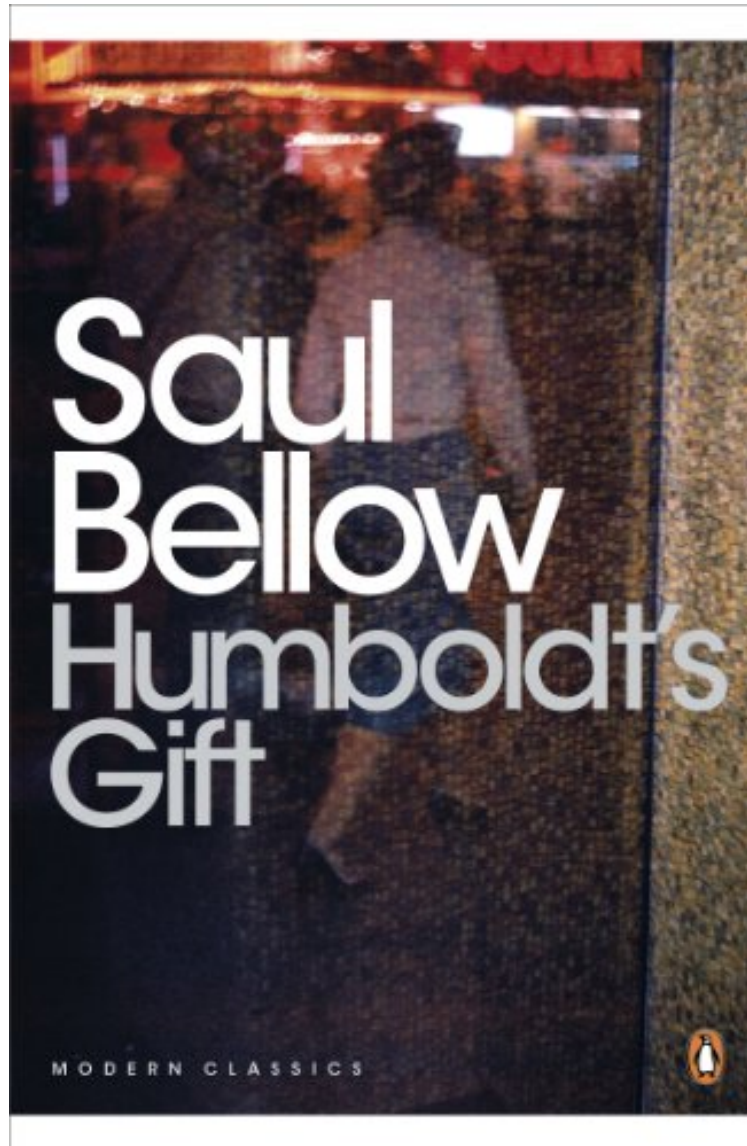


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Humboldt's Gift (Penguin Modern Classics)

Von Saul Bellow

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Von Saul Bellow : Humboldt's Gift (Penguin Modern Classics) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Humboldt's Gift (Penguin Modern Classics):

KundenrezensionenHilfreichste Kundenrezensionen1 von 1 Kunden fanden die folgende Rezension hilfreich. "This day belonged to Humboldt, it was charged with his spirit."Von expressJust before the book was published in 1975, Bellow told an interviewer that he wrote Humboldt's Gift, in his usual way, 'Lots of beginnings, three years on the middle and then the last third in six weeks flat out.' The following year the author won the Pulitzer and the Nobel Prize

in literature. The book is really two novels that were never quite reconciled: the story of Von Humboldt Fleisher, the goofy genius poet, a 'hero of wretchedness' whose tragic downfall exemplified the predicament of the artist in America; and 'an easy, funny book,' as Bellow described it, narrated by Charlie Citrine a worldly, wealthy Chicago citizen whose adventures eventually take center stage. The saga of Charlie Citrine begins with him as a bright, bookish, ambitious young man intent on literary success, coming, by way of Chicago, to Greenwich Village. There he becomes the friend and disciple of the visionary poet, critic and teacher Von Humboldt Fleisher, obviously modeled on Delmore Schwartz. In time the vexatious Humboldt dies alone, poor and mad, but he continues to affect the life of the middle-aged Charlie, who recapitulates some of the dead poet's folly while also striving for his wisdom. Material wealth comes to Charlie Citrine with a successful Broadway play about a Humboldt-like character, as well as a biography of Harry Hopkins and a book on Woodrow Wilson that won the Pulitzer Prize. Enconced in a Chicago high-rise loaded with fine art and Persian rugs, Citrine is now at work on the second volume of his magnum opus, a social history entitled 'Some Americans: The Sense of Being in the USA.' He is a big success and lives comfortably from the rights of the tremendously popular film whose script, written many years ago by Humboldt and Charlie. It's sort of a comedy about cannibalism and becomes the recurring metaphor in this novel. On assignment for Life magazine, he flies in a helicopter over Manhattan enjoying the company of senators Javits and Kennedy; he stays at The Plaza; he knows his way around Europe; he enjoys luxury cars and chic garments. He cannot resist his young and voluptuous matresse Renata who even stimulates him with a silk stocked foot under a table in the lobby at the Plaza hotel. But then financial problems plague him and bring a variety of comic difficulties in personal relations with his greedy divorced wife and voluptuous Renata. Most troublesome of all is Rinaldo Cantabile, a minor hoodlum to whom Charlie owes money and whose wife, oddly enough, is writing a dissertation on Humboldt. Rinaldo is putting pressure on Charlie - not openly extorting him - but pressuring nevertheless. One has to be familiar with certain biographical details of Saul Bellow and American literature to fully appreciate the main theme of the novel - literary rivalry and guilt about success. Yet, it is also hard to miss the resemblances between the characters in this book and their real-life sources. Friends, enemies, former lovers, even his doorman could easily identify themselves in the pages of 'Humboldt's Gift'. Some were flattered, others were more ambivalent about Bellow borrowing from their lives. The novel is in fact a roman clef about Bellow's friendship with the poet Delmore Schwartz which is employed to examine the relationship of art and power in the utilitarian society of America. This theme is analyzed through the contrasting careers of two protagonists, both writers, Von Humboldt Fleisher - a version of Schwartz - and his protg Charlie Citrine - a version of Bellow himself. Fleisher intends to influence American society by his art, but nearing death, he has to recognize his failure. In contrast, Charlie Citrine is materially successful. Although Bellow shows his usual genius in portraiture, the plot is as untidy as the prose. Nevertheless, Bellow considered this his funniest book, and who am I to disagree. 0 von 0 Kunden fanden die folgende Rezension hilfreich. Bellow's Resolution Von Tim Poe (timpoe@alltel.net) I think this is Bellow's materwork. An author who has always searched for evidence of the human soul in contemporary society, the questions Bellow raised in each of the novels leading to this point (Herzog particularly), finally find a resolution in this book, his last novel before winning the Nobel Prize. This is a story of Charlie Citrine, a successful author who finds himself struggling for meaning while confronting the ghosts of memory, particularly in the relationship with his friend, mentor; and, at many points, antagonist, Von Humboldt Fletcher. Curiously, the novel is thrown into action and suspense through Citrine's dealings with a minor gangster, Cantible. The relationship, though, turns out to be one that brings Citrine back to the "here and now." Just as he is on the brink of being lost in transcendental wanderings, Citrine is snapped back to his responsibility by Cantible. And, from such an unlikely source, the novel begins its reach towards resolution: to be fully human, Citrine must be spiritual but remain part of the world. Meaning and true spirituality come through compassion, empathy, caring. Once Citrine and the reader discover this, the novel reaches a resolution that marked the end of an era in many of Bellow's themes. This novel is simply a must for anyone who has enjoyed any of Bellow's earlier works, as well as for anyone who, like Charlie Citrine, struggle to find a place for the soul, the human spirit, in a world that seems to have forgotten such a thing may exist. 0 von 0 Kunden fanden die folgende Rezension hilfreich. A pretentious collection of allusions to great writers. Von James C. Mancuso I finally forced myself to attend to Bellow! I listened to the tapes!!! I had a difficult time trying to determine whether Bellow was pulling our legs or whether he meant this work to be taken seriously. He mentions every person who wrote something that would fit into the "great books," but never clarifies any meaningful concept that would be found in any of those works. Bellow had to be kidding us when he describes his sexual fantasies. These are the fantasies of a 50+ character who is supposed to be a great intellectual?? No wonder they have come up with Viagra!!! And what is all that stuff about communicating with spirits??? Is that supposed to be serious, as well. No -- Bellow was trying to do for novels what Stravinsky and Picasso did for music and painting.... One big put on!!! It must be!!!

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with a love for literature, were the best of friends. At the time of his death, however, Humboldt is a failure, and Charlie's life has reached a low point: his career is at a standstill, and he's enmeshed in an acrimonious divorce, infatuated with a highly unsuitable young woman and involved with a neurotic mafioso. And then Humboldt acts from beyond the grave, bestowing upon Charlie an unexpected legacy that may just help him turn his life around.

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Synopsis Charlie Citrine, suffering from steadily worsening troubles with women, career, and life in general, receives unexpected aid and comfort in the form of a belated bequest from his onetime friend and mentor, the poet Von Humboldt Fleisher.