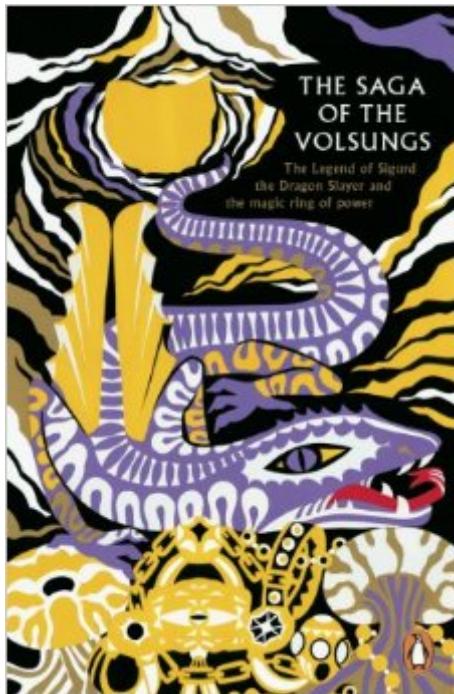


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# The Saga Of The Volsungs (Legends From The Ancient North)



## Synopsis

Legends from the Ancient North: Five classics of Norse literature that inspired J. R. R. Tolkien's epic vision in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. Legendary fantasy writer J. R. R. Tolkien spent much of his life studying, translating, and teaching the ancient tales of northern Europe at Oxford and drew on them for his own writing. These epic stories, with their wizards and knights, dragons and trolls, cursed rings and magic swords, are as fascinating today as they were thousands of years ago. Reading them brings us as close as we will ever get to the magical worlds of the Vikings and the origins of their twentieth-century counterpart: Tolkien's Middle Earth. 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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The Saga of the Volsungs is a series of interconnected poems written in thirteenth century Iceland by an anonymous author, telling the tale of the hero Sigurd the Dragon Slayer and his magic ring of power. This handsome edition, part of Penguin's Tales of the Ancient North series, was translated by Jesse L. Byock, who has also provided an informative Introduction and extensive Notes. Most people will immediately recognize that The Saga of the Volsungs was an inspiration for some of the works of Richard Wagner and J.R.R. Tolkien. But there is more to savor in these poems than just the dragons and heroes, magic rings and fabulous swords, which the names Wagner and Tolkien will bring to mind. Sigurd's tale is a great adventure, and Byock's masterful translation and helpful Notes illuminate it and add even more power and drama. Most of all, Sigurd's adventure depicts the tumultuous and beautiful world of the ancient Norse in all its magnificence, exactly as did Wagner in his greatest operas and Tolkien in his Lord of the Rings and Silmarillion.

Jesse Byock produces a wonderful prose translation of the Volsungsaga. Great complementary explanatory notes make this an easy and thoroughly enjoyable read. For those who revel in the stories of old, or those who might want to see how Wagner took this myth and compressed it... I would say this story should be on everyone's reading list. Few, if any, of the stories of the north are this easy and yet so rewarding to pick up and read... Also this particular edition... Beautiful. Just beautiful... I might just have to pick up the other "Legends from the ancient North" despite the fact that I have all of the extant texts in other translations...

I had to read this book for a class I took on Vikings and I loved it! So much happens and there is so much to be learned about Viking culture in the narrative. This story is full of strong women, love triangles, brotherhood, death, heroes, and the occasional god. It was quite the adventure.

The Saga of the Volsungs is a great tale, fascinating, often alarming to read. I have known of Sigurd, the slayer of Fafnir, for a long time, from my reading of The Elder Edda and books like Myths of the Norsemen, now I am glad to have finally read the tale which tells of his life from birth to

death. It is the amount of violence in the tale which made it alarming to me. I found it moving, too, particularly when it told of how fate conspired to keep Sigurd and Brynhild, who truly loved each other, apart. I liked the moments of magic in the tale, as when Odin intervenes in events in his human form, as a tall, one eyed man with a beard. It was interesting to read of how Sigurd slew the dragon, Fafnir, the deed which brought him fame, for one thing, it was clear how it influenced the tale of Turin Turambar and the slaying of the dragon, Glaurung, in The Silmarillion by J.R.R. Tolkien. The tale is a high tragedy, and well worth reading. The Introduction and Notes by its translator, Jesse L. Byock, are interesting, revealing the history and myth behind the tale, and how it came to influence William Morris and J.R.R. Tolkien and the Ring cycle of operas by Richard Wagner.

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