



## Perilous Realms: Celtic and Norse in Tolkien's Middle-earth

By Marjorie Burns

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**Perilous Realms: Celtic and Norse in Tolkien's Middle-earth** By Marjorie Burns

J.R.R. Tolkien (1892-1973) is increasingly recognized as the most influential writer of the twentieth century. Sales of his books remain exceptionally high, and Middle-earth fan clubs flourish around the world. The massive success of the film versions made of *The Lord of the Rings*, and released between 2001 and 2003, have only added to his popularity.

Throughout his life, Tolkien was acutely aware of the power of myth in shaping society; so much so, that one of his earliest ambitions as a writer was to create a mythology for England. The Middle-earth of *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* was to serve as a stand-in for Britain and North-western Europe and is strongly based on a variety of influential literatures and beliefs, particularly the Celtic and Norse. *Perilous Realms* is the first book to focus consistently on the ways in which Tolkien balances these two ancient cultures and unites them in a single literature. Renowned Tolkien scholar Marjorie Burns also investigates the ways Tolkien reconciled other oppositions, including paganism and Christianity, good and evil, home and wayside, war and peace, embellishment and simplicity, hierarchy and the common man.

Even those who do not know *Beowulf* or the *Arthurian tales* or northern European mythology come away from *The Lord of the Rings* with a feeling for Britain's historical and literary past. Those who recognize the sources behind Tolkien – and the skill with which he combines these sources – gain far more. *Perilous Realms* gives this advantage to all readers and provides new discoveries, including material from obscure, little-known Celtic texts and a likely new source for the name 'hobbit.' It is truly essential reading for Tolkien fans.

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*Perilous Realms* is a pleasure to read. Marjorie Burns writes in a style that is literate and graceful, avoiding the stiff and stuffy prose of much of today's critical writing. With this valuable piece of work, Burns displays a thorough knowledge of both Norse and Celtic literature of the medieval period, and by focusing on the hitherto-undervalued Celtic aspect of Tolkien's fiction, fills a gap in the spectrum of Tolkien scholarship.'

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(Verlyn Flieger, Department of English, University of Maryland)

'The Northern aspects of Tolkien's fiction have long deserved closer study. Marjorie Burns' *Perilous Realms* does much to redress the balance. All students and enthusiasts of Tolkien's works will welcome her insights into the intricacies of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*.'

(Wayne G. Hammond, Chapin Library of Rare Books, Williams College)

'*Perilous Realms* is a well researched and stimulating work that repeatedly offers original insights and contains much to interest the reader who wishes to explore the fascinating web of influences, sources, and attitudes underlying Tolkien's Middle-earth.'

(Nils Ivar Agøy, Institute of Humanities and Cultural Studies, Telemark University College, Norway)

#### About the Author

**Marjorie Burns** is a professor in the Department of English at Portland State University.

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