

Author Spotlight

NAOMI ALDERMAN



Naomi Alderman grew up in London and attended Oxford University and University of East Anglia. She has written four novels. In 2006 she won the Orange Award for New Writers; in 2007, she was named Sunday Times Young Writer of the Year and one of Waterstones' 25 Writers for the Future. She was mentored by Margaret Atwood as part of the Rolex Mentor and Protégé Arts Initiative, and in 2013 she was named one of Granta's Best of Young British Novelists. She is Professor of Creative Writing at Bath Spa University and a presenter for BBC Radio 4. She has also written several games, including co-creating the top-selling smartphone fitness game and audio adventure *Zombies, Run!*, which has been downloaded millions of times.

Winner of the 2017 Bailey's Women's Prize for Fiction and selected as one of Barack Obama's Best Books of 2017, *The Power* is a speculative feminist dystopia reminiscent of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. This is no accident—in 2012, author Naomi Alderman was personally selected as a protégée by Atwood and was Atwood's mentee for a year. The book that emerged out of this partnership concerns a world radically different from our own, transformed by a mysterious power that emerges from a new organ in adolescent girls all over the world. This power soon spreads to adult women and fundamentally changes society as women, not men, come to dominate.

The book follows four central characters as their world is affected by this massive shift in power. Roxy, a teenager from a family of criminals, witnesses the brutal murder of her mother just as her power is awakened. She follows her family's footsteps and becomes a high-level international trafficker in Glitter, a new, Power-enhancing drug. Second is Allie, a victim of sexual abuse at the hands of her foster father, who finds her own power as she murders her foster father in retribution. Guided by a voice inside her head, she becomes a powerful religious leader called Mother Eve who preaches a feminist reinterpretation of the Bible. Next is Tunde, the book's only major male character, who video blogs the global female takeover. Lastly, Margot is a mayor whose power is activated by her young daughter. She becomes a governor, then a senator, who develops military-style training camps for young girls who have activated their power.

As satisfying as it is for women to imagine this global feminist revolution, the book raises powerful questions about power's inherent capacity to corrupt. The women-dominated world created in *The Power* is just as violent as today's male-dominated one. Alderman does not believe that a world run by women would magically be better because of some quality exclusive to women. In an interview, she says, "If we lived in the world of the power, I don't think I would be magically excluded from the way the world operates...With or without the power, I behave the way the system teaches me to behave." Instead, Alderman said she wanted readers to ask themselves, "What would this be like in my life? How would this change things for me? How would it change things for my daughter? How would my work be different? How would my trip back home from the office late at night be different? How would my schooling have been different? How would that encounter I had this morning have been different?"

Alderman has sold the production rights of *The Power* to Sister Pictures, who produced *Broadchurch*, and is hoping for a multi-season TV show.

Prepared by Katie McNeirney

November 2018

Sources: 2018 New York Times interview "Naomi Alderman on the World That Yielded 'The Power'," naomialderman.com; thebookseller.com



Discussion Questions for *The Power*

1. The premise of *The Power* is that if a new world order were created—with women in charge—that women would use their power to oppress men. Do you agree with that premise? If the power of the skein were to exist in real life, do you think women would use the power to oppress others?
2. The book poses a question: why do people abuse power? Why is power inherently corruptible?
3. “‘*The Power*’ is our era’s ‘*Handmaid’s Tale*,’” one reviewer proclaims. Discuss the similarities and differences between the works.
4. In *Vogue* and *The New York Times*, reviewers call parts of the book “revenge porn.” Do you agree or disagree? Why?
5. Allie has a voice that has been speaking to and guiding her for many years. How do you make sense of this voice? What is its significance?
6. Discuss the naming of the power organ. Why do you think the author chose to use the word skein? According to Merriam-Webster, a skein is defined as “1: a length of thread or yarn, loosely coiled and knotted. 2 : a tangled or complicated arrangement, state, or situation.”
7. Barack Obama named *The Power* one of his favorite books of 2017 – why do you think it appealed to him?
8. What do you make of the palindromic Neil Adam Armon and his gushing letter to Naomi Alderman, saying, “I am so grateful you could spare the time,” and “Sorry, I’ll shut up now”? If you are a woman, does that tone have a familiar ring? Also, what’s the joke here about appropriation, given that Alderman’s name, not Neil’s, ends up on the novel?
9. Neil ponders: “Gender is a shell game. What is a man? Whatever a woman isn’t. What is a woman? Whatever a man is not. Tap on it and it’s hollow. Look under the shells: It’s not there.” What does Neil mean, and do you agree or disagree? How do you see gender? Is it “real” or a social construct?
10. How did you feel about the inclusion of artifacts, archaeological remains and drawings from pre-Cataclysm times?
11. What do you think the meaning is of leaving the chapters nameless once “Here it Comes” arrives?