

The Power Discussion Notes

Naomi Alderman's book poses two vital questions:

You will be discussing question #1 in your group at the beginning of class today.

1. What is power? What does the word itself mean and what does it mean in the context of Naomi Alderman's novel?
2. Why do people abuse power? What are some reasons why you think people in positions of power tend to let that power go to their head? Why are people so reluctant to relinquish power once they have it?

Themes:

- **Power & Violence:**
 - Group Definition of Power: Group 1 - influence, dominance, control, authority, money. Group 2 – the ability to direct, As a person has control and the power increases their morality decreases or is just not there. The power corrupts and ends up being a disregard to humanity. Group 3 - The capacity or ability to direct or influence the behavior of others or the course of events. Group 4 - the ability to act in strength, power is a symbol of a big load of strong energy, position in control, power gives strength and alters the personal ego to a high level to be able to attack anyone else who is powerless. ability to be in control. Group 5 – anything that gives one an advantage or authority over others.
 - **Power Definition: the ability to inflict pain on others, both physical and psychological, and to control others through pain.**
 - p. 3: "The shape of power is always the same; it is the shape of a tree. Root to tip, central trunk branching and re-branching, spreading wider in ever-thinner, searching fingers" (Narrator/Voice of Neil Adam Armon)
 - p. 23: "Already there are parents telling their boys not to go out alone, not to stray too far. "Once you've seen it happen," says a gray-faced woman on TV. "I saw a girl in the park doing that to a boy for no reason, he was bleeding from the eyes. The eyes. Once you've seen that happen, no mom would let her boys out of her sight." (Margot) 'it' and 'that' are vague terms...parallels rape or taboo actions. Why not call it rape? In our world rape = women being hurt. Gender has been turned on its head: women now causing the pain and are no longer the recipients of pain, which is why this woman lacks the language to express what is happening. In our world we have reduced terms like 'rape, sexual assault, abuse' to FEMALE terms. 'for no reason' = maybe payback for something that happened in the past; maybe as a message to fear women because they have power now; pain for the sake of pain = power.
 - p.33: "Saw you. Saw you in the graveyard with those boys. Filthy. Little. Whore." Each word punctuated with a punch, or a slap, or a kick. She

doesn't roll into a ball. She doesn't beg him to stop. She knows it only makes it go on longer. He pushes her knees apart. His hand is at his belt. He's going to show her what kind of a little whore she is. As if he hadn't shown her many times in the past." (Mr. Montgomery/Allie) FF is abusing Allie because he can = power. Allie is powerless – she's incapable of stopping the pain, which is why she doesn't resist. Tables turn and she becomes the power.

- p. 78: " Nothing that either of these men says is really of any great significance, because she could kill them in three moves before they stirred in their comfortably padded chairs. It doesn't matter that she shouldn't, that she never would. What matters is that she could, if she wanted. The power to hurt is a kind of wealth. She speaks quite suddenly, across Daniel, sharp like the knock at a door. "Don't waste my time with this, Daniel," she says." (Margot) Margot makes the connection between the ability to inflict pain on others and power. She realizes that she has the advantage over everyone else in the room. This quote is significant because it's the moment Margot realizes that she holds more authority than any of the men around her.
- p. 177: "You can turn money into anything. One, two, three, presto. Turn drugs into influence with Tatiana Moskalev, President of Bessapara. Turn your ability to bring pain and fear into a factory where the authorities will turn a blind eye to whatever you're cooking up there that sends purple-tinged steam into the skies at midnight." (Roxy). Power gives control/ability to do whatever one wants; this power is achieved through inflicting 'pain and fear'.

- Religion & Manipulation
- Revolution & Social Change
- Stories, History, & Perspective

Major Characters:

- **Roxy Monke**: mobster's daughter, watches her mother being murdered, her mobster father kills the two guys who murders mom. Incident really affects Roxy - because she has immense power but still can't save mother.
- **Allie/Eve**: abused girl who turns into religious messiah & becomes face of the power movement.
- **Margot Cleary**: becomes Major of a random city (maybe London). Political face of this new movement.
- **Tunde Edo**: reporter who first records/shares videos of women discovering their lightning.
- **Tatiana Moskolev**: former sex slave turned slaver... Dictator

- **Jocelyn Cleary**: sparks her mom's power by touching her hand. Loses the power a little while later.

Symbols:

- Lightning: Electrical, comes from NATURE, symbolizes power (physical because women use it to hurt men), (psychological threat of pain = control), symbolizes control because no one can escape its effect/force, causes fire/burns.
 - Fire: heat, destroys everything it touches, consumes everything, cleanses everything. Symbol of strength because it can cause tremendous damage. Fire can be all-consuming and unstoppable.
 - **Symbolically women having the ability to shoot lightning represents 1) their pent up frustrations/anger/resentment and 2) represents the potential danger that women can cause due to these unresolved feelings.**
- Trees
- Training Facilities
- Mother Nature