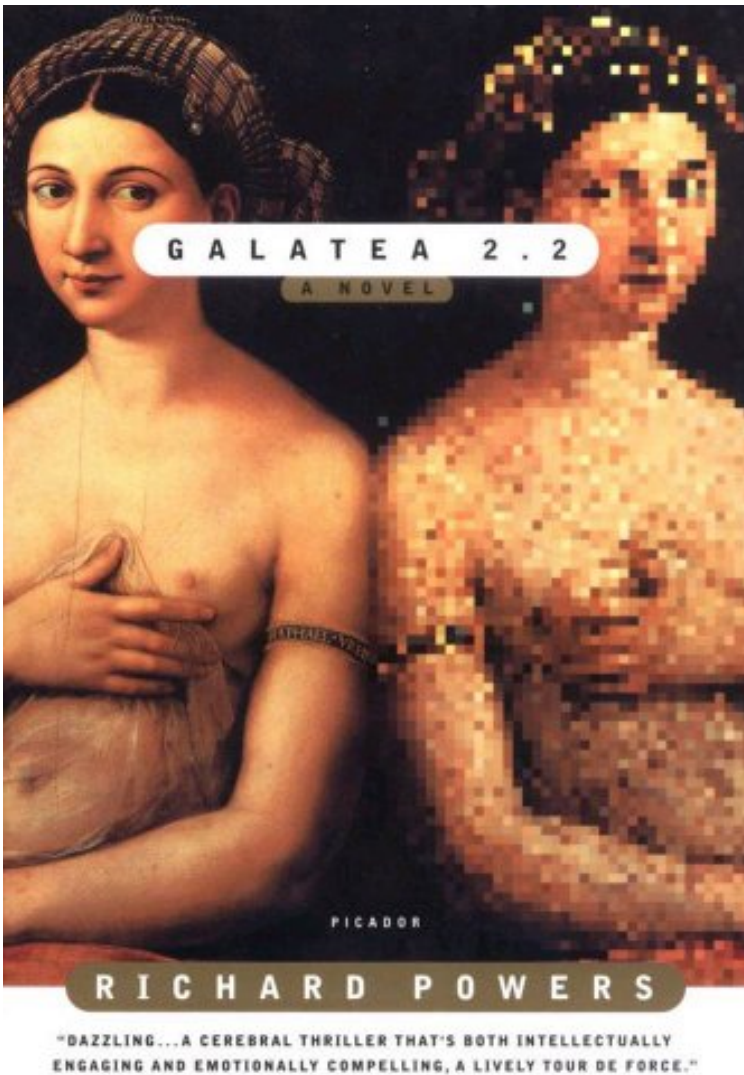


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# Galatea 2.2: A Novel



*Par Richard Powers*  
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**Description :** Description du produitAfter several years abroad, novelist Richard Powers -- the fictional protagonist of the story -- returns to America and accepts the position of Humanist-in-Residence at the enormous and prestigious Center for the Study of Advanced Sciences. There, he meets Philip Lentz, an outspoken neurologist intent on creating a model of the human brain with computer-based neural networks, and together they embark on an outlandishly ambitious project -- to teach the neural net English literature so that it can pass a difficult master's exam. As their experiment progresses, their brain-child absorbs more and more information, gradually becoming increasingly worldly. Soon, it demands to know its name, sex, race and reason for existing. Meanwhile, this literary crash course sparks in Powers a parallel awakening, and he begins a reconsideration of his chosen profession, his decade-long, failed relationship with a former pupil and his obsession with the master's candidate against whom his cybernetic pupil is slated to compete.

Prsentation de l'diteurAfter four novels and several years living abroad, the fictional protagonist of Galatea 2.2Richard Powersreturns to the United States as Humanist-in-Residence at the enormous Center for the Study of Advanced Sciences. There he runs afoul of Philip Lentz, an outspoken cognitive neurologist intent upon modeling the human brain by means of computer-based neural networks. Lentz involves Powers in an outlandish and irresistible project: to train a neural net on a canonical list of Great Books. Through repeated tutorials, the device grows gradually more worldly, until it demands to know its own name, sex, race, and reason for existing..comCognitive neurologist and well-known writer team up to produce a machine that can pass a comprehensive exam in English literature, with predictably unpredictable results. Like *The Gold Bug Variations*, this is another of Powers' wild, unforgettable novels encompassing science, philosophy, and the frailty of mankind.From Publishers WeeklyPowers, in his mid-30s and with four well-received books under his belt (*Three Farmers on Their Way to a Dance*; *The Gold Bug Variations*; etc.), is among our most prodigious young novelists, and without a doubt our most cerebral. He seems bent on proving the novel to be a form capable of housing all manner of human thought and expression: art, music, genetic theory, linguistics and philosophy. In *Galatea 2.2*, Powers, known as an extremely private person, is writing about himself?Richard Powers, the cerebral author of four novels?in a most intimate fashion, detailing his loves, passions and failings. His objective, however, is nothing so mundane as self-portraiture. Typically, he has a bigger idea: in exploring the nature of consciousness, he is trying to build a conscious novel in much the same way that the novel's fictional Powers is trying to spark consciousness in a university computer. The result is a kind of double simulation of intelligence that is breathtakingly elegant. Powers the character, returns to a Midwestern university with a huge computer science department, after several years in Holland, where he has left behind the love of his life, who saw him through the first four books. As a visiting writer, his job is to bombard a computer network, which he comes to call Helen, with literature, music and conversation so that it will recognize beauty in some neuronal simulation, and therefore become conscious of it. Meanwhile, Powers reveals his life, including his career as a novelist (down to the mentioning of a rare picture of him in a PW interview four years ago). It's as if both Helen and the novel itself can be programmed into self-consciousness. In the course of tutoring Helen to be able to successfully interpret a piece of text in a manner indistinguishable from a human, Powers and Helen form an enchanting though eerie bond: she has "read" all his books; he knows her circuitry. Still, there remain mysteries that can't be accounted for by electron paths, in Helen's case, or by a theory of the self, in Powers's case. In the end, Powers is left with the conviction he started with: that intelligence is irreducible; it cannot be known. Although parts of the book seem hastily done or weakly felt (the university folk are rather two-dimensional, and Powers's crush on a rail-thin, obnoxious grad student is simply unaccountable), these are minor flaws in an otherwise ingenious performance. Copyright 1995 Reed Business Information, Inc.