



The Passion

Jeanette Winterson

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Jeanette Winterson's novels have established her as one of the most important young writers in world literature. *The Passion* is perhaps her most highly acclaimed work, a modern classic that confirms her special claim on the novel. Set during the tumultuous years of the Napoleonic Wars, *The Passion* intertwines the destinies of two remarkable people: Henri, a simple French soldier, who follows Napoleon from glory to Russian ruin; and Villanelle, the red-haired, web-footed daughter of a Venetian boatman, whose husband has gambled away her heart. In Venice's compound of carnival, chance, and darkness, the pair meet their singular destiny.

In her unique and mesmerizing voice, Winterson blends reality with fantasy, dream, and imagination to weave a hypnotic tale with stunning effects.

The Passion Details

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Author : Jeanette Winterson

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From Reader Review The Passion for online ebook

Robin says

Somewhere between fear and sex passion is.

This short novel packs in so much beauty in the intersecting stories of French soldier Henri and daughter of a Venetian boatman, Villanelle. Winterson is a sage, a poet, with each scene, each paragraph containing gorgeous words about love, and the gamble of life and choices made.

Set in the times of the Napoleonic wars, Henri was selected by Bonaparte himself to prepare and serve his nightly chicken. He did this with devotion, and saw horrific death, suffering, and disappointment which was rampant among the French devotees to Napoleon's cause. Villanelle is a web footed, free spirit. How I loved being immersed in her labyrinthine Venice. When the two stories intersect, oh my heart! Such beauty, such pain, such passion.

4.5 stars

Sequester my heart. Wherever love is, I want to be, I will follow it as surely as the land-locked salmon finds the sea.

Passion will not be commanded. It is no genie to grant us three wishes when we let it loose. It commands us and very rarely in the way we would choose.

Caitlin says

After reading all the glowing reviews and then tackling the book for myself, I felt kind of like the child that wonders why the emperor has no clothes on. Everyone else can see the elaborate costume, why can't I?

Usually I can understand the love of a critically acclaimed book even if it's not my cup of tea but the writing in The Passion is something I just can't get past. This is an entire book of life changing ponders like "Is every snowflake different? No one knows," and repetitions of other brilliant adages in the attempt to make them seem more meaningful the third time around(spoiler alert: it didn't work). This book felt like a pretentious eight-year-old could have written it. And pretentious eight-year-olds are a nightmare.

But of course, this is just how it felt to me. "To me" the book fell flat, "to me" the writing felt self-conscious and pretentious. If you enjoyed the book, if it changed your life, I'm glad. Honestly, with so many people finding merit in this book I'm inclined to admit that I must be the one who is wrong.

The emperor has gorgeous clothes on. I just can't see them.

Hanneke says

A magical book. The story of the French country boy Henri who was personally picked by Napoleon

Bonaparte to be his special chicken cook and Villanelle, the adventurous red-haired daughter of a Venetian boatsman whose feet are webbed, but she cannot swim. They escape Napoleon's army at the siege of Moscow and make their way to Venice where they meet their separate fates. It is wonderful to see Venice through the eyes of Henri, who gets lost for days on end and is almost convinced that the churches and mansions of Venice can change positions overnight. Venice does give that feeling! Jeanette Winterson pictures Venice as a city where one is constantly lost and so are the hearts and minds of her protagonists. I enjoyed this lovely book and recommend it wholeheartedly.

Paul Bryant says

Jeanette Winterson pops up from time to time on BBC political debate programmes and she is like a laser beam of sensibleness, from a decidedly rad-lesbian perspective she cuts through the waffle and she's a joy to hear, Germaine Greer's punkier young sister maybe. But in her books she goes off on one, to coin a British phrase :

to go off on one (Brit; colloq.)

to suddenly become very angry and start shouting or behaving violently, as in

He went off on one because he thought I was threatening his dog

JW doesn't go off on one *violently*, but *wildly and artistically*. She pins you against the wall and rants in this really wonderful poetic prose style. Leaving aside the autobiographical stuff (which is great) I've read two of her actual novels, this one and *Sexing the Cherry*, and each time I was like you sometimes get in a movie like *Fellini Satyricon* or *Last Year at Marienbad* - you whisper to the person you came with *hey, do you know what's goin on here? Who's she? Is he supposed to be the bad guy? Is that guy her father? Who are all those people ?* and if your friend says *I was just about to ask you, I have no clue what's goin on* then you can say *Let's leg it to the pub, this is auteurist codswallop* but us readers, we can't do that. If I say something to this effect to my cat Hatter, he just yawns back at me and mutters *pal, I've never read a book in my life. I don't know why you're wasting your time like that when you could be sleeping*.

Daniel says

There is little I can say about this book that does not border on gushing, but I'll try. *The Passion* is perhaps one of the most amazing stories I have ever read. It is not so much a novel as a journey through the mind and soul of Henri and Villanelle, through the real and ephemeral Venice, through history and imagination. While containing a solid narrative, it delves into the psyche and spirit of the writer and her characters. Read it once and you are trapped. Read it twice and you gladly relinquish your freedom.

The story follows Henri, cook and horse groomsman for Napoleon Bonaparte, as the conqueror's army moves across Europe and Henri discovers that life is so much more than working for the highly particular self-styled overlord. We also meet Villanelle, a wonderful Venetian who makes gender seem as fluid as the water in the canals of La Serenissima. Through the consequence of Fate these two meet at one point, and their lives, strange and wonderful already, are never to be the same. In the midst of it all, Love is explored as a force of creation and destruction, as that unique impetus that can make or break a person, and how it is all

one and the same.

This is the fourth time I have read it, and every single time it casts the same spell on me, sucking me into the world that the pages, only letting me go after a fierce struggle. What I love about *The Passion* is that, after four times around the block, it still captivates and surprises me. With each reading, it reveals a new layer you did not see the time before, and only hints at all the wonderful mysteries it still holds for you. It is exhilarating to think that there is so much still waiting for me there, whenever I come back. And come back to it I will...

This is a book that is not so much read as experienced; by the time the last page is turned, you are a different being. Revel in it.

May 16, 2013: Read it overnight, a fifth time, and still love it as much as ever.

Lisa says

"Gambling is not a vice, it is an expression of our humanness.
We gamble. Some do it at the gaming table, some do not.
You play, you win, you play, you lose. You play."

Jeanette Winterson is one of those authors I am constantly surprised at. "*The Passion*" is my favourite so far (update: before reading *Sexing the Cherry*, which is even more fascinating). There is something magical in her way of weaving the stories of her characters, and showing different angles of the central theme: passion. I do generally not like historical fiction, but in this case, the setting in Napoleonic Europe adds tremendously to the ideas she develops - in her own, very special language.

One main thought, repeated several times over the course of the story, haunts me ever since I read it for the first time: "Between fear and sex is passion". That strikes me as the sad truth of the human condition, a valid explanation for many women's choice to trust themselves to violent, unreliable men. Those men represent such stuff as dreams are made on, and nightmares as well.

To save themselves, the protagonists have to make the decision to renounce the passion that is too hurtful to endure. Beautiful fiction! Must-read!

Anna Banana says

4.5 stars

Wow! Talk about amazing writing! This book was deep, the writing was amazing and I loved how much it made me think. So, so good!

Diane Barnes says

I was not sure where this book was headed when I began, and I'm not sure where I landed at the end, but I do

know I enjoyed the journey. This is only my second Jeanette Winterson book, and the first one was Christmas themed short stories. I enjoyed it enough to look for more, and picked this one up at a used book sale.

In this novel, you simply ride along on a river of magical prose until, every page or two, you hit the rapids with an awesome sentence or idea that whirls you around and leaves you breathless. A fairy tale of sorts about Henri, a Frenchman who was Napoleon's personal food server, and Villanelle, the daughter of a boatman in Venice, a magical city. How they meet in the Russian winter that defeated Napoleon is a story of gambling, passion, love and hate, cruelty and greed.

Winterson is 2 for 2 with me now. I'm off to find more.

Lisa says

The Passion is an intense kaleidoscope of a novel- an intertwining narrative of a solidier and a Venetian woman during the Napoleonic Wars. This could be a thick historical novel but it is concentrated into a mere 160 pages. This is my first experience reading Jeannette Winterson and it won't be my last. Wintersons' writing is so vivid, it shimmers on the page.

Kelly says

To my surprise? I'm kind of disappointed in it. The New York Times review of it says that it "dares you to laugh and stares you down." Unfortunately, I'm just laughing. She's trying so hard to be profound with these statements, and 9 out of 10 times it doesn't quite work. The book is filled with cliches and trite conclusions that are just so hackneyed (actual example: death and darkness are like each other...wow! Have you noticed that??) Her attempt to be Marquez fails quite badly, unfortunately. I am okay with basic points, but I just need them to be expressed in a more nuanced way. I mean, Ulysses a canonical classic and its message is about love and family.

She did have a few really good lines. But she would immediately follow up those good lines with groan worthy ridiculousness for the next thirty pages. I really wanted to like this. Everyone said it was right up my alley. I was ready to love it. I doggedly tried to. And yet... meh. I was disappointed that I found it nothing more than below-average with a few glimmers of good.

Jamie says

I don't even know where to begin with this, so I'll likely keep it brief. Basically all I can say is that Jeanette Winterson is officially my next obsession, that I'm absolutely thrilled that my adviser recommended her to me, and that this is one of the most invigorating novels I've read in a long time. Winterson reminds me a bit of Angela Carter here-not that they write in the same way, but in that they use magic and intertextuality in similar ways, and that each have a very blunt aesthetic that hits the reader's gut with a great deal of force.

I had to restrain myself and make sure I wasn't highlighting every last word-for they're all powerful, and I often found myself reading passages aloud to anyone close enough to listen. Henri and Villanelle are close

enough to touch, the language is startling, the inquiries are brilliant, and the landscapes grab hold of you and don't let go. I'm not coherent writing of this, so the best I can say is that EVERYONE should read this. It's in-fucking-credible.

Samadrita says

2 stars for the phantasmagorical imagery and the story.

1 more star for the beautifully done ending and the immensely quotable lines on love and passion the writer seems to have clumsily crammed in to the narrative in the last few pages.

TheSkepticalReader says

The Passion follows two major protagonists, a Frenchman in love with Bonaparte and a Venetian with webbed feet and a stolen heart, as they wander through life seeking passion and love. The novel is exquisitely written and while chunks of it felt heavier than necessary, the language itself is too beautiful to ignore. It has an alluring sense of calm that draws the reader into the streets of Europe and even though it barely 200-pages, the historic setting felt truly authentic even when it's really not. Winterson maintained a balance between setting, story, and characters without any parts feeling clumpy.

I loved Henri's perspective lot more than Villanelle, mostly because Henri felt a lot more tangible than Villanelle—as I think it might have been intended. Both narratives, and characters, complemented each other really well and despite the odd nature of their relationship, they work well in their partnership.

Winterson's exploration of history, disillusionment, passion, love, sexuality, and gender are boldly commented upon throughout the book but she also gives the reader a lot to think about on their own. There are short sentences in between paragraphs that hit the key note of the discussion perfectly. Magic is also interspersed throughout the story and despite it's nature to awe and distract, it adds a lot to what the themes try to portray.

Even though for a few days I forgot I was reading this, when I finished it I was kind of blown away by it. I cannot wait to read another Winterson novel in the future.

PattyMacDotComma says

I loved this book. It's not long, and it's an easy read (you don't need to be a literary critic to enjoy it!), but the style and world are so marvellous, I wanted to linger. There is history and love, but it's not a historical romance.

In spite of some magical realism, it's not really a fantasy either. In those days, unusual or exceptional talents may have been attributed to magic, so the lines between what's supposed to be real and what the characters have imagined are pretty blurry.

It's the very early 1800s, when Napoleon is rising to power and sacrificing his troops to foreign armies and the Russian winter. Our hero, Henri, adores him and has caught the great man's eye, so he works in the

“kitchen” (tent), where he gets a bit of food and warmth, while anyone who’s managed to escape horrific slaughter on the battlefield starves and freezes to death instead.

Meanwhile, Villanelle, our heroine (the author takes us back and forth), the wild young daughter of a Venetian boatman, roams the casinos, the alleys, and along the canals of Venice, picking pockets, carousing, and attracting trouble. She has inherited the webbed feet characteristic only of boatmen’s sons, which may account for her habit of cross-dressing and her unique talent for navigating the shifting canals and hidden streets.

Of course, Henri and Villanelle eventually cross paths. Their stories are full of love and loathing, revenge and murder, and although there are no happy endings, there are some understandable, satisfying conclusions.

Winterson’s writing is exceptional. Here, you can see that even our mysterious heroine, in spite of her special senses, is not immune to the terrors of the night.

“I like the early dark. It’s not night. It’s still companionable. . . I don’t know why it is that one kind of dark can be so different from another. Real dark is thicker and quieter, it fills up the space between your jacket and your heart. It gets in your eyes. When I have to be out late at night, it’s not knives and kicks I’m afraid of, though there are plenty of those behind walls and hedges. I’m afraid of the Dark. You, who walk so cheerfully, whistling your way, stand still for five minutes. Stand still in the Dark in a field or down a track. It’s then you know you’re there on sufferance. The Dark only lets you take one step at a time. Step and the Dark closes round your back. In front, there is no space for you until you take it. Darkness is absolute. Walking in the Dark is like swimming underwater except you can’t come up for air.”

Maria Thomarey says

3,5 στην αρχη παθι?στηκα , αλλα οπως ολα τα π?θη , ξεφο?σκωσε ωραια ιδεα , ωρα?οι χαραχτ?ρες , , αλλα μιλ? ,μιλ? για το π?θος , αυτο ?παψε Μα υφ?σταται
Η ?κδοση ειχε λ?θη επιμ?λειας ...
readathon2017:14/26 ενα βιβλιο που διαδραματ?ζεται σε π?λεμο

Jenny (Reading Envy) says

Set in Venice. You know, not enough books are set in Venice.

Quotations:

“How is it that one day life is orderly and you are content, a little cynical perhaps but on the whole just so, and then without warning you find the solid floor is a trapdoor and you are now in another place whose geography is uncertain and whose customs are strange?” (pg. 68)

“Passion will not be commanded. It is no genie to grant us three wishes when we let it loose. It commands us and very rarely in the way we would choose.” (pg. 144)

“Whoever it is you fall in love with for the first time, not just love but be in love with, is the one who will

always make you angry, the one you can't be logical about. It may be that you are happy, but the one who took your heart wields final power." (pg. 145)

"Then, when I had regarded myself for the first time, I regarded the world and saw it to be more various and beautiful than I thought. Like most people I enjoyed the hot evenings and the smell of food and the birds that spike the sky, but I was not a mystic nor a man of God and I did not feel the ecstasy I had read about. I longed for feeling though I could not have told you that. Words like passion and ecstasy, we learn them but they stay flat on the page. Sometimes we try and turn them over, find out what's on the other side, and everyone has a story to tell of a woman or a brothel or an opium night or a war. We fear it. We fear passion and laugh at too much love and those who love too much. And still we long to feel." (pg. 155)

Jo (An Unexpected Bookish Geek) says

"Somewhere between fear and sex passion is. Passion is not so much an emotion as a destiny."

This is only my second Jeanette Winterson novel, and holy shit, she did not disappoint.

This is a short read, but as I was devouring this book, it felt quite a bit longer.

The Passion, follows two protagonists in their search for love and passion. That sounds pretty dull right?

Wrong!! Winterson's writing style is captivating and unique, and it's not alike to anything I've read before. She explores gender, sexuality, passion and with this she expertly combines magical realism, some slight humour and historical fiction.

This is such an unusual read. Some may even call it an oddity. Considering Winterson was not even thirty years old when she wrote this, I am hugely impressed. She shows such knowledge about history, love and life.

I strongly believe this is a book that contains layers. Each time I read this book, I will uncover a new layer that I had yet to uncover before.

Cecily says

Dans le Noir

"A blind pedlar... never spilt his stew or missed his mouth the way I did. 'I can see,' he said, 'but I don't use my eyes.'"

I recently ate unknown food, served in total darkness, by blind waiters.

It was an intense and disorienting experience. Boundaries break down: you touch the stranger who guides you to your seat, talk to invisible people sitting beside you (how un-English!), can't judge or be judged by looks or clothing, and are tempted to eat with your fingers, despite the cutlery you feel before you. Phones and even watches must be locked away before you enter, so you lose sense of time as well as place.

Deprived of vision, your other senses are more intense. But surprisingly, this makes it harder to recognise what you are eating, not easier. You taste a medley of familiar (and delicious) flavours, but their individual identities are oddly elusive. Names only spring to mind where shape or texture are unique (scallops, figs, and

pomegranate seeds).

Reading this early Winterson was similar. I'm not sure if it's a good book, and I'm not even sure I understood it, but it was a rich, kaleidoscopic, and confusing carnal feast that I enjoyed.

*"I like the early dark. It's not night. It's still companionable... Real dark is thicker and quieter, it fills up the space between your jacket and your heart... the **Dark** only lets you take one step at a time. Step and the Dark closes round your back. In front, there is no space for you until you take it. Darkness is absolute. Walking in the Dark is like swimming underwater except you can't come up for air... Lie still at night and Dark is soft to the touch."*

Masked kiss - image source: <http://www.holidaypirates.com/media/i...>

Not the Plot

This is set in the Napoleonic wars, and told in four parts: The Emperor (narrated by Henri, a kitchen hand and faithful server of Bonaparte), The Queen of Spades (narrated by Villanelle, a web-footed, Venetian boatman's daughter who cross dresses, works in a casino, and picks pockets), The Zero Winter (French troops trudging through Russia, narrated by Henri), and The Rock (set in Venice, and narrated by both).

But the reading experience is not really about a linear narrative with its sprinkling of magic and occasional forays into the philosophy of passion and love.

Just indulge your senses.

That's what Venice requires.

That's what passion demands.

Invented, Magical, Invisible City?

Venice is portrayed as invented, magical, invisible and more, and hence reminded me strongly of Calvino's Invisible Cities:

- In the introduction, Winterson explains, "My own **cities** were invented; cities of language, cities of connection, words as gang-ways and **bridges** to the cities of the interior where the coin was not money, where it was emotion."
- "Arriving at Venice by sea, as one must, is like seeing an invented **city** rise up and quiver in the air. It is a trick of the early light to make the buildings shimmer so that they seem never still."
- "There is a **city** surrounded by water with watery alleys that do for streets and roads and silted up back ways that only the rats can cross."
- "This is the **city** of **mazes**. You may set off from the same place to the same place every day and never go by the same route."
- "Although wherever you're going is always in front of you there is no such thing as straight ahead."
- "The **city** I come from is a changeable city. It is not always the same size. Streets appear and disappear

overnight, new waterways force themselves over dry land.”

- “I come from the **city** of **mazes**... but if you ask me a direction I will tell you straight ahead.”
- “‘I need a map.’
‘It won’t help. This is a living **city**. Things change.’”

Liturgy

This is a strange, mystical, and eponymously passionate book, with recurring lines that are almost liturgical. Sometimes the exact same word or phrase is repeated, but other times they weave a subtly different route every time, like the enchanted streets and canals of the city itself, especially these variations:

- “Somewhere **between fear and sex** passion is. **Passion** is not so much an emotion as a destiny.”
- “Somewhere between the swamp and the mountains. Somewhere **between fear and sex**. Somewhere between God and the Devil **passion** is and the way there is sudden and the way back is worse.”
- “Man cannot live without **passion**. Religion is somewhere **between fear and sex**.”
- “In between freezing and melting. In between love and despair. In **between fear and sex**, **passion** is.”

Passion is... elusive, but where IS it? Everywhere, nowhere, or in a parallel realm?

THE Passion

John 15:13 “*Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.*”

The title has the definite article (“**The** Passion”, not just any old passion), which makes one think of Jesus’ crucifixion. Winterson’s infamous Pentecostal upbringing (Oranges are Not the Only Fruit and Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?) means this is no accident, and yet the connection is more subtle than the title leads you to expect.

There are Biblical allusions (some think Bonaparte might be the Son of God, and like Samuel, “He’ll call you”) and references to “basking” in the glow of a church or religion you don’t believe in, but most of the passion is fiercely carnal.

Kaleidoscopic Cornucopia

With a browser and laptop, you’ll see key words in bold; with a phone app, I don’t think you will.

- “Surely a god can meet passion with **passion**?”
- “We’re a **lukewarm** people.”
- “They say that every **snowflake** is different. If that were true... how could we ever recover from the wonder of it?”
- “I would have preferred a burning Jesuit, perhaps then I might have found the **extasy** I needed to believe.”
- “Romance is not a contract between equal parties but an explosion of dreams and desires that can find no outlet in everyday life.”
- Recruits have to “gather up their **passion** for life and make sense of it in the face of death.”

- “The King and Queen had no care for us, except as revenue and scenery.”
- “Adults talk about being happy because largely they are not. Talking about it is the same as trying to catch the wind.”
- **Stories** and even diaries are not, need not, be true: “The way you see it now is no more real than the way you’ll see it then.” If stories make people happy, “Why not?”
- Non-believers can **bask** in the trappings of religion:
“longing for strong arms an certainty and quiet holiness around.”
- “In the **dark** you are in disguise and this is the **city** of **disguises**.”
- “We don’t build our **bridges** simply to avoid walking on water... A bridge is a meeting place. A neutral place.”
- “To **kiss** well one must kiss solely... The lips and the lips alone are the pleasure.”
- “There’s no **dark** like it. It’s soft to the touch and heavy in the hands. You can open your mouth and let it sink into you till it makes a close ball in your belly. You can juggle with it, dodge it, swim in it. You can open it like a door.”
- “**Bridges** join but they also separate.”
- ““Will you kill people, Henri?” ...
‘Not people... just the **enemy**.’
‘What is enemy?’
‘Someone who’s not on your side.’”
- **Kissing** only: “The greedy body that clamours for satisfaction is forced to content itself with a single sensation and, just as the **blind** hear more acutely and the deaf can feel the grass grow, so the mouth becomes the focus of love and all things pass through it and are re-defined. It is a sweet and precise torture.”
- “Up she went, closing the **dark** behind her.”
- “How is it that one day life is orderly and content... and then without warning you find the solid floor is a trapdoor and you are now in another place whose geography is uncertain and whose customs are strange? **Travellers** at least have a choice... We who were fluent find life is a foreign language.”
- “Is every **snowflake** different? No one knows.”
- “I longed for feeling though I could not have told you that. Words like **passion** and **extasy**, we learn them but they stay flat on the page. Sometimes we try to turn them over, find out what’s on the other side... We fear **passion** and laugh at too much love and those who love too much. And still we long to feel.”
- “We **gamble** with the hope of winning but it’s the thought of what we might lose that excites us.”
- “I like **passion**, I like to be among the desperate.”
- ““They’re all different... **snowflakes**. Think of that.’ I did think of that and I fell in love with her.”
- “A true **gambler**... prepared to risk the valuable, fabulous thing.”
- “Fingertips that had the feel of boils bursting... whose hands crept over her body like crabs.”
- “Why would people who love the grape and the sun die in the zero winter for one man? Why did I? Because I love him. He was my **passion** and when we go to war, we feel we are not a **lukewarm** people any more.”
- “Being with her was like pressing your eye to a particularly vivid kaleidoscope.”
- “Beware of old **enemies** in new **disguises**.”
- “I say I’m in **love** with her. What does this mean? It means I review my future and my past in the light of this feeling. It is as though I wrote in a foreign language that I am suddenly able to read. Wordlessly, she explains myself to me.”
- “Pleasure on the edge of danger is sweet. It’s the **gambler’s** sense of losing that makes winning an act of love.”
- “The **cities** of the interior are vast and do not lie on any map.”
- “The one who took your heart wields final power.”
- “When **passion** comes late in life for the first time, it is harder to give up” and only “devilish choices” are offered: give up the familiar to follow it, juggle, or “refuse the passion as one might sensibly refuse a leopard

in the house, however tame it might seem at first... So you refuse and then you discover that your house is haunted by the ghost of a leopard."

- "This is the **city of disguises**. What you are one day will not constrain you on the next."
 - "What am I interested in? **Passion**. Obsession... The dividing line is as thin and cruel as a Venetian knife."
 - What is freedom? "To love someone else is to forget about yourself... through the flesh we are set free. Our desire for another will lift us out of ourselves more cleanly than anything divine."
 - "I longed for feeling though I could not have told you that. Words like **passion** and extasy, we learn them but they stay flat on the page. Sometimes we try to turn them over, find out what's on the other side... We fear passion and laugh at too much love and those who love too much. And still we long to feel."
 - "You play, you win, you play, you lose. **You play**."
- As a wise man said, "Love is akin to risk".

Take a chance on passion.

Ana says

There's something exhilarating about reading your favourite author's earlier books: you don't look for flaws in the 'young' writer's work, you see the beginning and the possibilities, and you now know where everything is coming from: all those later books that you've fallen in love with from the very first pages. Jeanette Winterson is one of my most read and reread authors ~~if we're not counting that one YA Fantasy writer that I'm complete trash for~~.

The Passion is quite an emotional read and although I was not a fan of Henri's POV, I could understand his obsession with romantic love and its transforming powers. I think we see that in Winterson's other books, it was just weird to read it from a male perspective.

Villanelle, the gambler who loses her heart to the Queen of Spades, might be described as bisexual, although her fluidity and her cross-dressing subvert gender identities and boundaries not in the sense of hiding one's sex, but in the way of challenging the male/female, truth/disguise, inner/outer binaries. I can see where the narrative voice of *Written on the Body* came about. **It makes me want to reread it!**

I read Villanelle's character more as a comment on sexual identity, desire, and gender performance, while Henri's narrative was as a postmodern construct through and through. Taking on themes such as history and war, experience and passion, one you can dissect to no end if we throw metafiction into the game. Which I won't, however much tempted... I will say that I particularly liked the way he portrayed his mother and his comments on the war's dehumanizing of women ("Even the women without ambition wanted something more than to produce boys to be killed and girls to grow up to produce more boys"), particularly in the way the army treats the women brought in the camps. Winterson takes apart Henri's masculinity, portraying him as a sensitive character with a distaste for war's aggressions.

There are recurring themes and motives:

- ? the metamorphic, living **Venice**, the central topos of the book, the city of madmen and disguises, the city of mazes, ever so slippery, the city of beauty, sex, and decay, the city of Satan;
- ? the telling of **stories** about the human body and the human mind, about love and war and God ("Stories were all we had");
- ? the idea of the "**cities of the interior**" unmappable, mysterious;
- ? the relation between **past, present, and future**, unsettling the linear temporality;

? the **traveller's narrative**, both masculine and feminine;
? disputing the notion that women have no place in the patriarchy's map of the world or in the making of history. After all, "**the women, they're always the clever ones**".

There are so many great quotes to take from this book, the writing is beautiful, while the structure of the novel and the way everything is wrapped up is just brilliant. When I read a novel set in Venice, I usually roll my eyes to no end, but *The Passion* is a totally different story.

**** Buddy read with the lovely Swaye *****

"I was happy but happy is an adult word. You don't have to ask a child about happy, you see it. They are or they are not. Adults talk about being happy because largely they are not. Talking about it is the same as trying to catch the wind."

"Passion will not be commanded. It is no genie to grant us three wishes when we let it loose. It commands us and very rarely in the way we would choose."

"The future is foretold from the past and the future is only possible because of the past. Without past and future, the present is partial. All time is eternally present and so all time is ours. There is no sense in forgetting and every sense in dreaming. Thus the present is made rich. Thus the present is made whole."

Elyse says

"Lovers are not at their best when it matters. Mouths dry up, palms sweat, conversation flags, and all the time the heart is threatening to fly from the body once and for all. Lovers have been known to have heart attacks. Lovers drink too much from nervousness and cannot perform. They eat too little and faint during their fervently wished consummation. They do not stroke the favored cat and their face-paint comes loose. This is not all. Whatever you have set store by, your dress, your dinner, your poetry, will go wrong".

A small book to be experienced!

Historical setting: Venice...Napoleonic era

Luscious..eccentric storytelling with offbeat passionate themes: gender & identity...

physical deformation....mental illness....war... prostitution...gambling...always stories and always love!

Magical realism at its best....beautiful and powerful!

*A special thanks to Cecily.....who turned me on to this book!
