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Gain



Par Richard Powers
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Par Richard Powers : Gain before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Gain:

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Description : Description du produitA New York Times Notable Book of the YearGain tells two parallel stories: one, of Laura Bodey, divorced mother of two and successful real-estate agent in the small town of Lacewood, Illinois, who one day discovers that she has ovarian cancer; and two, of Clare Soap Chemical, the company begun by three merchant brothers in 19th-century Boston, which by the turn of the century has grown into a large multiconglomerate with factories in Laura's hometown. As the history of Clare Soap changes through the history of America, so a modern-day Laura Bodey descends into a battle with her terminal illness. By the novel's conclusion, we have learned how the largest enterprises affect us on the most personal level.

Prsentation de l'diteurRichard Powers' novel is a fascinating and profound exploration of the interaction of

an individual human life and a corporate one. It tells two stories: the first that of an American company, which starts as a small family soap and candle-making firm in the early 1800s, and ends as a vast pharmaceuticals-to-pesticides combine in the 1990s. The second is that of a contemporary woman, living in the company town, who during the course of the novel is diagnosed and then finally dies of cancer, a cancer that is almost certainly caused by exposure to chemical wastes from the company's factories. Richly intellectually stimulating, deeply moving and beautifully written, *Gain* is very much a 'Great American Novel', an exploration of the history, uniqueness and soul of America, in the tradition of *Underworld*. But it is most reminiscent of Graham Swift's *Waterland*, another novel that combines history, both public and private, with contemporary lives, showing how individuals are both the victims and shapers of large-scale historical and economic forces.

Richard Powers made his debut in 1985 with *Three Farmers on Their Way to a Dance*, a brilliant and almost unbelievably brainy meditation on what he calls "our tortured century." Since then he has produced four more novels, showcasing his mastery of genetics, art history, computer science, theology, aesthetics, and a host of other pointy-headed fields. The author's range--and the meticulous music of his prose, which suggests a considerably less zany Thomas Pynchon--is mind-boggling. Yet his subject remains fairly constant: the acceleration, and consequent dehumanization, of contemporary life. In *Gain*, Powers puts our modernity through the wringer once again. This time, though, he points the finger at one villain in particular: rampant, American-style capitalism, as exemplified by a conglomerate called Clare International. His novel, it should be said, is no piece of agitprop, but an intricate lamination of two separate stories. On one hand, Powers describes the rise (and fall and rise) of the Clare empire, beginning in its mercantile infancy: "That family flocked to commerce like finches to morning. They clung to the watery edge of existence: ports, always ports. They thrived in tidal pools, half salt, half sweet." The author's Clare-eyed narrative amounts to a pocket history of corporate America, and a marvelously entertaining one. Lest we get too enamored of this success story, though, Powers introduces a second, countervailing tale, in which a 42-year-old resident of Lacewood, Illinois, is stricken with ovarian cancer. Lacewood happens to be the headquarters of Clare's North American Agricultural Products Division, and lo and behold, it seems that chemical wastes from the plant may be the source of Laura Bodey's illness. The analogy between corporate and cancerous proliferation is pointed--too pointed, perhaps. But no other recent novelist has written so knowingly, and with such splendid indignation, about capitalism and its discontents.

From Publishers Weekly A novelist who has always taken inspiration from scientific and historical research, most recently in the AI-centered *Galatea 2.2*, Powers now follows the lead of environmentally concerned writers Thomas Pynchon, Don DeLillo, Jonathan Franzen and Rick Moody by returning to the great (newly literalized) myth behind Hawthorne's *House of the Seven Gables*: that the tainted American soil will take revenge on us for the sins of our exploitative fathers. In Powers's ambitious but mechanical novel, the victim is Laura Bodey, a real estate agent and single mother whose Midwestern town of Lacewood is polluted with mysterious carcinogens produced by its biggest employer, the Clare Soap and Chemical corporation. Laura's battle with ovarian cancer takes up half the book, but the novel really belongs to Clare itself. Interspersing Laura's story with the company's history from 1820s Boston to the present, Powers touches lightly on myriad aspects of American life over the last 170 years: the millennialist religious revival of William Miller, the Civil War, the changing fashions of advertising (perhaps the novel's most entertaining subplot), the history of labor and management. Although they never mesh with Laura's present-day misadventures ("tragedy" is much too strong for such an academic book), the Clare chronicles play to Powers's strengths (literary pastiche, historical and scientific summary, witty description, a knack for idyll) and cover his weaknesses (clunky dialogue, flat characters, portentous commonplaces). The result is impressive and imaginative, albeit a little puzzling. Powers has given us the historical novel as survey course? a curiosity that we never knew we needed but that we can't keep from admiring. Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc.