



NAOMI ALDERMAN

The Power

How to run your
own book club,

a collaboration between
The Feminist Bookshop
and Brighton CCA

How to run your own book club

Part of COMMUNAL Online: Passages of Time

'The Power' by Naomi Alderman

Notes by Ruth, founder of The Feminist Bookshop

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Background

Naomi Alderman, born in 1974, is an English novelist and video games writer. She grew up in the Orthodox Jewish community in Hendon, London before moving to New York. Her first book *Disobedience* (2006) is a novel about a North London rabbi's bisexual daughter living in New York. Following the novel's success she won the 2006 Orange Award for New Writers, the 2007 Sunday Times Young Writer of the Year Award, and a feature as one of the Waterstones 25 Writers for the Future. According to Alderman, writing the novel led her to cease being a practising Jew.

In 2012, Alderman was selected as a protégée by Margaret Atwood as part of the Rolex Mentor and Protégé Arts Initiative. It was in the course of this mentorship that she wrote her fourth novel, *The Power* (2016), a dystopian work influenced by and dedicated to Atwood. In June 2017, *The Power* won the Baileys Women's Prize for Fiction. The book was also named by The New York Times as one of the 10 Best Books of 2017. In December 2017, former U.S. President Barack Obama named *The Power* as one of his favourite books of 2017.

General Impressions

- What did you think of *The Power*? Did you enjoy reading it?
- Which of the characters did you identify with or like most? Why do you think that was?
- Why do you think Alderman frames the novel as a piece written by a man, for the "Men's Writers Association"?
- Thinking back on the book, what struck you as some of the key themes running through the narrative?

Themes

Here are some of the themes that came up for us on our reading: patriarchy, gender-based violence, revenge, womanhood and religion. Feel free to explore whichever of these you are drawn to.

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Power and Patriarchy

“There is a part in each of us which holds fast to the old truth: either you are the hunter, or you are the prey” Tunde

- What do you think of Tunde’s statement? Do you agree or disagree? How come?
- The Power is focused on physical power, why do you think this is?
- How well do you think The Power represents a world run by women? If you think the world would look different, why is that?

Gender-Based Violence

“You don’t have to think that all men are horrible to know there are some men who abuse their strength. Why wouldn’t the same hold true for women?” Alderman speaking to the New York Times

- Do you agree with Alderman? Why / why not?

“The things are tangled together now in his mind; lust and power, desire and fear.” Tunde

- What did you think of Alderman’s portrayal of sexual violence, perpetrated by men and by women, in the novel? Did it challenge any of your views about gender-based violence?

Revenge

“Everything’s got it’s vengeance. A wound for a wound. A bruise for a bruise. A humiliation for a humiliation.” Roxy

- How did you feel witnessing the scenes of revenge in The Power?
- In interview Alderman has condoned revenge, especially for victims of sex trafficking. What do you think of her position? Do you agree?

Womanhood

“The younger women can wake it up in the older ones” Tunde

“Every day one grows a little...this is how a girl becomes a grown woman” Allie

- Why do you think the power is awakened in the younger generation first?

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- What did you think of Alderman's portrayal of womanhood in the novel? To what extent does the novel challenge gender norms?
- If you read *The Black Unicorn* in the previous book club, how do the women in *The Power* compare with the Coniagui women described by Lorde?

Power and Religion

"The people came to Samuel and said: Place a King over us, to guide us"

- What do you think the book says about the role of religion and religious power structures?
- Why do you think Alderman chose Christianity as the frame of reference for religion in the book?

Activity

Imagine you are asked to design a new world order – a feminist utopia. What would this new world look like? Who would lead and who would follow? Who would hold power and what kind of power would they hold?

Spend two minutes trying to visualise this world and jot down the images and ideas that come to mind. Share your ideas with others in your group. How do they compare? Would you want to live in the worlds the others envisage? Why/why not?

Conclusions

"Different this time, better this time. Dismantle the old house and begin again." (*The Power*, p328)

- Reflecting back on the three books by Woolf, Lorde and Alderman, what do you think each author's message would be about how to improve the world that we live in?
- Would you agree or disagree with them, and why?

Suggested Further Reading

- Also by Naomi Alderman: *Disobedience*; *The Lessons*; *The Liars' Gospels*.
- *Feminist Science Fiction: The Handmaid's Tale* – Margaret Atwood; *The Female Man* – Joanna Russ; *Vox* – Christina Dalcher; *Kindred* – Octavia E Butler; *Frankenstein* – Jeanette Winterson.

ENJOY!

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The Feminist Bookshop is an independent bookshop based in central Brighton, currently online and delivering. The shop opened in November 2019 following a successful crowdfunding campaign. The bookshop stocks a range of books written by and about women, hosts events celebrating female artists and provides space for dialogue, discussion and debate. Visit the online shop on their website thefeministbookshop.com and follow them @thefeministbookshop

COMMUNAL Online: Passages of Time is a three-part programme examining alternative understandings of our social narratives and the models of organisation which reflect them. The book club discussion notes follow the online programme structure: the first part considers the historical roots of our discourse, the second how these are manifested in the present and the third how we can effect change.

Get in touch with Brighton CCA via brightoncca.art or @brightoncca

Cover artwork by Florence Carr

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