NEW ZEALAND MEDIEVALISM

REFRAMING THE MEDIEVAL

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Tolkien's primitivism and the myth of a pastoral paradise in Peter Jackson's Tolkien adaptations

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Introduction: Tolkien's medievalist vision and Aotearoa New

Zealand as Middle-earth

Tolkien's fantasy vision was seen as a form of medievalism long before the texts were adapted for screen.[1] The texts were then converted to epic films. Peter Jackson, a New Zealand filmmaker, bought the rights to the screen versions from the producer Saul Zaentz and immediately decided on New Zealand as a location. Zaentz had acquired the rights from United Artists, who earlier got them directly from Tolkien. This chapter will demonstrate the relationship of the New Zealand settings to the construction of medievalism in the films. It will argue that New Zealand is a perfect location for the adaptations, yet it will claim that the employment of Māori actors and extras now looks inappropriate in the present cultural climate. This came at the cost of some exploitation of the landscape and its Indigenous inhabitants.

Jackson's choice of New Zealand as the location for both *The Lord of the Rings* (Jackson 2001–2003) and *The Hobbit* trilogy (Jackson 2012–2014) reflects his nationalistic belief that his country was the most fitting landscape in which to set "a remote fantasy world" (Murray and Conrich 2007, 253). When the "primitive" Middle-earth was to be filmed in the

*Lord of the Ring*s trilogy, Peter Jackson idealized New Zealand as a location, because he had also made all his films in New Zealand (Babbington 2007, 258). Tolkien made Middle-earth "primitive" through its unspoiled nature and through the "races" that inhabited it.[2] Likewise, New Zealand had existed as an "uncultured" land in the European imagination (Barnes 2013, 80) due to its being a distant colony of Britain. Importantly, the myth of the "primitive" was attached to New Zealand in the 19th and 20th centuries, when New Zealand was seen as most different from London (Barnes 2013). This made it easy to appropriate a visual imagining of the past as medieval. Tolkien's medievalism consisted in creating Middle-earth as a place set in the fantasy equivalent of the historical Middle Ages,[3] although in Letter 211 he defined "about 6000 years" before our time as the specific temporal identification (Carpenter 1981, 283). Although Jackson did not make this known, he also found New Zealand as appropriate for his cinematic vision because of the Māori presence as a precolonial race. This added even more "romantic" and "primeval" appeal to the landscape. However, he does not make this argument explicit in the adaptations in question.

First, Tolkien made Middle-earth primitive and medievalized

it, and then Peter Jackson created yet another instance of medievalism in his adaptation, with medievalism understood here as any responses to the (imaginary) Middle Ages (Matthews 2015, 1), and the global success of his films undoubtedly promoted his understanding of New Zealand as a site of the "medieval". Ian Conrich (2006) extends the metaphor of a pastoral paradise, arguing that the country became "a producer's paradise offering a diversity of effective screen locations" (119). Jackson wished to popularize the landscape but also make New Zealand more attractive as a film location: "the choice help[ed] to reduce costs", as Daniel Timmons claims (2007, 304). After using New Zealand fields, woods, rivers, and mountains, the landscape began to be identified with Tolkien's vision of Middle-earth, particularly in the eyes of Tolkien's fans.

This chapter will argue that the representation of Māori actors and extras in the films may have its origins in New Zealand white settler romanticization of Māori during the period of colonization, the nostalgia for the romantic past associated with the Māori, and the othering of Māori as non-modern. It will also discuss Tolkien's "cinematic universe", as Philip E. Kaveny (2011, 186) calls it, in the context of the medievalist myth of organic

unity and the myth of New Zealand as a pastoral paradise.[4] In the second half of the chapter, I will identify and engage with critiques of the handling of race in casting and locations in the trilogies and will relate these to earlier attitudes to the Māori race as identified in Maoriland 19th- and early 20th-century writing, which romanticized Māori in order to promote the myth of a peaceful egalitarian society. Jackson seems to be silently re-invoking the identity of New Zealand as Maoriland, that is, as a land where white settlers dominated. Māori represented the precolonial past as defined by Jane Stafford and Mark Williams (2006) in their study *Maoriland: New Zealand Literature 1872-1914*. I will also discuss the ethical consequences of Jackson's casting of the Māori as villains in the film trilogy.

The myth of organic unity was inextricably attached to the idea of Middle-earth in Tolkien's works. In 19th-century England it was believed that this organic unity existed in medieval England (Barrington 2007, 71), while in the Victorian era, which Tolkien looked back to in his writing, a return to "the idealized agrarian society and the idealized past" was postulated (Barrington 2007, 71). John M. Ganim (1996) confirms this, stating that in Victorian England the Middle Ages was inseparable from "a critique of modernity, a critique of industrialization, urbanization" (152). Tolkien's texts returned to this myth, as he admitted in the Foreword to the second edition of *The Lord of the Rings* (Tolkien 1991, xvii). He had witnessed the degradation of the landscape in West Midlands, where he lived as a child in the aftermath of the Industrial Revolution. As the Rawlinson and Bosworth Professor of Anglo-Saxon at Pembroke College, Oxford, Tolkien identified the Middle Ages as an era of an ideal unpolluted environment, drawing on the Victorian myth of organicism. Jackson, in turn, insisted on the New Zealand settings as best able to reproduce Tolkien's vision on the screen, and in relating to the myth, he chose an underdeveloped landscape that consisted of uncultivated land.

The myth of organicism developed in Victorian England in the context of returning to the imaginary Middle Ages as a world superior to the 19th-century one. To quote Carolyn P. Collette (2021):

the core argument [was] [...] that medieval England was a better place than nineteenth-century England, socially, spiritually and economically. In this paradigm

of contrast the medieval past was deemed quite separate from the present to which it offered an instructive and distinct alternative. To follow a medieval pattern meant following a better path to human happiness, one opposed to capitalism and utilitarianism, one full of spiritual substance and human connection, albeit often envisioned within a hierarchical and patriarchal social structure.

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Tolkien followed this line of thinking, since he nostalgically looked back to England's imaginary medieval past as a time of greater harmony and peace than was experienced in the difficult times after World War One. He served as a soldier in action, which probably caused his nostalgia for the distant past, imagined as different from his present. In his vision of Middle-earth, Tolkien clearly criticized not the 19th century but the 20th century he lived in. Yet, reminiscent of the Victorians, he drew upon his vision of the distant and idealized medieval past for his readings of Old and Middle English literature.

Jackson's Middle-earth also contradicted the modernity of the first two decades of the 21st century, when the films were shot, by presenting a more "natural" world than the modern, industrialized one of their viewers. Jackson's one invented scene in *The Lord of the Rings*, which cannot be found in Tolkien, presents Saruman, one of the three powerful wizards, and his Orcs, the monstrous creatures manipulated by Saruman to fight for him, as those who destroy trees and forge iron. They do this in order to create the new Isengard, different from the Old Isengard, which was pastoral and full of gardens. Saruman took over Isengard in order to forge the Uruk-hai, the new breed of monsters, in this place. Isengard became a fortress indispensable for Saruman in fighting in the War of the Ring, which was a war about possession of the one ring of power.

Tolkien depicts the Middle Ages as "primitive" in a positive sense, since it was more "organic" and thus closer to nature as an ideal, but this perspective leads to clichés about the Middle Ages that are distant from the historical reality. Jackson drew on this myth and combined it with the myth of New Zealand along with the idea that New Zealand consisted of two nations. In contrast to the history of the Australian Indigenous peoples, the Māori signed the Treaty of Waitangi with the British government, which meant that they had official status as one of the two

nations of New Zealand. Their presence on the two islands at least partly defined how New Zealand was perceived in the eyes of both Europeans and the settlers themselves (Stafford and Williams 2006, 20).

Peter Jackson's "medievalizing" and commodification of New Zealand landscape

Both Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* and Peter Jackson's cinematic adaptations *Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* present a cultural phenomenon that David Matthews (2015) calls the Middle Ages "as it never was" (38). These forms of medievalism created non-existent places rather than indicating some past realities. This is one of the factors that contributed to Tolkien's "modern medievalism" (Chance and Siewers 2005) due to the fact that he is not a re-creator but rather the creator of an alternative reality. Peter Jackson in turn "medievalizes" New Zealand, a place with no known European past and no notion of the Middle Ages. The question of whether Māori had their own Middle Ages in New

Zealand, the land to which they travelled from the mythical Hawaiki before the 13th century, depends on who examines the situation.[5] On the one hand, the idea of the Middle Ages is Eurocentric; on the other, in relation to *matauranga Māori* (Māori knowledge), Māori culture around the time of the Māori's arrival in New Zealand can be imagined as part of the so-called global Middle Ages, a concept broader than that of the Middle Ages, which is usually restricted to the European Middle Ages (Heng 2019). It assumes that, alongside the European Middle Ages, there were equivalent historical periods in non-European lands and that they were by no means inferior to the European historical period.

Ian Conrich and David Woods (2000) summarize the myth of New Zealand as that of "a pastoral paradise". This refers to materials disseminated by the Wakefield Company in the 1820s and 1830s to encourage migrants to make the journey, which evokes New Zealand as similar to paradise due to its picturesque landscape. The imagery meant that all historical accounts about conflict over Māori-owned land, colonial domination, and a racial hierarchy which privileged the white settler over the Māori were whitewashed in the cultural productions that preceded

Jackson's. The myth was strengthened in the 20th century, when cinematography started to explore it. Bruce Babbington (2007) writes about such titles as *Hinemoa* (1913), *How Chief Te Ponga Won His Bride* (1913), *The Romance of Hine-moa* (1927), *The Devil's Pit/Under the Southern Cross/Tamango* (1929/30), and *Hei Tiki* (1935) as cinematic examples of "Maoriland Romance" (31–37) and "Maoriland revisited" (37–41). These productions coincided with the beginning of New Zealand cinema. They were characterized by "the authentic indigeneity of the […] casts" and set in "a dehistorized pre-European past" (Babbington 2007, 36). Since then "through to *The Lord of the Rings*, landscape has been a dominant feature of New Zealand film-making" (Babbington 37), encouraging a singular focus on the values of purity, equality, romance, and access to the Indigenous other.

It can be argued that the myth of the pastoral paradise found its cinematic pinnacle in Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, which also had financial consequences. The achievement was repeated in *The Hobbit* trilogy, which used the same locations. As Martin Barker et al. (2008) argue, "'Hollywood' encountered 'New Zealand' in the making of *[The Lord of the Rings]*, particularly because of the way this illustrates the interweaving of economic forces and cultural rhetoric" (4). They point out, however, that although "Peter Jackson's homeland provided a particularly suitable locale", it was one that demonstrated "New Zealand's inherent weakness in the global mediascape, not least because it consumes from abroad far more product that it can ever produce indigenously" (Barker et al. 2008, 4).

Some scholarly criticism of Peter Jackson's adaptations openly refers to the commodification of the New Zealand landscape. In *Gollum Talks to Himself*, Kristin Thompson (2011) writes that this use, "combined with the miniatures and full-size sets created by Weta Workshop, came to be one of the chief virtues and attributes of the Jackson version" (27). Verlyn Flieger (2011) notices that the landscape of Middle-earth has been "translated from New Zealand" (47), even though she places the set of Hobbiton in line with the set of Teletubbies, which downplays the comparison. She makes this comparison because New Zealand in the films looks like a fairytale land, which cannot be located in any specific place.

The adaptations were inspired by Jackson's desire to film Tolkien's texts, but they were also considered as a commercial endeavour to transform New Zealand into a film set in order

to increase tourism and give the country more of a distinctive cultural identity. Such funding bodies as Creative New Zealand had a part in the endeavour. The New Zealand locations of both *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* acquired an economic value. The village of Hobbiton was built around the Waikato town of Matamata and granted a trademark in order not to be imitated anywhere else. In order for the filming of *The Hobbit* trilogy to take place (2012–2014,) Hobbiton was reconstructed in 2011. Hobbiton has nothing to do with New Zealand culture, but it is a tourist landmark now and it is advertised as "created […] with brilliant attention to detail" ("The Lord of the Rings Filming Locations"). Other locations in the North Island are Mount Ngauruhoe (Mount Doom in *The Lord of the Rings*) and various Wellington locations. In the South Island, locations in the Nelson Tasman region, Canterbury, the Mackenzie Country, Southern Lakes, and Fiordland have all become marketable as "Tolkien" places.

When *The Lord of the Rings* films were released, the tourism rate in New Zealand increased exponentially, growing from 1.7 million in 2000 to 2.4 million in 2006 (Schreffler 2018). In Ian Brodie's *"The Lord of the Rings" Location Guidebook*, New Zealand is consistently advertised as the equivalent of the fantastic Middle-earth, featuring the actors in Jackson's films. Elijah Wood, who plays Frodo, claims that "[e]very element of Middle-earth is contained in New Zealand" (Brodie 2002, 21); John Rhys Davies, Gimli in the films, calls the geographical place "primitive" (Brodie 2002, 84); and Viggo Mortensen, who plays Aragorn, attaches the word "primeval" to it (Brodie 2002, 92). Thus, *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy has been used in order to "sell" New Zealand tourism principally to Tolkien fans and to increase the number of enthusiasts of both Tolkien and New Zealand; these new audiences are also attracted to Jackson's film adaptations alone and not at all to the literary texts.

Bruce Babbington joined the discussion on the marketability of New Zealand in his analysis of Rudall Hayward's *The Bush Cinderella* (1928). He wrote about "New Zealand's desirability" materialized in "a *locus amoenus* that skirts the wilderness but tames it without wholly excluding it" (2007, 46). In the adaptations of Tolkien, the interplay between the wild and the cultivated develops this topos, which is based on the classically inspired, medieval concept of a pleasurable place surrounded by nature, in some cases wild and in other tamed (Curtius 1983,

92–94). In Jackson's adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings*, there is both wilderness and cultivated land, in the form of the village Hobbiton. Babbington emphasizes that the true "wild" landscape is not a part of the everyday experience of New Zealanders either. He claims: "many of these locations, like *The Lord of the Rings*, are hardly the habitat of many New Zealanders (they are spectacular holiday sites to them as much as to tourists); yet they recur cinematically" (2007, 118). The medievalist locations of *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* as fairyland settings create an impression that New Zealanders live in a medieval place, but this is just the cinematic artifice of an alternative world that some tourists take for reality. The tourists attracted by these images to visit the country are usually Tolkien fans from the USA and Europe.

The Hobbit trilogy and in particular its New Zealand locations have so far received little critical attention, in contrast to that paid to Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings*.[6] With the progress of the filming technology from the time of the first trilogy, the special effects of *The Hobbit* in each of its three parts are more outstanding than in *The Lord of the Rings*. On the other hand, the landscape, as it is reconstructed by more advanced software, appears to be more surreal. In *The Hobbit* trilogy, the mise en scene is no longer "natural", since the real landscape matters less for the overall vision in these adaptations. Instead, the effect of New Zealand as a specific technicolour dream is created in *The Hobbit*. This may result from Peter Jackson as a director becoming interested in the topic of ecology and developing an innovative technology to suggest environmental pollution as a possible source of evil when filming *The Lord of the Rings*, but no longer filming the landscape in this manner in *The Hobbit*. Yet it also reflects the aims of the original texts from which the two trilogies originate. *The Lord of the Rings*, planned as a narrative for adults, included serious reflections about threats to the 20th-century natural environment, visible in Chapter VIII, Book VI, where Sam carries out "the scouring of the shire" from signs of technological progress and from industry (Tolkien 1991, 975-997). *The Hobbit*, written earlier as a book for children, retained the adventure narrative format of the novel.

The aesthetic concerns in adapting *The Hobbit* trilogy for screen were different from those of *The Lord of the Rings*: in *The Hobbit* Jackson wished to present an entirely unrealistic vision, highlighting fantasy elements. In *The Hobbit: The Desolation*

of Smaug, where Smaug is the name of a dragon, the dragon as a fantasy element is metonymic of the fantastic genre. Yet the dragon also shows the link between Tolkien's prose and the medieval literatures of Europe, since dragons entered European culture mainly through Old Norse sagas, which Tolkien knew and admired. There was no need to stress the pristine quality of the locations any longer in *The Hobbit*. As for the New Zealand landscape, it is presented unrealistically in the first part, *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey*, but it is still "primeval" there.

The metaphors of a pristine landscape, a primitive country, and its innocent inhabitants were of colonial origin in the national context. In the post-World War One period, when New Zealand was a settler colony and then a dominion, external perspectives of the country were dominated by the impression that it belonged to the past. The perspective from London was influential since, to quote Felicity Barnes (2013), "London, then the biggest city in the world, had become New Zealand's cultural capital" (2) in colonial times. While London was modern and civilized, New Zealand, by contrast, was "old" and imagined as "uncultured" (Barnes 2013, 1, 74). Its inhabitants, both of European origin and Māori, were "archaic", and the space they inhabited was anachronistic (Barnes 2013, 71, 93). Barnes stresses that "anachronistic" did not merely mean "behind the time that was modernity in the metropolitan centre" but also "outside of time" (93), that is, beyond the conception of time as it was understood in Europe. The image of New Zealand as "outside of time" was very much shaped by the 19th-century image of the colony, which from the London perspective was characterized by Māori culture, curious fauna, and a landscape that was supposedly primitive and empty of people (Barnes 2013, 136).

These perspectives suggest that landscape and its Indigenous inhabitants distinguished New Zealand from other settler colonies like Australia and Canada, which are also subject to distinctive temporal shifts in the popular imagination. The myth of New Zealand as primeval contributed to Jackson's choice of it as the location that would evoke Tolkien's Middle-earth. The smallness of the country's film industry (Barker et al. 2008, 4) was also a factor, since the Hollywood enterprise could develop easily. Barker et al. (2008) call the New Zealand film industry a "second cinema", that is, one that receives both state subsidy and private support (4) but is open to activities on the part of "first cinema", that is, Hollywood. In aiming to make the New

Zealand landscape more popular worldwide for nationalistic and commercial reasons, Jackson reinforced this status of a "second" cinema. New Zealand's cinema had little of the global or commercial status apart from the single blockbuster film, *Once Were Warriors* (1995). Perhaps apart from the one film New Zealand was not known in the popular imagination, hence it kept its status of a "second" cinema.

New Zealand's official authorities supported these productions, as they saw business and commercial benefits in the filming of the trilogies in their country. The army furnished logistical support and extras ([Conrich 2006](), 133), public funds supported the production's publicity, and contributed to refurbishing the Embassy Theatre in Wellington, the venue for the premiere of *The Return of the King* in Wellington, specially for that celebration ([Barker et al. 2008](), 5). A connection was made between the myth of New Zealand as a pastoral paradise and the Hollywood production that located Middle-earth in the country.

Reimagining Maoriland: critiques of Middle-earth

All the above, however, has happened to the detriment of the landscape itself, as the long list of such tourist tours as Safari of the Rings from New Zealand, Nomad Safaris, Red Carpet Tours, the Rings Scenic Tours, and the Hobbiton Movie Set makes clear ([Conrich 2006](), 135). Some of these tours are no longer in existence now, 20 years later, since they were taking place just for a few years after the release of the first trilogy.[7] The extensive tourism that followed *The Lord of the Rings* film adaptations was advantageous in terms of profit and commercial benefits yet also problematic: it could be damaging to the environment due to overcrowding and lack of appropriate care. Local craftspeople were employed to produce objects associated with the production and its merchandising ([Conrich 2006](), 131), making accessible to international viewers "superior movie merchandising" and "high-class products" ([Conrich 2006](), 121). The industry around the film production developed very rapidly, but infringements upon the integrity of the landscape began from the time of the tours. New Zealand could no longer be seen the way it had been in the past, following the trilogy, but the Tolkien dimension was important for Tolkien fans, who saw the

landscape as incomplete if it was not complemented by Tolkien references and souvenirs.

Another critique of these successful film productions was that *The Lord of the Rings* production involved Māori actors cast as Orcs and numerous Māori extras in similar roles, stereotyping them as physically completely different from the European actors. Māori were cast as monstrous warriors, in alignment with their 19th- and early 20th-century identification with the "ancient warriors" of Māori land (Stafford and Williams 2006, 132). This led the Māori actors to being dehumanized in the film due to their ethnic origin. The main cast were European or American actors of European origin, while some of the monstrous Orcs have Māori facial features under their make-up. Casting Māori as Orcs created the impression that Māori were different and racially inferior to the "white" actors.

Jackson's adaptations also continue, apparently uncritically, historical representations of Māori as Others and as adjuncts to the dominant white Pākehā presence. When the New Zealand landscape started to be occupied by white settlers, "idealized" Māori were located as a complement to the "romantic" Ossianic space. The term "Maoriland" created an image of New Zealand as innocent, primitive, and sparsely populated by Māori, who were invested with the same qualities as the imaginary Celtic tribes (Stafford and Williams 2006, 71). Māori became the white settler's Other in this image.

The racism of the adaptations is very likely closely related to the colonial stereotypes of the Indigenous peoples in the Pacific, including Māori in New Zealand. Shane Rangi, a New Zealand actor from Ngati Porou, was cast in *The Lord of the Rings* twice. In *The Fellowship of the Ring* he was the Witch-King of Angmar, lord of the Nazgûl. In *The Return of the King* he was cast as one of Haradrim, the Men of the East. Both roles were uncredited. Lawrence Makoare, another Māori actor, was cast as Lurtz the Uruk-Hai, and then as the Witch-King of Angmar and the Orc, General Gothmog, in *The Lord of the Rings*. In particular, the scene when Lurtz was born was represented with a degree of racism according to Sean Redmond (2008), who points out that the Uruk-hai as the Other were born in a manner that differed from that of a live creature. Jackson's birth scene explains his vision of the Uruk-hai, since their birth resembles the forging of a killing machine with racist implications:

At the bottom of this underground pit, one finds a bubbling birthing pool of thick mud [...] [97] In a terrifying birthing reconstruction of a human birthing scenario, a brutish figure roars into existence, ripping open the sack it was contained within, killing the Orc who had moments earlier acted as his midwife [...]. Shot in close-up, his blazing nostrils, dreadlock hair and animalistic posturing directly recalls the stereotype of the all-body/no brain black buck of racist imagination.

(Redmond 2008, 96–97)

Redmond recognizes the "no brain" and animalistic racist stereotypes associated with African Americans here, but the film's cast, which included, among others, Māori actors, makes this racism more general. Redmond argues that whiteness dominates and is presented as superior in Jackson's adaptation, even though the dangers of this "hyper-whiteness" are seen there as well. Saruman, for example, is a white magician; at first apparently a positive character (Redmond 2008, 91) due to the whiteness of his hair, skin, and clothes (Mills 2022, 16), but later turning out to be evil.

Orcs in *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey* may not be as dominating as Orcs in *The Lord of the Rings*, but their representation changes for the audience: it is not a children's film at this stage. The two remaining films, *The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug* and *The Hobbit: The Battle of Five Armies*, develop the topic of Orcs as monstrous Others in an even more terrifying manner than *The Hobbit*. As in *The Lord of the Rings*, a Māori actor was cast as a distinguishable Orc figure. *An Unexpected Journey* starts with the Dwarves' fight against the Orcs and the role of Azog, yet another monstrous Orc, is central in the fight. Azog, later identified as the Pale Orc before Thorin realizes that this is Azog who had slain his father, is played by the muscular half-Māori actor Manu Bennett.[8] Bennett was cast in the role due to his physical frame, but his Māori face is partly visible through the Orc characterization, as also happened in the case of the Māori cast as Orcs in *The Lord of the Rings* and with actor Lawrence Makoare. In *The Desolation of Smaug* and *The Battle of Five Armies* Makoare was cast as Bolg, yet another Orc central to the plot. Māori actors are frequent in the roles of Orcs in the three parts of *The Hobbit* and the same actor even played different Orcs.

This could suggest that the white audience sees all others as indistinguishable.

The casting of Māori actors and extras in both Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* reflects racist overtones. Jackson assumed that Māori actors were the most appropriate to play those monstrous but central characters. Significantly, there was no challenge to those assumptions by the Māori themselves. Only later did such practices become unacceptable due to the consciousness and sensitivities of global audiences and some Māori viewers. At the time the adaptations were filmed, the colour-blind casting strategies adopted by some filmmakers nowadays, such as casting the Black British actor Jodie Turner-Smith as the historically white queen in the 2021 TV mini-series *Anne Boleyn*, were unthinkable. No Hobbits or Dwarves could be of Māori origin, for example, when both *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* were made, because of the conviction that such characters as Hobbits or Dwarves could only be white. In the texts, the binaries light/dark and white/black prevail. At least Jackson intended to make the female characters, such as Arwen or Éowyn, more central, but the fans of Tolkien's novels and films, who had invested in his conservative vision, did not

like this and rejected Jackson's "feminism".[9] Lothar [Mikos, et al. (2008)](#) comment on this conservatism as typical of the fantasy genre, which is conventional and so tends to be driven by the expectations of its audience: they note "gender stereotypes" and "ethnically stereotypical representations" are stock elements of fantasy (119). Similar conservative remarks have been voiced online today, after the Amazon Prime TV series *The Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power* was released. This prequel to the events from *The Lord of the Rings* cinematic trilogy includes non-white characters and has already inspired very vociferous responses. The casting shows how thinking about ethnicity has changed in fantasy film since the first trilogy was filmed in 2001–2003.[10] In both trilogies Jackson excludes non-white actors from the roles of characters imagined by Tolkien as "white". The two trilogies were made in an era before colour-blind casting. His assumption that Māori actors were only appropriate for the roles of Orcs and other "negative" characters can be challenged today.

Casting Māori actors as the fighters, Orcs and Uruk-hai can also be associated with the myth of Māori as heroes and great warriors, which again goes back to the 19th-century ideology of New Zealand as Maoriland ([Stafford and Williams 2006](#)).

Nevertheless, Jackson's adaptations show the two ethnic groups as belligerent but fighting for the wrong cause, which exemplifies how inappropriate casting Māori actors in such roles was when considering the historical New Zealand wars. To quote historian Keith Sinclair (1986): "The conception of Maoris as heroes persisted into later historical elements in the New Zealand tradition" (199). The identification of Māori as "natural warriors" was widespread (Rabel 2009, 252). In time, however, the historical events of Māori winning battles against Pakēha were transformed into the myth of Māori as "ancient" warriors, and as "the Vikings of the Pacific" (Lynch 2015, 141), who paralleled medieval Europeans in aggression.

The casting of Māori in specific roles as powerful and brutal figures enhanced the image presented in mythical cinematic representations of Lee Tamahori's 1994 *Once Were Warriors*, which de-historicized their situation and created the impression that a Māori return to the ancestral (or the pre-European) past was possible. The New Zealand landscape was romanticized in the past, which Jackson resorted to, but he also preserved Māori as a part of this romanticized landscape. What is more, if the supposedly "ancient" landscape provoked nostalgia, "ancient"

Māori could provoke it as well. Perhaps Māori actors and extras were chosen by Jackson to complete the nostalgic image of the Middle-earth.

The Pakēha imagined the landscape they inhabited as empty and characterized by an "unfinished quality" (Stafford and Williams 2006, 17). The "primitive" landscape connoted the previous, 18th-century ideas of the sublime; it was seen as uncanny, and the Māori presence as something "savage and degraded" (Stafford and Williams 2006, 42). In representations within the visual arts, they could only be located as romanticized figures, inhabitants of the imaginary Maoriland. This image was far removed from the contemporary realities of Aotearoa New Zealand, marked by indigenous demands for equality and co-governance to be addressed within the ideology of biculturalism that developed through revisions of the Treaty of Waitangi and reparation of confiscated and stolen land from the 1980s. It appears that adapting *The Lord of the Rings* on location in New Zealand and casting Māori actors and extras recreated Maoriland ideology of the 19th century, preserved in literature and the visual arts,[11] by making the "mythical Māori" act in the adaptations of "the mythical Tolkien".[12] Tolkien did not wish

to create a "mythology for England" himself, as he is generally thought to have done, but to create myths to which the English could have recourse. Jackson developed these in filming his adaptations by complementing them with the myths of New Zealand as primitive, pastoral, and Eden-like.[13]

Jackson's adaptations were able to respond to the original myths of medieval primitivism with their own cinematic ones for at least two reasons. One is that the trilogies were funded by major Hollywood studios, and the other related to the position of Jackson himself (Grant 2007, 320), who had become a successful filmmaker by developing just one cinematic style, according to Lawrence McDonald (1993, 1). Although McDonald was referring to Jackson's early splatter and horror films, the formulation is also relevant to the two Tolkien trilogies as versions of fantasy film. Barry Keith Grant (2007) suggests that the first trilogy "may be read for its New Zealand subtext" even though it gained an international reputation and could be seen separately from Jackson's own nationality (327). Grant (2007) suggests that the adaptations could be seen as "a celebration of New Zealand" (328), yet a medievalist reading exposes darker overtones. Middle-earth had to be presented as primitive and the myth of primitivism that supposedly characterized New Zealand landscape added to this. Furthermore, this vision aligns with a kind of racism and a reductive view of indigeneity, which was already present in Tolkien's texts and for which he continues to be criticized (Sinex 2010).

As for Hobbiton, it was created in the prosperous Waikato region, because aspects of the New Zealand landscape were seen not just as epic and grand there but also as "picturesque and pastoral" and dotted with small houses inhabited by members of small communities, as Grant explains (2007, 328). This led to the growing, but erroneous conviction that New Zealand was the same as Middle-earth (Conrich 2006, 132). Nevertheless, as a place inhabited by Māori, New Zealand was remote from pastoral cosiness.

Adapting Tolkien for the screen in New Zealand led to a peculiar cultural recolonization of the former settler colony. James Belich (2009) formulated the concept of recolonization as the situation in which "the relationship between old land and new tightened" (179), even though he was writing about the colonial times.[14] The New Zealand locations of *The Lord of the Rings* films can be seen as a peculiar case of recolonization in

the late 20th and early 21st centuries. A relationship between Middle-earth, very much like imaginary England, and New Zealand was established, as if to contradict the legacy of colonial history: New Zealand's geographical distance from England as the imperial centre. Middle-earth started to be associated with New Zealand, even if Tolkien's narrative was set in an English shire (Barker et al. 2008, 132). This related New Zealand to Englishness even more strongly, though the white settlers were not only English but also Scottish and Irish. They were never a homogenous community, but the identification of New Zealand with Middle-earth and its "Englishness" imposed the label of Englishness onto the nation. The cult of the English Middle Ages with its literature reinforced Englishness as the imagined cornerstone of colonial identity, regardless of the fact that there were many Scottish and Irish settlers as well.[15]

At the beginning of the 21st century, the New Zealand landscape was presented through the "Englishness" of Tolkien's Shire, thus symbolically connecting New Zealand with Englishness again. The one-time colonial academic medievalism resided in what was English, and modern cinematic medievalism strongly started to relate New Zealand to England again.[16] This medievalism relied on the tropes of the medieval as organic, New Zealand as pastoral, and Māori as an ethnic Other. It disregarded other factors, such as the positive Māori presence and the distinctiveness of their culture. In this manner, it was similar to the Gothic presence of Māori in, for example, Jane Campion's *The Piano* (Tinknell 2000), hence it did not reflect the changes of the late 20th century, in which New Zealand became a bicultural nation. The landscape was romanticized and Māori were othered by Jackson. On the one hand, New Zealand was perfect as Middle-earth, but on the other, the Māori presence in the adaptations makes the impression of two different races and is misaligned with the present-day reality.

Acknowledgement

Notes

1. Tolkien's medievalism is manifested, among others, in his Arthurian fascination with *aventure* (Seaman 2007), the Old English influences on his work (Smol 2007), the role of medieval manuscripts in his texts (Drout 2007b), and the sources of riddles in them (Kisor 2007); Tolkien's music medievalism (and Peter Jackson's) is analysed by Stephen C. Meyer (Meyer 2020).

2. In 1996 Charles W. Mills (2022) wrote about "the racially-structured character of Tolkien's universe", even though his essay "The Wretched of Middle-earth: An Orkish Manifesto" (Mills 2022) was only published after his death; the topic of race in Tolkien will also appear in the volume with the working title *Race and Tolkien* edited by Robin Anne Reid (forthcoming, McFarland).

3. The term "Middle-earth" originated from Old English literature, where the idea of "the middle" referred to the earth as situated between heaven and hell.

4. Importantly, the novel cycle is not a "trilogy", since it is a cycle of six books, customarily published in the three volumes due to the requirements that HarperCollins imposed on Tolkien.

5. See Williams's Chapter 4 in this volume.

6. The most extensive critical source is still *J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopaedia* (Drout 2007a), which devoted a separate entry to Peter Jackson and included a lengthy bibliography (Timmons 2007, 303–309); however, it did not cover the *Hobbit* trilogy, as this adaptation was made later.

7. The Hobbiton Movie Set advertises itself as "100% pure New Zealand", which follows the trope of primitivism in the presentation of the Middle-earth and New Zealand landscape; https://www.newzealand.com/us/matamata/

8. The types of Orcs and how this is reflected in the cast would require a separate study. I would like to thank Professor Emeritus Greg Waite for this observation.

9. The limitations of Jackson's approach are indicated, for example, in: https://pagesunbound.wordpress.com/2018/05/18/reclaiming-

arwen-why-i-dont-appreciate-peter-jacksons-limited-view-of-womanhood/.

10. The responses were summarized on TheOneRing.net in the following manner: some of the actors in *The Rings of Power* have been "ill-received for their ethnicity, skin colour, and hair", and they "received criticism for no other reason than simply being people of colour"; "*The Rings of Power* and the Issue of Race", 17 February 2022 https://www.theonering.net/torwp/2022/02/17/112125-the-rings-of-power-and-the-issue-of-race/

11. Stafford and Williams (2006) write about "the smug paternalism of a period now regarded with embarrassment, a world in which Maori warriors in heroic attires and Maori maidens in seductive ones adorned romantic portraits and tourist postcards" (10).

12. The "mythical" aspects of Tolkien's texts have been explored, among others, by Jane Chance (2001).

13. Michael D.C. Drout and Hillary Wynne (2000) discuss the concept of the "mythology for England" that had been attributed to Tolkien (101–134).

14. He also begins his *Paradise Reforged* with the point that recolonization "tightened New Zealand's links with its metropolis" (Belich 2001, 11).

15. See Wilson's Chapter 1 in this volume.

16. At the same time, New Zealand was marginalized in some research on Peter Jackson's adaptations, since, for example, Martin Barker's study (Barker's 2008) study does not include the New Zealand audience at all.

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