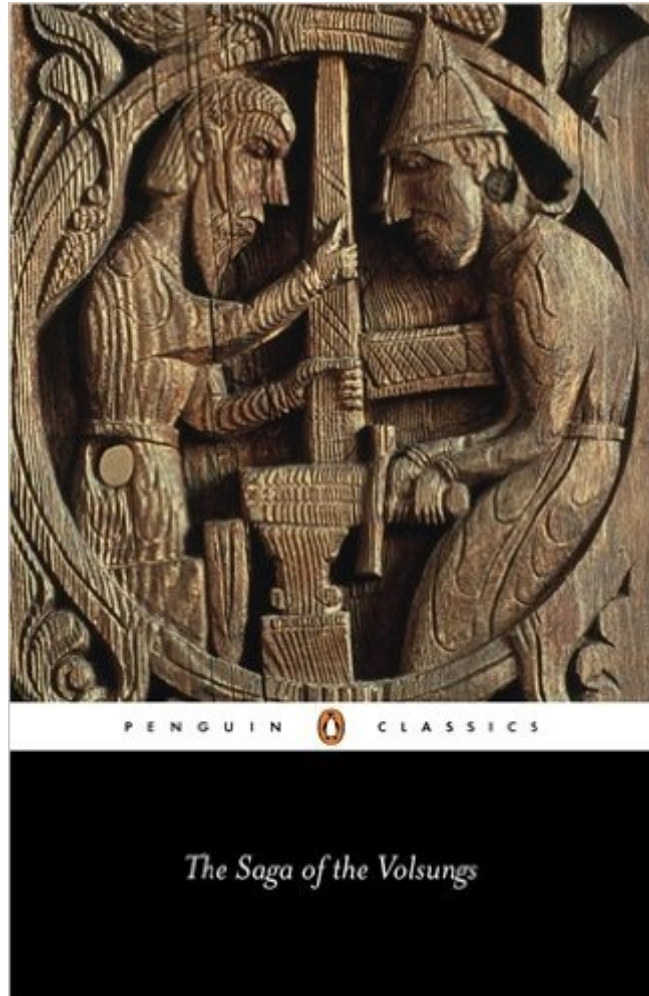


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The Saga Of The Volsungs (Penguin Classics)



Synopsis

One of the great books of world literature--an unforgettable tale of jealousy, unrequited love, greed, and vengeance. Based on Viking Age poems and composed in thirteenth-century Iceland, The Saga of the Volsungs combines mythology, legend, and sheer human drama in telling of the heroic deeds of Sigurd the dragon slayer, who acquires runic knowledge from one of Odin's Valkyries. Yet the saga is set in a very human world, incorporating oral memories of the fourth and fifth centuries, when Attila the Hun and other warriors fought on the northern frontiers of the Roman empire. In his illuminating Introduction Jesse L. Byock links the historical Huns, Burgundians, and Goths with the extraordinary events of this Icelandic saga. With its ill-fated Rhinegold, the sword reforged, and the magic ring of power, the saga resembles the Nibelungenlied and has been a primary source for such fantasy writers as J. R. R. Tolkien and for Richard Wagner's Ring cycle. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

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Customer Reviews

Jesse L. Byock's translation of the Old Icelandic "Volsunga Saga" -- a prose version of older stories,

some surviving in Old Norse poems, including events going back at least to the fall of the Roman Empire -- is the most readily available English-language version, and in my opinion is one of the best -- arguably, the best, period. "Volsunga Saga," the story of the ancestors and deeds of Sigurd the Dragon-Slayer, his murder, and the following vengeance, has been translated into English a number of times; a reflection in part of its own qualities as a story, in part of the celebrity of Wagner's "Ring" cycle, portions of which are, rather loosely, based upon it, as well as other Norse and German versions, and Wagner's own notions of what Germanic myths should have been. (The relations between versions of the tales, which seem to have been popular over a wide area for many centuries, are complex. I have discussed some examples in a review of another translation, as "Volsung Saga.") The Saga differs from the "Nibelungenlied" in more than details, and in being in Old Icelandic prose rather than Middle High German verse; the Icelandic narrative is rich in a sense of personal honor offended, and legal precepts followed or ignored, in places where the German account is very much concerned with the outer signs of rank and feudal hierarchy. Both are equally reflective of reality; but different realities. William Morris worked up a fine-sounding English version with the assistance of the Icelandic scholar Eiríkr Magnússon, first published in 1870; it had a long-lasting paperback edition from Collier Books, beginning in 1962 (also published in a British edition as a Collier-Mac). That version had a good introduction by Robert W.

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