

Grasping Reality with Both Hands

The weblog
of Brad DeLong. Since 1999.
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Cooney: Lore Context & Gandalf v. Balrog— Noted

Evan Cooney: *I was asked to do a thread*
<https://twitter.com/EvanCooney0717/status/1290728350504423435> on why “lore
context” for Gandalf’s fight with the Balrog in the *Lord of the Rings* is so
important and makes the scene much more intense and powerful than first
impression. So here we go...

...Let’s focus on what is said. To keep this post relatable, I’ll stick
with the lines from the Peter Jackson movies instead of getting too
deep with the books, also Jackson does the scene justice IMO: “I
am a servant of the secret fire” is a reference to the secret fire of
Illuvatar, the monotheistic god of the Tolkien universe. The secret
fire refers to his power to give life. Here, Gandalf reveals and
identifies himself as not an old decrepit wizard, but one of the
Maia.

The Maia are a class of beings that you could think of as angels in
the Tolkien universe. There are Maia that chose to stay good and
Maia that chose to side with the evil Melkor (story for another
thread), much like angels and fallen angels. Sauron is the strongest
of the Maia. Balrogs were also Maia that had sided with the
darkness. So “I am a servant of the secret fire” is Gandalf
identifying himself as a Maia that remained good, revealing his
power and his authority.

Let's move on to “the dark fire will not avail you, flame of Udun.”
“Udun” or Utumno was the first fortress of Melkor, the original
dark lord and Saurons master, it is where orcs and all matter of evil
creatures were first made. So I’m referring to the Balrog as “flame
of udun” Gandalf is saying, “I know exactly who, and what you
are.”

And for the last line I’m going to take the line from the books
because it's more powerful, Gandalf establishes himself as the
Balrogs good counterpart, and executes his authority over it by
saying “YOU CANNOT PASS”. This line is deep, and powerful.

“You cannot pass” isn't Gandalf saying “I’m not going to let you
pass”. It's Gandalf saying, “You do not have the authority to pass”
as in: there are greater forces at work and providence will not allow
you to stop us. Tolkien’s personal belief in divine providence in our
world affected his writings. This taking authority over evil that
Gandalf executes is so inspiring and fills me with awe and I cant
help but think of comparisons in our own walk through life.

Thanks for coming to my ted talk...

.#books #noted #sciencefiction #2020-08-05

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