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Myths Of The Norsemen: From The Eddas And Sagas



Synopsis

Over the centuries, Northern mythology has exerted much influence on Western customs, language, and literature. Its principal theme of the perpetual struggle of the beneficent forces of nature against the injurious, and its twin characteristics of dark tragedy and grim humor, tinge much European literature and music, most notably Wagner's Ring Cycle. In this volume, a noted scholar of myth and folklore has assembled a rich collection of Northern mythology as preserved in the Eddas and sagas of Iceland. These are perhaps the purest versions of the original myths, thanks to the island's remoteness and lack of contact with outside influences. Both grand and tragical, the age-old tales tell of the creation of the world; the heroic deeds of such gods and heroes as Odin, Thor, and Siegfried; the machinations of the evil Loki; the fantastical adventures of giants, dwarfs, and elves; the twilight of the gods; and much else. Sixty-four marvelous, atmospheric illustrations add an additional dimension of charm. In this convenient, reliable edition, *Myths of the Norsemen* offers not only hours of reading entertainment but also valuable insights into the nature and meaning of myth and how it constitutes part of the deep and ancient wellspring of Western culture.

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Customer Reviews

Beware this book. It is apparently written for older children, but is based much on unidentified sources or the author's own imagination, and is filled with careless, factual errors. Guerber often refers vaguely and randomly to "some mythologists", "old Northmen", "ancient Northern nations",

"Northern races", "the Scandinavians", "some authorities", "some accounts" as sources, only once actually mentioning Snorri Sturluson under the odd misspelling "Snorro - Sturleson". She presents unsourced descriptions and information found in no extant medieval texts. A typical example, one of many, concerns Ælfǫtgir: "He was supposed to occasion and quiet the great tempests which swept over the deep, and was generally represented as a gaunt old man, with long white beard and hair, and clawlike fingers ever clutching convulsively, as though he longed to have all things within his grasp. Whenever he appeared above the waves, it was only to pursue and overturn vessels, and to greedily drag them to the bottom of the sea, a vocation in which he was thought to take fiendish delight." The writing is good and makes Ælfǫtgir come alive. But every detail is modern invention, whether invented by Guerber or some literary source from which Guerber took it without attribution. Guerber continues with more bogus information that Ælfǫtgir married his sister. Such passages abound. This might be reasonable in a work which presented itself as a retelling and reworking of Norse mythology (yet even retellings for younger children mostly stick closer to the originals). Who "supposed" Ælfǫtgir to be as Guerber presents him? What does "generally represented" mean when no representation of Ælfǫtgir has ever been found? Ælfǫtgir was "thought to take fiendish delight" by whom?

Myths of the Norsemen: From the Eddas and Sagas by H. A. Guerber

The errors in this work are fairly typical for the period that it was written. Romanticizing the Norse and Arthurian Myths seemed to be a very legitimate pastime for numerous Victorian era authors. While most of the book is in clearly and well written prose, at best it should be considered along the lines of a "Historical Novel", or as a semi-serious children's text on Norse mythology. There are just too many errors and outright fabrications for serious study. Additionally, while there might be a small amount of justification for an academic and scholarly comparison between Norse Mythology and Greek Mythology, what is presented in the last chapter of this book is not one. Guerber's unsupported and exceptionally vague references to non-identifiable ethereal sources is very frustrating. Let's face it, there are not an infinite number of sources for this information, different translations are one thing but changing the myths and alluding to, "other", unspecified sources of wisdom is quite unacceptable. I am of the opinion that many of these sources were contemporaries of Guerber's and she was sighting them in this work. It would be like me using Harrison's, "The Hammer and The Cross", as a validation for what I thought the true meaning of the Edda's were and then publishing it as a fact. O.K., now that I've slammed this work and author fairly hard let me lay out two or three reasons why I think anyone interested in the Norse and Germanic Myths should own a copy, or in my case two copies, (one

paperback and one hardback). Firstly, the illustrations are very well done. Granted that they are seldom historically accurate and very Victorian or Wagner like, but well done none the less.

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