

## J.R.R. TOLKIEN: ROMANTICIST AND POET

Review by Ryder W Miller

J.R.R. Tolkien: Romanticist and Poet by Julian Eilmann; Zurich and Jena: Walking Tree Publishers, 2017. Paper, 474 pages. \$32.

Originating from a Dissertation in German by Julian Eilmann, now available in English thanks to the translation of Evelyn Koch, is a fascinating academic exploration which relates Tolkien's famous sub-creation to Romanticist predecessors and his lively fans. Walking Tree Publishers Series Editor Thomas Honegger explains that they seek to also make available "original research in languages other than English to a wider audience..." The University at Jena also: "has a very strong connection to Early German Romanticism". This scholarly work also seeks to answer why fans are so compelled to return and return and return again to Middle-earth?

By Romanticism, which has a number of definitions, Eilmann quotes classical sources to argue that we live in an Enchanted world that we have learned to deny, but it is available to those who understand and embrace it. Eilmann quotes and starts with poet Joseph von Eichendorff who wrote in "Magic Wand":

Sleep a song in things abounding  
that keep dreaming to be heard:  
Earth's tune will start resounding  
if you find the magic word.

(from "Magic Wand")

There is a tradition, at least in story, to seek this enchanted world in The Fairy.

Those magic words are poetry which evokes this magical world for us. Powerful poetry indeed which helps us connect again to a world, the Romanticists are arguing that we don't pay close enough attention to understand. We find an acknowledgement of such a magical world in Middle-earth. Tolkien also sometimes gave the poetry or those who use poetry magical powers. Interesting new responsibilities and powers for the Romanticist poets indeed. Poesis brings this world to us again and as such it also has salience and sublimity. The argument also suggests that it pays to be more alert, maybe instead of being withdrawn to escape and protect oneself from the harshness of the world. Tolkien reminds us of this battle to protect The Fairy which the modern seems to have lost and even forgotten.

Eilmann's treatise covers a lot of ground with some of this having been published before as articles. Explored are Tolkien's predecessors and influences and influential texts like Lord Dunsany's The King of Elfland's Daughter, Kenneth Morris, and George MacDonald's Phantastes. Tolkien knew of their explorations in and explanations of The Fairy. Much of Tolkien's work is explored here, not only his widely read classics, but the book is not biographical but rather literary textual history. A key work is Tolkien's Smith of Wootton Major which is an argument against George MacDonald's Phantastes. Richard Wagner, with whom Tolkien also differed, is not a subject in this exploration.

The book is comforting in a remote emotional way, fascinating in its intellectual gifts, and abounds with insights which bring Tolkien's works and poetry to life. It would have been helpful to have all his poems collected together in the appendix to reference, but the book abounds with their quotations as well as quotations from his novels and scholars commenting upon his work and Romanticism. This is a wonderful translation, at least in my estimation, for how accessible and profound it is. Maybe a bit repetitive for some, but it does leave an impression and one does not need to read it cover to cover. But for those who read it in its entirety there are new ways to understand Tolkien and his works who was and are so many things as this series from Walking Tree Publishers, and from others, have shown.

Eilmann argues that we are seeking this magical world, this enchantment, that we find in Middle-earth and in The Fairy. Tolkien reminded many of this and that the Anglophone world had a mythology. Poetry, Tolkien's poetry and poetic writing acknowledged it.

Maybe though for some there is a different interpretation or related experiences. Some might enjoy Tolkien because they crave suspense or more on topic here their experiences in the outdoors. There can be a special feeling out there alone on the trail or on a boat. Solitude also allows one to think and takes many of our defenses down. Maybe with Tolkien we connect also with these in Nature experiences. Tolkien also wrote about bravery, adventure, and providence. He also survived like many of his heroes despite the odds, which suggest that maybe fate was also at work, and maybe also in our lives. Some might like John Steinbeck, also a Romantic, because he also had outdoor and agrarian settings. One finds critters in his stories which also are adversely affected sometimes by the growing technological juggernaut. With Steinbeck we are also happy that certain things are not forgotten and certain issues addressed. Steinbeck probably also would not have appreciated Saruman. One also finds some comfort in Film Noir knowing that the bad guys are caught in these suspenseful morality tales. These contemporaries were reminding of a world that was getting out of control and reminded that a struggle was necessary. Interesting to note that these folks, these contemporaries, fifty years ago, were also missing the good ol' days. Tolkien brought us out into the wild and prepared his heroes and sometimes his readers for this struggle. The evocation of Romanticism and power of Poetry reminds us that we have needed to be vigilant, but we have had weapons that we have not known about. We have needed them to protect the wild and wondrous. The longing might be for an experience of nature and nurture that we do not fully experience rooted in our present times. We might have also needed an adventure in the country.