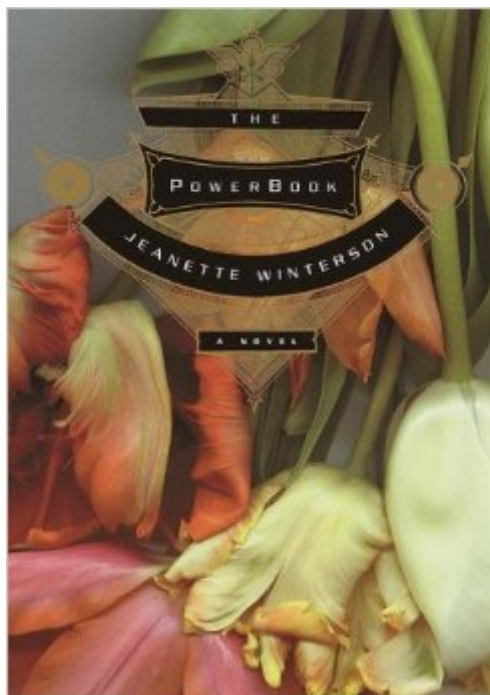


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The PowerBook



Synopsis

Winterson enfoldes her seventh novel within the world of computers, and transforms the signal development of our time into a wholly human medium. The story is simple: an e-mail writer called Ali will compose anything you like, on order, provided you're prepared to enter the story as yourself and risk leaving it as someone else. You can be the hero of your own life. You can have freedom just for one night. But there is a price, and Ali discovers that she, too, will have to pay it. The PowerBook reinvents itself as it travels from London to Paris, Capri, and Cyberspace, using fairy tales, contemporary myths, and popular culture to weave a story of failed but requited love.

Book Information

Hardcover: 304 pages

Publisher: Knopf; 1st American ed edition (October 24, 2000)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0375411119

ISBN-13: 978-0375411113

Product Dimensions: 7.8 x 5.4 x 1.1 inches

Shipping Weight: 14.4 ounces

Average Customer Review: 3.9 out of 5 stars Â Â See all reviews Â (32 customer reviews)

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Customer Reviews

This new book navigates the seas of fiction and love. As a piece of internet prose, it easily surpasses Matt Beaumont's entertainment 'E'. Jeanette Winterson explores the opportunities offered by the net, the wardrobe door that leads to many a magical land. The heroine of this novel flits here and there, choosing exotic locations as she pleases. However, much of this book is also based in the real as much in the imaginary. There's an ongoing plot in 'The Powerbook', a very modern love affair. It's the beauty of the prose that is really outstanding though. Winterson goes to Capri and uses the funicular railway as a metaphor in a manner that seems entirely natural, unforced, but prone to gravity. For me, there was a certain amount of nostalgia, as Winterson explores the settings of my own adolescent vacations, from the Isle of Capri near Sorrento, the romantic flirtation with Paris, the exhilarating adventure of seedy London. 'The Powerbook' lives up to its ambition of being an internet novel, since we can all attempt the Grand Tour via the Net

nowadays. It's always a delight to follow in an author's footsteps, see the world through their eyes. For instance, you can find the painting of his wife Saskia as Flora on the net by Rembrandt. At first sight, this picture seems too dark to be the image that Winterson describes, but it's a delight to look at the picture again through her prose. There's a section here where Winterson seems to return to the 'real life' of 'Oranges are not the Only Fruit', and it's very compelling to find a horror of nothing, the fear of having to invent, the burden of having to create. It does seem, though, that Winterson has been following current literary trends, borrowing and embellishing what she fancies. The Tulip trade is very much in fashion now, and Winterson has a faction devoted to George Mallory. Yet there are also much older, traditional tales. Lancelot and Guinevere, and Paolo and Francesca reading of their love, doomed to a much more bloody fate in the pages of Dante's *Inferno*. I had never come across the tale of Paolo and Francesca before, but it thrills me to find that it had been the subject of a variety of paintings, including one by the Pre-Raphaelite 'Dante' Rossetti. This isn't a very weighty book in terms of page count. You'll find that you'll be able to finish off 'The Powerbook' in one sitting. Some might find the book a little costly in hardcover format. There is very little drama. Instead, there are some quite modern truths and observations. Winterson discusses the fact that nobody really seems to be content now, and that they always want more. That nobody wants to settle. Just waiting for the next opportunity, the next love affair. A society where everyone wants love, but wants to be left alone. So, this book is perfect for of a generation of short attention spans. Yet, if used in the right way, 'The Powerbook' can stimulate you a great deal; make you highly active as you seek out its subtle meanings, to compose your own story as you weave a path through the web, following the footsteps of Ali and Sebastian Melmoth. Maybe the Reformation and the Tulip trade brought the immortal Arabian Nights to us? Winterson also covers the theoretical debate of author/reader - which of these two really creates the fiction? Winterson comes down on the right side, and reveals fiction in its true light, as a dialogue between author and reader (literally). She conveys how some fictions will never die; will be forever revived by future artists. This poetic novel deserves to be kept on the bookshelf, and referred to whenever your heart desires.

Jeanette Winterson's *The Powerbook* manages to accomplish in only 289 pages what other books cannot accomplish in 1000...suggesting that all time is one. Winterson has made it perfectly clear elsewhere ("*Art Objects: Essays on Ecstasy and Effrontery*") that "all art belongs to a single period". Winterson interweaves myth, fact, history, drama, comedy, charm, wit, all in a mesmerizing voice that carries itself in a blend of rhythm, logic, revelation, beauty. What is particularly fascinating about this novel is that there is no plot, but a series of themes that run through the fragmented novel. It is

as though she has grabbed a whole of beauty, smashed it, and reassembled it. A few readings show that the otherwise unrelated characters do have some dependancy on each other, to continue the story where their mentioning ends, to reveal nuances that their actions would otherwise obscure. This book moves through several characters, through the eyes of women and men, and we find out what it is like to feel and act and love like a man and as a woman. Francesca loves Paolo and we fall in love with him too (the haunting line "Paolo il bello" resonates) but through the story of Guinevere and Lancelot it is through Lancelot's eyes that we are, and the object of our affection is Guinevere. This is a fully realised work, and if we compare *Oranges* and this we see vast differences...it makes me wonder what novels Jeanette Winterson will be composing for the next 30 to 40 years of her life. I, for one, will read them all upon moment of publication.

If you're someone who loves the power of words, who loves lush, poetic prose and the images it can conjure, the magic it can work, then you will probably love Jeanette Winterson's beautiful novel, "The Powerbook." "The Powerbook" explores Winterson's recurring themes of time, love and gender identification (or the lack of it) through the story of Ali/Alix, a woman living in cyberworld and reinventing herself at another's command. But reinventing yourself doesn't come without a price as Ali/Alix soon finds out. Will she pay it? And if she does, will it be worth the price? For me, "The Powerbook" is Jeanette Winterson at her very best. Everything that was so wonderful in her previous novels comes together in this one. She tells stories, she writes the most lyrically divine prose, she uses linear time and circular time, she anchors herself in reality while letting herself soar on flights of fancy. "The Powerbook" is art for the sake of art. Although some would argue that "art for the sake of art," especially in the literary realm, is nothing but conceit, Winterson herself, has stated differently and I agree with her. Art, she said, is our opportunity to get things right. To tell the truth. To find the ultimate reality. And she's right. Art doesn't deceive us, except on very rare occasions, and when those rare occasions do occur, we're angry with the artist. I know that many people will read this book and wail, "But that's not real life!" Those who do should stop and reread the book once again. And even again and again if need be. It's life that tells us lies, either deliberately or by omission, life that deceives, life that denies us the rich world of fantasy and imagination and creative invention...the world that Winterson seeks and finds in her own strikingly original work. In "The Powerbook," Winterson allows her narrator to become a part of his/her own stories, to become a character in them, to reinvent himself/herself to suit the needs of the receiver. While this book is not conventionally plotted, there are stories in "The Powerbook," and they are wonderful stories indeed. One of the best is a meandering, poetic discourse on the meaning of life

and love and death. "I was happy with the lightness of being in a foreign city," Winterson writes, evoking Milan Kundera's wonderful "The Unbearable Lightness of Being," "and the relief from identity that it brings." And later, "There was such lightness in me that I had to be tied to the pommel of the saddle..." "The Powerbook" is set in London and Paris and on the beautiful island of Capri as well as in the world of cyberspace, employing both the world of reality and the world of fantasy in the very best mix possible. The lines between reality and fantasy begin to blur in this book, but they blur in real life as well. Who can say exactly how much of an experience is "real" and exactly how much exists in the imagination? And, as she does in every book, Winterson mesmerizes us with her images of time, or the lack of time. She explores linear time, circular time, the absence of time, the impermeability of time, the transmutation of time, time without end and on and on and on. It's fascinating, but only if you want to make the effort. Winterson is so often accused of being possessed of literary conceit and disdain for her readers. I think this is grossly unfair criticism. Her books can be difficult and they do demand the reader's attention; one cannot flip through a Jeanette Winterson book, speed-reading on a beach under the summer sun. However, if Winterson demands attention and time and effort from her readers she also gives. I judge a book's worth, in part, by what I take with me after reading it, what becomes lasting, what changes me. With Winterson's books I am always a different person when I finish than when I began...I'm richer, smarter, more enlightened. To me, that's high praise for an author rather than criticism. In Winterson's wonderful book, "The Passion," she writes, "I'm telling you stories. Believe me." It is the wise reader who does believe Winterson and the rewarded one who listens to her stories...again and again and again. Jeanette Winterson really is a writer with something important to say.

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The PowerBook

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