



Gold: Being the Marvelous History of General John Augustus Sutter

Blaise Cendrars , Nina Rootes (Translator)

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Leave it to a French poet to demythologize John Sutter, a Swiss thief and swindler who fled his native country one step ahead of the bill collectors. Sutter went first to New York, then Missouri, and finally ended up in California, where he set up a trading post and fort and, not coincidentally, something of a protection racket for other settlers. When a carpenter building a mill on Sutter's property found gold, he opened up the Swiss entrepreneur's private domain to hundreds and thousands of newcomers, a migration that changed the course of American history. Sutter died in 1880 in Washington, D.C., where he had gone to complain to Congress that his empire had been stripped away from him without due process. This is an altogether fascinating reconstruction of his strange and star-crossed life. --*Gregory MacNamee*

Gold: Being the Marvelous History of General John Augustus Sutter Details

Date : Published June 3rd 1996 by Da Capo Press (first published 1925)

ISBN : 9781569248072

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Format : Paperback 128 pages

Genre : Fiction, Cultural, France, Literature, Classics, Novels

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Andrew says

Like Dan Yack, this was a madcap tale, although far less over-the-top Frenchy/like a Decemberists song, and more about the tragically funny fate of noted accidental American legend John Sutter who curses out what gold does to a man, Treasure of the Sierra Madre-style. Of course, it's a wildly fictionalized picaresque, but you'll likely enjoy it in the same way you enjoyed (if you did) Mason & Dixon, The Public Burning, or any other thoroughly overboard, comic exploitation of historical personages. And the fact that I'm comparing this to high-postmodern novels written several decades later should tell you how far ahead of his time Cendrars was.

Laure says

Un texte frappant sur une histoire qui l'était déjà beaucoup ; la prose n'a guère vieilli, on sent une influence très forte sur nos auteurs contemporains. La lecture de la préface (après celle du roman, bien sûr) donne à voir les libertés que Cendrars a pris avec la biographie de Sutter pour en faire le mythe Suter. C'est une légende, donc les personnages sont dessinés comme de très loin, à peine plus que des silhouettes de conte ; pas ce que je préfère, mais les qualités littéraires restent indéniables.
Prêté par A.

Mostafa says

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Hamza says

It was just awesome! I've loved this story even if it has a dramatic end. It's the true story of the general Johann August Sutter when he came to the USA where he started a new business and then became rich. Unfortunately, he found mines of gold in his wide farms in California, which ruin his fortune...

I'm not fond of drama, but this true story, besides being a true one, shows how determination and self-confident can make a wealth starting from nothing.

Liedzeit says

Die Geschichte des Kaisers von Kalifornien. Schnörkellos erzählt. Faszinierend.

Chuck LoPresti says

Cendrars - demo era. If you, like just about every reasonably attentive person in the world, are a bit uneasy about things like "Columbus Day" and "American History" this breezy and vigorous read might interest you. It is impossible for me to read Cendrars without thinking up an Abel Gance film in my head and that's a great thing because life is better when you have an Abel Gance film in your head. Cendrars is a skilled observer of lives led to the fullest and like all his works - the possibilities of human achievement are the central concern here. Not a wasted word here - this is a succinct but not curt biography of John Sutter, a Swiss man like Cendrars, and his lust for riches that brought him to and through the pre-Civil War US. In about 130 pages, Cendrars writes a fairly direct telling of his fate that should appeal to most people interested in adventure biography. I think it's fair to find some fault with Cendrars' "macho" concerns but there's nothing overtly offensive if you're willing to accept some anachronistic attitude that isn't inconsistent with most of his other works, To The End of the World being an obvious and fairly reactionary deviation.

I'm not sure how I would feel about Cendrars if I didn't consider Gance one of the best film makers to ever stand behind a camera. In my mind - the two are permanently connected and I'll admit a possible bias. Having said that - there is something I find brilliantly vivacious about all of Cendrars' writing. He has an obvious lust for experience that is skillfully displayed in his intelligent and feral writing.

Don't start here with Cendrars - dive into Dan Yack first - that's a cannon-shot of literary gusto that will please anyone but the very easily offended.

Anybody interested in silent film genius Abel Gance is advised to see La Roue, J'Accuse and Napoleon as soon as possible. The debate around Napoleon and its soundtrack-based legal issues is a fascinating study in human arrogance - you'll only be able to get a horribly crappy print of Napoleon at the time of this writing - but it's worth it. And...when the issues get solved and a proper print gets released - you'll be scanning the crowd scenes for Cendrars who is identifiable by his pinned up empty sleeve in much greater detail. All three of his best-known works rank among the best films ever made as far as I am concerned.

Valentin Saint frison says

L'histoire tragique et magnifique du général suter, bâtisseur de la californie ruiné par la découvert d'Or sur son territoire. Malheureusement le grand écart tenté par Cendrars déçoit : voulant rester factuel, l'histoire est contée la plupart du temps assez sèchement, tandis que par moments l'auteur se prend d'envolées lyriques sur certains points de l'histoire d'un personnage que l'on a finalement l'impression de n'avoir pu connaître qu'à peine.

Sergio says

Blaise Cendrars was always fascinated with the life and adventures of John Augustus Sutter, traveller,

cheater, crook, entrepreneur, pioneer. Having read his allegedly fictionalised account of his years in North America, one is not surprised. Sutter fled Switzerland to escape creditors leaving wife and kids behind and ended up in New York. From there he worked his way through Missouri and decided to venture to the West, at a time when only few intrepid travellers had risked life and limb through the natives' territory. Once on the Pacific he worked his way to California through Alaska, where he caught a lift on a Russian ship.

This extra-ordinary person could speak many languages, start new enterprises any day of the week, and was unfazed by setbacks, betrayals, hardship. Constantly a step ahead of everybody else he builds an empire and becomes one of the richest man in the world. Mind you, his wife and kids may have been less excited by Sutter's exploits throughout their lives, but there you go.

All came to a crushing end when gold was discovered on his land, sparking a gold-fever frenzy that would cause him to lose everything. Thousands of gold diggers (literally) invaded his land, all of his workforce abandoned him to spend their days kneeling in shallow rivers. Sutter devoted the rest of his life on law suits to claim compensation from everybody and their dogs.

Blaise Cendrars prose is concise and clean. He loves telling a story and he's a master at it. The result is a 125 self-turning pages, compelling, roller-coaster of a book.

Jeff Bursey says

Cendrars is even more marvellous than Sutter, so check out his novels.

Ali Khamoushi says

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Brian says

A unique reading experience. You sit shotgun in the author's muscle-car narrative, barreling along highway of Sutter's life which stretches across Europe, Middle America, Panama, the South Pacific, and finally into the frontier of San Francisco Bay and the Sacramento Valley. Cendrars imagines a life for Sutter that is like a composite of Jack London, JD Rockefeller, Citizen Kane, and Vito Corleone; fortunes made and lost, kingdoms built and razed, family elevated and cut-down, spirits set sail and ultimately sunk. All in 128

pages.

Evan Cordes says

Just re-read this and love the story. Means a lot more now that I know the area a lot better.

I'd love to read an annotated version of this book, detailed with more history, images, references, etc.

Vivian Pradels Boutteville says

Le jeune Blaise Cendrars fut subjugué par l'histoire de Johann Suter, un suisse allemand qui trouva fortune en Amérique au milieu du XIXe siècle avant de finir sans le sou. Devenu riche à millions en quelques années, propriétaire d'un immense domaine foncier, il fut complètement ruiné par la découverte sur ses terres des premiers gisements d'or californien qui allaient déclencher la ruée vers l'or. Un destin certes tragique mais avec dénué d'épique ou de fantastique. Tout dans ce portrait sue l'austère morale du travail. Car ruiné, Suter n'aura de cesse de demander justice. Job des temps modernes.

Le vrai mystère est de savoir pourquoi Cendrars fut fasciné au point d'écrire ce court roman ? Une biographie romancée. Etait-ce la richesse ? Etait-ce la fin tragique ? Car la vraie richesse de ce livre est ce mystère.

Brian says

A ripping yarn that tackles the bio of an interesting 19th century character in a fictional format.

I am writing this to remind myself to write a full review when I am back home at a real keyboard and not on this goddamned iPad hunt-and-peck-a-thon.

Kelly says

Written simply and straightforwardly, this slim volume tells the rather unbelievable story of a Swiss outlaw, Johann August Suter (who became known as John Augustus Sutter), an unscrupulous but shrewd businessman whose enterprises were ruined when gold was found on his land in California in 1843. The series of events that led to his rise and subsequent demise were remarkable; his personal evolution from an outlaw, to a generous host and respected businessman, to the rejected, broken and half-crazed old man he became, was hard to believe, and surprisingly sad, despite the man not garnering much sympathy from this reader otherwise. You just can't make this stuff up.
