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Music in Tolkien's Works and Beyond (2019), edited by Julian Eilmann and Friedhelm Schneidewind

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Music in Tolkien's Work and Beyond, edited by Julian Eilmann and Friedhelm Schneidewind. Zurich and Jena: Walking Tree Publishers, 2019. [12], viii, 474 pp. \$32.00 (trade paperback) ISBN 9783905703399.

Music in Tolkien's Work and Beyond presents itself as a “follow-up volume” to the illuminating *Music in Middle-earth* (2010) (ii). Both volumes share an editor (Friedhelm Schneidewind) and this new sequel “follows the path” that was laid out by its predecessor while “considering the broader context” of how music fits into Tolkien’s life and works such as “adaptions and other authors and composers” and how exactly Tolkien applied the word to melody, song and language (ii). Some chapters quote from the 2010 volume so a little familiarity with it will help to contextualise a few of the arguments. However, nothing is lost by reading *Music in Tolkien's Work and Beyond* before *Music in Middle-earth*. Gerald Seaman noted in his 2011 review (in *Tolkien Studies*, volume VIII) of *Middle-earth Minstrel* that “there is ample room for more than one book on music in Tolkien in any given year, perhaps for years to come, without fear of overlap, necessarily” (129). Music has now become a staple part of Tolkien scholarship, with a wide selection of articles, edited volumes and titular monographs on the subject that all present Tolkien as an author who was intimately sensitive to the power that sound and music. The newly edited *A Secret Vice* (2016) has further helped to remind us how Tolkien had a deep knowledge of the musicality of language and in his language creation employed “sound aesthetic to suggest the nature of creatures and things” which would “become a hallmark of his name invention in his Middle-earth mythology” (xxiii). The present volume has responded enthusiastically with a multifarious collection of chapters that deal not just with instrumental or sung music, but seek to explore Tolkien’s “prose itself, his careful use of sounds, words and sentences, has musical qualities, which underlines the vital literary musicality of the philologist Tolkien” (i). Considering how frequently the authors delve into *A Secret Vice*, it is a shame that none of the chapters turn their attention to the musicality of Tolkien’s invented languages. However, this does not detract from the heights that the volume reaches at times.

The volume is separated into five sections: (1) Tolkien and Music, which considers the influence of Primary World musical factors on Tolkien’s work; (2) The Power of Music, which examines the influence that music has within Tolkien’s works; (3) Music of Different Texts and Characters, which impressively expands the volume’s scope to include texts from *The History of Middle-earth*; (4) Instruments of Middle-earth, which furthers discussions from *Music in Middle-earth* with regard to how instruments are presented; and (5) Music Beyond Tolkien, which provides comparative and posthumous studies of the impact that Tolkien’s work has had.

On the general layout of the volume, helpful bibliographies are attached to the end of chapters (as is custom for Walking Tree publications), but so are abbreviations and authors’ biographies. It would have perhaps been easier to

access if these had been collated at the front of the volume.

The first section identifies how Tolkien incorporated various older styles of music, from polyphony to liturgical Gregorian chant and improvisation, into his legendarium and other writings. Chiara Bertoglio provides an impressive opening to the volume by placing the development of Ilúvatar's theme by the Ainur within the medieval tradition of polyphonic improvisation. The chapter opens by framing the "Ainulindalë" within the tradition of global creation myths alongside theological and literary approaches to *harmonia mundi*—one striking comparison being made between Tolkien's cosmogony and Edward Young's *Night Thoughts* (1742). Bertoglio is clear that Tolkien's familiarity with most of these texts is merely speculative but the thread of consistency that ties the sources together certainly lends a strong scaffold to the argument. This develops into a thoroughly detailed history and explanation of the intricacies of polyphonic improvisation. Bertoglio confidently builds on Giuseppe Mazzotta by arguing that Ilúvatar's themes can be identified as the *cantus firmus* of the Ainur, providing a relational framework and model for them to "play" with the themes (19). By doing this, the Ainur begin to reveal to each other their true selves.

The religious lens is handed over to Michaël Devaux and Guglielmo Spirito, who examine what Tolkien knew about sacred and liturgical music. Two chronological surveys of modern and Gregorian masses are arranged to show how Tolkien's "love" for Gregorian chant first bloomed in Birmingham in 1903/4 and then continued to grow at Oxford (47). The study focuses on the *Kyrie eleison* and enlightens the reader on its potentially misinterpreted meaning from the original Hebrew and Greek, the phrase "does not refer so much to justice or acquittal but to the infinite loving kindness of God and his compassion for his suffering children" (37). Such a viewpoint paints Middle-earth in a different colour as "*mercy* is woven into the very reality" of Middle-earth by Nienna and shows that Bilbo and Frodo do not pass judgement over Smeagol and Gollum, but instead show compassion (45).

Nancy Martsch sees the songs in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* from two perspectives: (1) the narrative as true history, (2) the narrative as feigned history. She poses the question of whether any of the songs were "on-the-spot improvisation[s]" or based on existing songs or folk tunes contemporaneous to Tolkien (60). The conclusion is that various pieces from *The Hobbit* make their way into *The Lord of the Rings* and other, independent literary pieces are interpolated into the novel. Additionally, Tolkien wrote four poems that fitted the rhythm of "The Fox Went Out" folk tune which emphasises his fondness for the tune.

The final two chapters look at the "Lament for Boromir". Łukasz Neubauer identifies it as part of the traditional medieval lay that eulogises great heroes while embroidering it, as Tolkien frequently did, with a Christian lens. This is achieved in three ways: (1) laying out how the song is effective as a piece of oral performance that roughly reflects the structure of the alliterative verse that Tolkien was so fond of; (2) identifying Boromir as a "genuine hero of some

early medieval poem, song or saga” like “Beowulf” or “The Battle of Maldon” (97); (3) perceiving Boromir as confessing to Aragorn and attaining a place in Heaven. Neubauer argues that Boromir’s departure is wrapped in Christian allusion and considers the “Lament for Boromir” as the peak of Tolkien’s art that blends medieval and Christian ideals. On the other hand, Jörg Fündling sees Rudyard Kipling’s “The English Flag” (1891) as the source and frame for the poem. Although there is no primary evidence that Tolkien read the poem, Fündling does quote John R. Holmes on Tolkien liking Kipling more than his contemporaries and the poem’s patriotic flare will have made it a popular piece during the Great War. Additionally, the “hauling down of the British flag” in South East Asia will have caused Tolkien to recall a famous poem from “*the poet of the Empire*” (127). Fündling interestingly provides a structural comparison which highlights that Tolkien used the overall framework from “The English Flag” and two key elements: (1) the use of caesuras in the middle of lines, (2) an “‘insert here’ exercise” whereby a line is repeated but a couple of words are changed (121). The comparison is worthy of merit and as Fündling notes, there are connections to Kipling across Tolkien’s work; there is indeed further research needed into what ties these two writers together.

The second section considers the power of music within Tolkien’s legendarium and is started by Elizabeth A. Whittingham, who shows how Tolkien approaches the role of music differently in the various texts of his legendarium. *The Silmarillion* “look[s] forward in time” in contrast to *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, which employ songs retrospectively to enrich what Tolkien called “depth” and the “back cloth” (139). Music, Whittingham states, is the “most powerful force in Tolkien’s universe” and this is deemed a “part of the essential nature of Arda” which encourages the sea longing that all living beings feel (135-148). Some useful time is spent looking into the role that music plays in the *Lays of Beleriand*. Túrin is highlighted as a “great musician” whose mournful music for Beleg is so powerful that nature itself it moved. Frequently music is identified as a force that is so powerful that it can create life and manipulate the material around the performer to devastating ends (138).

Two chapters approach the musicality of Tolkien’s prose and offer dynamically differing viewpoints. Bradford Lee Eden builds on his established interest in Tolkien as a “Scholar Turned Minstrel” by sharing various excerpts from Tolkien’s edited texts that have been published since 2007. These are indicative that “Tolkien felt a very strong musical power within the constructs of myth and language” and Eden gives some helpful insight into Tolkien’s work with Kullervo and certainly shows how music allusion appeared in various texts we now have available to us (163). The chapter continues two strands of thought from Eden’s previous scholarship: music allusion and phonoaesthetic pleasure, but the chapter leans significantly towards music allusion, leaving the aesthetics of Tolkien’s musical prose by the wayside. Eden’s chapter (and Maureen F. Mann’s, at times) feels overburdened with

quotations that yearn to be unpacked further. When I came to the conclusions of both chapters, I felt that they needed to hone their scopes. However, Mann's masterful approach towards Tolkien's "musicality" (phonoaesthetic pleasure reworded to fit into the theme of the volume) certainly illuminates one meaning of Tolkien's original comment that *The Lord of the Rings* was "largely an essay in linguistic aesthetic" (*Letters* 220). Mann locates in various prose texts of the legendarium, *Roverandum* and "On Fairy-stories" moments where Tolkien was "theorising about language" by "placing significant emphasis on sound and the effect of word patterns" (230). One particular point worthy of note is how Tolkien appears to use the /f/ phoneme in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* to represent fighting. Additionally, the analysis to how Tolkien achieves a sense of timelessness in the chapters dealing with Shelob's Lair by favouring "complex syntax" and "extremely dense" assonance and alliteration offers a detailed picture of how Tolkien reflected not just race just geographical locations in his prose's "musicality" (223–224).

One of the finest and meatiest additions to the volume is Lynn Forest-Hill's work on Tolkien's exploration of informal minstrelsy. Hill argues that *The Lord of the Rings* "historicises the relationship between oral and textual versification" so that Tolkien can claim "the absolute authority of the creative process by smuggling into print versions of *Silmarillion*" (175). The chapter defines informal minstrelsy as an act when a non-minstrel character voluntarily sings, chants or recites. The move is political in many instances such as Bilbo's translation and Sam's performance of the "Lay of Gil-galad". The hierarchy of Tolkien's languages mimics that which existed in the Middle English period (Latin at the top, followed by French then English) and the translating and disseminating of material borrows authority and status from the original. However, the act can be damaging to the original as "elvish ideas of effective oral aesthetics do not align with those of mortals" (186). Aragorn's rendition of "Song of Beren and Lúthien" appears to have lost some of the original's aesthetic and Bilbo's "Eärendil" creates "tension between adaption and aesthetics" by imposing his own verse structure onto the story (187). In this way, the history that makes up *The Silmarillion* achieves a mythologised status through oral and textual mobility in the different languages of the linguistic hierarchy of Middle-earth in its Third Age. This is how Tolkien's authorial control asserts itself; the recomposing and *mouvance* of the stories within the Secondary World of Arda challenges the "critical notion of textual hierarchy and authenticity" (194). Stories are changed into the "generic form expected by the society for which [they] are intended" and as this occurred with Chaucer, Tolkien's own disseminating of his "found mythology" in English makes the man himself a minstrel (199).

Petra Zimmermann concludes the section by turning our attention to the roles that silence and "voices" play in Arda. The chapter is split into two parts and in the first half, Zimmermann identifies the presence of silence as a suppressive, negative element of the land that seeks to create tension. However, when nature is silent it "creates the condition for perceiving all the

subtle sounds from the exterior and interior noises that are usually not noticed', which presents Arda as a varied world (238). The second half argues that silence is used by Tolkien as a framing device for poetry performance. Within his prose tales, poetry exists as a 'semantic co-text' that "transcend[s] reality" as the performer becomes a sub-creator within Tolkien's own sub-creation (243-246). Zimmermann explains this convincingly and etymologically links "chant" to the "enchantment" that Tolkien famously explored in "On Fairy-stories" and implies that the silence before and after a performance is essential to the effect it has on its audience.

Section three is one of the weakest, it contains some fruitful insights but requires further depth and work. Renée Vink seeks to trace how the story of Beren and Lúthien transformed from "a somewhat whimsical fairy tale featuring dance and song into a mythical opera composed of poetic and musical words and images, instead of music notes" (272). The change in the story occurs, Vink identifies, after Tolkien wrote the "Music of the Ainur" between 1918-1920 and because of the addition, "music also had to become somehow instrumental to the story of Beren and Lúthien" (267). Of the various settings of the story, it is made clear that "The Tale of Tinúviel" contains only the "seeds" of the later story and "The Lay of Leithian" is the "earliest version" of what appears in *The Silmarillion* (259).

Angela P. Nicholas looks at how music is portrayed and influenced by Aragorn. The chapter reads as a biography and relies on an element of speculation to emphasise certain points. Split into five sections, it is the final two that offer some intrigue as Aragorn's role in the fate of Man has been prophesied throughout the Third Age of Middle-earth. The chapter would have perhaps benefited from some closer attention to these elements, probing deeper into how Aragorn and Arwen's union completed a three-part "Divine Plan". Sabine Frambach concludes the section by examining the music performed by Tolkien's "Evil" characters and offers a brief but helpful conclusion: music for "Evil" characters is functional; it aims to mock and conjure fear in the enemy and in the case of Sauron, becomes a tool for manipulation.

Jennifer Rogers's chapter is the gem the section up as it looks at an underrepresented texts by employing an ethnomusicological viewpoint. The chapter looks solely at "Fíriel's Hymn" from *The Lost Road* and three drinking songs from *The Notion Club Papers*. To justify her approach, Rogers notes the similarities between ethnomusicology and philology: one of the founders of ethnomusicology, A. J. Ellis, was also a philologist and the two fields share common interests in how words and music are "closely tied to the idea of what it means to be a person within society" (279). Rogers states that Tolkien "intended song to play a key role in these novels" and that they present the "relationship of the mortal outcast to his or her community and universe", drawing attention to the characters' mortality and societal and tying the unfinished novels into the central themes of his wider legendarium (278). Following a philological approach to Fíriel and Arry's names, Rogers

convincingly highlights how both characters use music to identify as part of a community during a societal epoch of unrest and fragmentation. Although Rogers maps the chapter clearly at the start, the fourth part of the chapter feels unwarranted within the scope of Tolkien's life and work. The connection is one, perhaps, that requires wider study and is undervalued by a "brief overview" at the end of a splendid addition to Tolkien scholarship (280).

Section four develops the scope of its theme from its initial inclusion in *Music in Middle-earth*. Heidi Steimel offers a widened view on the music that has been inspired by Tolkien's works. From symphonies to chamber music, Steimel shares her personal responses to each piece to showcase how they have attempted to "evoke emotions and express their creators' impressions" of Tolkien's legendarium (356). The chapter is very beneficial for drawing attention towards lesser known creative responses and it even offers information on whether recordings exist on CD or on YouTube to encourage readers to seek out the compositions.

John Holmes provides the most fruitful study of the section by exploring the "idea of the harp" in Tolkien's translations and legendarium (360). The chapter argues that the harp is a "temporal object that mediates eternity" and in its music, "joy is inextricable from sadness" because it recalls time past (382). What stands out is Holmes's attention to detail in a chapter that casts a wide scope. He draws on Tolkien's translations to provide a more grounded explanation of how Tolkien understood the concept of the harp. This goes on to contextualise the links made between how the harp is presented in Tolkien's legendarium and Psalm 137 ("By the waters of Babylon")—the latter making the harp a vehicle that conjures longing in its listeners during times of cultural threat.

Allan Turner initially presents an intriguing question: to what extent does Tolkien use music as "a marker of the liminal zone between the everyday and the wonderful"? (391). However, the length and content of the chapter does not allow Turner to come anywhere close to answering his worthwhile question. Whereas a few references to *The Book of Lost Tales*, *The Lord of the Rings* and *Smith of Wootton Major* are made, they are not effectively linked back to Turner's question. Additionally, significant moments elsewhere are overlooked that would have lent gravitas to the investigation. Tolkien's "The Sea-Bell" (originally "Frodos Dreme") is a perfect example of a moment where music is used to establish a liminal space between Man's mortality and the immortality of Faery. The bell's repeated "dinging" is enchanting and Verlyn Flieger and Tom Shippey have both written extensively on the poem.

The section ends with Rainer Groß's speculative study of how the portatives of the elves, dwarves, and hobbits will have looked like. The chapter offers a good history of the instrument and displays Groß's expertise in the field.

The final section opens with Anja Müller revisiting the discussion of *The Lord of the Rings* and Richard Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. The chapter is based on an earlier conference paper from 2006 (before Christopher

MacLachlan and Renée Vink's 2012 monographs on Tolkien and Wagner) and is split into two sections: (1) the differences between the two rings, (2) theoretical approaches to Fantasy. Müller clarifies from the start that she is not interested in Tolkien's "intentions or motivations", rather, her study is "informed by the theoretical framework of intertextuality and adaptation studies" (414). This is useful as it leads to several solid conclusions that Tolkien and Wagner "obviously conceptualise the imminent power of the respective rings differently", which corroborates Tolkien's famous statement on Wagner's Ring cycle (422-423). The second part is helpful as it clarifies how Tolkien's rejection of the visual as a mode of sub-creation, successful only in generating a Coleridgean "suspension of disbelief", is limited within modern terms of "Fantasy-drama" that is conjured by Wagner. Müller relates this successfully to modern film and how "in a time that is increasingly dominated by multimedia forms of representation, the *Gesamtkunstwerk* offers itself as an adequate medium that can make us acquainted with other worlds" (431).

One obstacle with Müller's chapter is that Wagner's texts are quoted in the original German with no translation. The volume prides itself in being published in English and Walking Tree Publishers have gone to great lengths to provide this English edition. It therefore seems peculiar that translations of Wagner's words (which are integral to Müller's argument) are not provided. When I recall the English version of Julian Eilmann's monograph *J.R.R. Tolkien: Romanticist and Poet* (2017), I remember that quotations were translated with the original German provided as footnotes. Ernst Jünger's work followed a similar strategy in *Something Has Gone Crack* (2019).

Patrick Schmitz follows by providing a fruitful comparative study of the power that verse and music play in *The Lord of the Rings* and Patrick Rothfuss's *Kingkiller Chronicles*. As the chapter moves on, Schmitz is able to synthesise many of the key messages this volume has presented on Tolkien's connection to music. It would be worthwhile to extend this study to consider the role of music in the fantasy genre more widely. In his attempt to find one or two differences between the two texts however, Schmitz considers music to be used to "express . . . emotions and experiences, whenever words don't suffice", implying that this is not a common feat in Tolkien's work (443). However, this is not true as Frodo and Sam both feel greatly moved to not only sing but create songs to lament Gandalf's passing. Additionally, Aragorn and Legolas's lament for Boromir comes after a period of silence.

The section and volume closes with an insightful look into how Tolkien's work has been extended into the medium of video games. He especially focuses on how Chance Thomas's 'Tolkien Music Style Guide' has helped to provide a "coherent artistic vision fitting the source material" for Middle-earth (473). The chapter is enlightening for anyone who is curious about how video game music works and how Tolkien's works have been adapted. However, I would warn its readers against such unconvincing claims as video games "being the only medium to unite all forms of art" (448). Müller, for example,

has already touched on the virtues of film in bringing Fantasy-dramas to life.

This new addition to Tolkien scholarship is wide-ranging and interprets the term “music” loosely at times. There are moments where the “music” in the volume’s title has been stretched too far and raises the question whether the volume should have been called “Music and Sound in Tolkien’s Work and Beyond”. It does, however, build well on its predecessor and continues to give space for new voices in Tolkien scholarship. It has additionally raised new questions: how did Tolkien conceive of the musicality of his invented language? How does his smaller and sometimes marginalised works enhance our understanding of *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings* or *The Silmarillion*? The former is one that is missing the most from the volume and was certainly a lost opportunity. However, this should not distract from the wealth of new and impressive material that has been provided. In conjunction with *Music in Middle-earth* and *Middle-earth Minstrel* and various articles, there is now a magnitude of material for readers to dip in and out of at their pleasure. Eilmann and Schneidewind’s new volume is an excellent addition but by no means conclusion to the role that music played for Tolkien.

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