitzsimmons@swosu.edu.
Three Artistic Versions of "The Death of Glorfindel"
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 Orcs, for Morgoth had set watchers all about the encircling hills; and a Balrog was with them. Then dreadful was their plight, and hardly would they have been saved by the valour of yellow-haired Glorfindel, chief of the House of the Golden Flower of Gondolin, had not Thorondor come timely to their aid.

Many are the songs that have been sung of the duel of Glorfindel with the Balrog upon a pinnacle of rock in that high place; and both fell to ruin in the abyss. But the eagles coming stopped upon the Orcs, and drove them shrieking back; and all were slain or cast into the deeps, so that rumour of the escape from Gondolin came not until long after to Morgoth's ears. Then Thorondor bore up Glorfindel's body out of the abyss .... (S, p.243)

Each of the artists has written a brief description of what contributed to his or her picture. The descriptions are given in the order of the dramatic sequence (see pages 21, 39 and the back cover). We hope you will enjoy the results of this project.

Sarah Beach: My rendering of "The Death of Glorfindel" is actually for the moments before the event, the about-to-happen moments. I limited the figures to Glorfindel and 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 rendition 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

(Continued on page 25)
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.