



Mythopoeic Society

mythLORE

A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis,
Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature

Volume 16
Number 2

Article 3

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

Beach, Sarah; Wynne, Patrick; and DiSante, Paula (1989) "Three Artistic Versions of "The Death of Glorfindel"," *Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature*: Vol. 16: No. 2, Article 3.

Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore/vol16/iss2/3>

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.

To join the Mythopoeic Society go to:
<http://www.mythsoc.org/join.htm>

SWOSUTM

Online Summer Seminar 2023

August 5-6, 2023: Fantasy Goes to Hell: Depictions of Hell in Modern Fantasy Texts

<https://mythsoc.org/oms/oms-2023.htm>



Three Artistic Versions of "The Death of Glorfindel"

4. *Surprised by Joy*, (Glasgow: Collins, 1977), 167; see Lionel Adey, C.S. Lewis' "Great War" with Owen Barfield (Victoria, B.C.: English Literary Studies 1978).
5. *Christian Reflections* (Glasgow: Collins, 1981), 7-8.
6. *Miracles* (London: Collins, 1960), 85.
7. *A Preface to "Paradise Lost"* (London: Oxford University Press paperback, 1961; repr. 1977), 75.
8. *Letters*, 260.
9. *Of Other Worlds: Essays and Stories* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1966), 76-77.
10. *Out of the Silent Planet* (New York: Macmillan, 1943, repr. 1978), 13-14. Subsequent references to this volume are given in the text.
11. "On Science Fiction" was first presented November 24th, 1955; it has been printed in *Of Other Worlds*, 59-73.
12. *Of Other Worlds*, 69.
13. *Ibid.*, 70.
14. *Ibid.*, 66-67.
15. Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking-Glass* (repr., New York: Random House, 1965), 94.
16. *Ibid.*, 88-89.
17. "The Wonder of Passage, the Making of Gold: Alchemy and Initiation in *Out of the Silent Planet*," *Mythlore* 41 (Winter/Spring 1985), 18.
18. Compare, for example, Bedford's desolate view from the moon, in H.G. Wells' *The First Men in the Moon* (repr. New York: Heinemann, 1982), 347:
Over me, about me, closing in on me, embracing me ever nearer, was the Eternal, that which was before the beginning and that which triumphs over the end; that enormous void in which all light and life and being is but the thin and vanishing splendour of a falling star, the cold, the stillness, the silence — the infinite and final Night of space . . . an overwhelming Presence, that stooped towards me, that almost touched me.
19. See especially "The Womb of Space," fifth chapter of Walsh's *The Literary Legacy*, and Sys' "L'expérience métaphysique."
20. See Walsh, *Legacy*, 87.
21. *Perelandra* (London: Bodley Head, 1943), 232.
22. Michael Collins demonstrates that Ransom's facility in the Malacandrian language is intended by Lewis to reinforce the concept of common spiritual ancestry between *hnanu* of different planets. See "Jespersen on Toast": Language Acquisition in C. S. Lewis."
23. *A Preface to "Paradise Lost"*, 95.

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 Riven-dell, "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-glimped 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

- Cavaliero, Glen. "The Way of Affirmation: A Study of the Writings of Charles Williams." *Church Quarterly Review*, 157 (Jan/March 1956), 19-28.
- Dante Alighieri. *The Divine Comedy I: Hell*. Trans. Dorothy L. Sayers. Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books, 1949, 1960.
- . *The Divine Comedy II: Purgatory*. Trans. Dorothy L. Sayers. New York: Penguin Books, 1955, 1984.
- . *The Divine Comedy III: Paradise*. Trans. Dorothy L. Sayers and Barbara Reynolds. New York: Penguin Books, 1962, 1977.
- . *La Vita Nuova*. Trans. Barbara Reynolds. Middlesex, England and Baltimore: Penguin, 1971.
- Shideler, Mary McDermott. *The Theology of Romantic Love: A Study in the Works of Charles Williams*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1962.
- Williams, Charles and C. S. Lewis. *Arthurian Torso*. London: Oxford University Press, 1948.
- Williams, Charles. *All Hallows Eve*. 1948; rpt. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1980.
- The Descent of the Dove*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1977.
- . *The Figure of Beatrice: A Study in Dante*. New York: Octagon Books, 1980.

☛ MYTHLORE ART PORTFOLIO ☛

Over the years *Mythlore* has published a large amount of highly praised mythopoetic artwork. Few people are inclined to cut up their issues of *Mythlore* in order to frame these pieces for their walls. Therefore, *Mythlore* has begun a series of portfolios reproducing various pieces on quality paper suitable for framing. A limited number of portfolios are now being offered containing copies signed and numbered by the artists.

Signed portfolios are \$25.00

Unsigned portfolios are \$15.00

Included in the first portfolio are the following pieces:

"Meditation of Mordred"

(Williams) by Sarah Beach (from *Mythlore* 39)

"Trothlight at Cerin Amroth"

(Tolkien) by Paula DiSante (from *Mythlore* 45)

"The Mistress of the Silver Moon"

(MacDonald) by Nancy-Lou Patterson

(from *Mythlore* 21)

"Till We Have Faces"

(Lewis) by Patrick Wynne (from *Mythlore* 39)

Each Portfolio comes in a folder with Patrick Wynne's "Triskelion" (from *Mythlore* 35) printed on the cover. The artwork is reproduced on 9" x 12" sheets, and are suitable for framing. Please specify whether you want a signed or unsigned portfolio. Send your order to:

Mythlore, Orders Dept., 1009 N. Monterey St.,
Alhambra, CA 91801.

- , *He Came Down From Heaven and The Forgiveness of Sins*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1984.
- , *Reason and Beauty in the Poetic Mind*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933.
- , *Religion and Love in Dante: The Theology of Romantic Love*. Westminster: Dacre Press, Arden Library, 1980.
- , *Taliesin Through Logres and The Region of the Summer Stars*. London: Oxford University Press, 1954.

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)

Sí Laurefindil ar i Valarauko kostaner tanya aikalesse or i lie.
Laurefindilo orme hortane i Malkarauke tildello tildenna,
i kallo varna ho uruile latta ar angarakka laurea rembenen. Sí
palpanéro onno erekassa, sí aupelektane lattaranko ólesse.
San i Malarauko quanta kaurenne kampe Laurefindilenna i
nastane ve leuko rinke, nan er túvóiro róma, ar i Valkarauke
mápe so. San Laurefindilo má hyarya túce sikil i amba
nastandó onno súma lerien, ar i súlundo ursoo ramne naikenen
ar nallante aikalello, mápala oharo lokse laurea nu karma;
ar yúyo lantier yúvonna. Yé! Lantalto láma haltane ter i ambor
ar quante Sornesifreó yúve.

Now Glorfindel and the Balrog quarrelled upon that peak above the people. The Wrath of Glorfindel sent 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. ☞