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## *Modernism and the Cult of Mountains: Music, Opera, Cinema* by Christopher Morris (Review)

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*Modernism and the Cult of Mountains: Music, Opera, Cinema.* By Christopher Morris. Ashgate Interdisciplinary Studies in Opera. Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2012. Pp. 203. Cloth \$100.78. ISBN 978-0754669708.

Over the course of the last decade, in what can be identified as a second phase of inquiry following groundbreaking works such as Rainer Amstädter's *Der Alpinismus. Kultur—Organisation—Politik* (1996), Christian Rapp's *Höhenrausch. Der deutsche Bergfilm* (1997), Dagmar Günther's *Alpine Quergänge. Kulturgeschichte des bürgerlichen Alpinismus*, and Helmut Zebhauser's *Alpinismus im Hitlerstaat. Gedanken, Erinnerungen, Dokumente* (both 1998), more specialized studies such as Matthias Schirren's *Bruno Taut. Alpine Architektur. Eine Utopie* (2004), Peter Mierau's *Nationalsozialistische Expeditionspolitik. Deutsche Asien-Expeditionen 1933–1945* (2006), Ursula Schreiber's *Politische Berge. Alpinismus und Alpenverein im Spannungsverhältnis mit der Politik* (2008) and, most recently, Sean Ireton and Caroline Schaumann's coedited volume *Heights of Reflection: Mountains in the German Imagination from the Middle Ages to the Twenty-First Century* (2012) have greatly enhanced our understanding of the various cultural and political representations of mountains in Germany over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Christopher Morris's *Modernism and the Cult of Mountains: Music, Opera, Cinema* adds to this now quickly expanding body of knowledge by investigating the heretofore barely researched musical representation of mountains in the first half of the twentieth century. Morris, author of *Reading Opera Between the Lines: Orchestral Interludes and Cultural Meaning from Wagner to Berg* (2002) and Professor of Music at the National University of Ireland Maynooth, bases his monograph on the observation that “judged by the sheer volume and range of cultural output associated with the mountains, or the philosophical seriousness of the rhetoric produced on its behalf, the German cult of mountains occupied a unique space” (3) and subsequently approaches the Alps as “one of the principle sites at which the struggle with modernity would be waged, metaphorically and literally” (2) with a special eye to the representation of this struggle in twentieth-century art music, especially opera, and its role—in a Foucauldian sense—“in forming and re-forming that [mountain] landscape” (4). Morris's subjects of inquiry—an inquiry which draws heavily on post-Nietzschean theory, theories of gender and sexuality, and theories of modernism—range from the opera *Tiefland* (1903) by Eugen d'Albert (to a libretto in German by Rudolph Lothar) in Chapter One via Richard Strauss's *Alpensinfonie* (1915; Ch. 2), Edmund Meisel's score for Arnold Fanck's *Der heilige Berg* (1926), Paul Dessau's music for *Stürme über dem Montblanc* (1930; Ch. 3), and Ernst Krenek's *Jonny spielt auf* (1927; Ch. 4) all the way to Herbert Windt's compositions for Leni Riefenstahl's film *Tiefland* (1954; Ch. 5).

Exploring d'Albert's *Tiefland* against the background of the *Heimat* discourse at the turn from the nineteenth to the twentieth century—a “discourse of resistance and critique” (19) to Germany's belated experience with modernity—Morris identifies the Pyrenees as a site invested with “a fascination with the physical purity of the mountains and with a sublime inhospitability that holds the potential to sharpen and harden existence” (24). The opera itself represents a “dramatic enactment of the encounter between mountain *Heimat* and mountain sublime, both set against the corrupt and debased environment of the lowlands” (23).

In his reading of Strauss's *Alpensinfonie*, Morris focuses on the Nietzschean dimension of the Munich composer's last tone poem. As he observes, Strauss, since the mid-1890s, had mobilized themes developed by Nietzsche in *Also sprach Zarathustra* and *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*—the “confrontation with and remaking of the self”—for the purpose of challenging “the metaphysics of music so embedded in German culture and epitomized in the genre of the symphony” (50). Strauss's post-Nietzschean *Alpensinfonie*, a work of “*Tonmalerei* in naked form, a musical pictorialism not even pretending to clothe itself with ideas,” Morris suggests, ought to be read as the composer's rejection of “the metaphysics of the transcendental sublime and the legacy of the Romantic idealism of nature” (50) in musical form, resulting in what he characterizes as the “residue of a *Naturlaut* that can now only provoke mockery, and a metaphysical Nature challenged but never truly dislodged by the subversive irony of Straussian sensuality” (77).

The central question for Morris in his discussion of Edmund Meisel's and Paul Dessau's musical contributions to Arnold Fanck's *Der heilige Berg* and *Stürme über dem Montblanc* is each composer's characteristic response to the *Bergfilm*'s double identity as “mass-reproduced technology and remediation of Romantic aura [. . .],” an identity “mirroring the dual status of the mountains as both aesthetic object and commodity” (81) at the time. In Morris's reading, “Meisel hints that the autonomy of the artist is threatened by an industrial process while at the same time eroding distinctions between musical realizations of machines and nature,” while Dessau's “discursive retreat into the absolute turns out to be a thoroughly intermedial and technified engagement with sublime nature.” In their respective scores, both composers can be said to “mirror the nature/technology dialectic at work in Fanck's films, realizing it on the level of cultural production, where nature is the autonomous realm of music, technology its modern remediation and mixture in filmic form” (108).

Relating Ernst Krenek's *Jonny spielt auf* to the composer's 1929 lieder cycle *Reisebuch aus den österreichischen Alpen* and its manifest “struggle between tradition and modernity,” i.e., the ambivalence expressed in the refusal “to give in to the elitist, anti-urban underpinnings of the cult of mountains” on the one hand and the revulsion “at the tourist hordes who invade the [mountain] landscape” (116) on the other, Morris identifies the same type of dualism at work in Krenek's earlier opera.

*Jonny spielt auf*, however, complicates the traditional oppositions—the realm of the glacier (i.e., the mountain) as a “timeless, frozen eternity immune to the march of progress and accessed only in solitude” and Jonny’s music as an “unstoppable [modern] force capable of pulling everyone . . . along with it” by “aligning the drive of Jonny’s music not only with technology but with life, conceived of here as a vitalistic impulse. Conversely, the vital eternity of the mountains is shown to be nature as automaton, driven by forces that are inimical to humanity” (175).

Highlighting the previously neglected auditory dimension of Riefenstahl’s film *Tiefland*, especially the score of Herbert Windt as adapted from d’Albert’s original opera, Morris points out how “the very synchronicity of the score’s relationship to image guarantees a magical wholeness that admits of no gaps or fissures” in the film, “suggesting a fusion of man and nature, music and image” (155). Consequently, Riefenstahl’s *Tiefland* can be understood as participating in a “recovery of place (i.e., *Heimat*), turning to the mountains as a refuge from urbanization.” But the film, through its highly sophisticated, mutually complementary image and sound editing, “equally participates in the dissolution of place in favor of a technologically-enabled space, overlaying the autonomy of the *Heimat* and *Heimat* subject with the heteronomous intrusion of the “other” place, and disturbing the fixity of dwelling with mobility and flux” (164).

Morris’s study, equally well-grounded in the discourses of German philosophy, modernism, instrumental music, and opera as it is in musicology, critical theory, and scholarship on the *Bergfilm*, amounts to a fascinating and important, though—due to its sometimes heavy theoretical bent—not always immediately accessible contribution to a continually growing list of inquiries into the cultural and political imaginations and representations of mountains over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Especially its sophisticated analyses and detailed interpretations of individual musical passages and modern stage adaptations make it a highly informative and illuminating read.

Harald Höbusch, *University of Kentucky*

*The Aesthetics of Loss: German Women’s Art of the First World War.* By Claudia Siebrecht. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. Pp. xv + 188. Cloth £65.00. ISBN 978-0199656684.

This book studies the trajectory of the work of more than thirty women artists in wartime Germany. They began in the tradition of patriotic mobilization and the stoical acceptance of the deaths of their loved ones. By the end of the war, their work expressed ambivalence about the war, and they constructed an image of women as