



PROJECT MUSE®

"Day of the Girls": Reading Gender, Power, and Violence in
Naomi Alderman's *The Power*

Alyson Miller

College Literature, Volume 47, Number 2, Spring 2020, pp. 398-433 (Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/lit.2020.0016>



➔ For additional information about this article

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/752897>

"DAY OF THE GIRLS": READING GENDER, POWER, AND VIOLENCE IN NAOMI ALDERMAN'S *THE POWER*

ALYSON MILLER

INTRODUCTION

Naomi Alderman's *The Power* (2016) is a speculative fiction that imagines a dystopia in which women, enabled by the ability to generate electrical power, rule a matriarchal world order. According to Justine Jordan, the narrative is a "thought experiment" which seeks to determine how the "individual exercise of power might contribute to power relations as a whole" (2016); or, as Alderman notes, how "when the people change, the palace cannot hold" (2016, 4). Critics emphasize the problematic inversions of the fiction, noting that whilst a "galvanising new female superpower" (Armistead 2016) might offer a reprieve from reality, it is a speculation that is neither optimistic nor feminist (Steele 2016, 17). The complications of Alderman's narrative, however, are more nuanced than simple reversals of power, as its portrayals of extreme violence—both literal and symbolic—function as a strategy of resistance against cultural misogyny. It does so by literalizing those mythic archetypes associated with femininity, specifically the notion of the monstrous-feminine and its association with abject and highly sexualized imagery. By dissecting how violence is figured as central to social systems that

rely on gender binaries, this paper makes two arguments: firstly, that the reversal of power in Alderman's novel creates an imagined scenario in which the full horror of current gender relations is revealed; and secondly, by reframing "female monstrosity as a source of physical power," *The Power* offers an image of women who are able to combat such a "culture of gender violence" (Kelly 2016, 98). Yet it is also important to observe how such an imagining is strikingly incomplete: by failing to acknowledge how the machinations of power are imbricated with questions of race and sexuality, *The Power* ignores the "transdemographic terrain" (Carbado 2013, 4) of identity politics. As a result, white heteronormativity is constituted and naturalized as a universal experience of womanhood, a vision of revolution which reveals how a lack of an intersectional approach to the problems of inequality "only perpetuate the rot in a different pattern" (Hoyle 2017).

Whilst published before the furor surrounding the election of President Trump or the momentum of movements such as #MeToo and Time's Up, *The Power*, Victoria Hoyle observes, seems not only prescient but also impossible to read in isolation from recent incarnations of fourth-wave feminism. As Hoyle argues, "the toxic machismo and aura of threat that hangs over Western politics is writ large here" (2017). Alderman has also remarked that in writing the novel, she was "responding to the same thing that #MeToo is responding to. A lot of things have become visible now, things we need to address" (quoted in La Ferla 2018). Indeed, often described as "our era's [*The Handmaid's Tale*]" (Charles 2017), *The Power* is part of a history of feminist speculative fictions which critically reflect on contemporary gender and sexual politics. Mary Harges notes that "women writers since Shelley have used the fantastic to subvert the male symbolic order" (1998, 31), a mode drawn upon in Alderman's narrative to explore the violence of patriarchy. While critics such as Roxane Gay observe that it is "far more important to discuss power than to exhaustively regurgitate the harmful cultural effects of power structures where women are consistently marginalised" (2014, 118), Alderman insists that power and its effects exist in a complex dialectic. In line with Marleen Barr, who in *Alien to Femininity* (1987, xx) argues that speculative fiction is a genre through which the assaults of "structures which constrain women" might be made "obvious and perceptible," *The Power* highlights how the violence of cultural misogyny must first be perceived before the normative behaviors of heteropatriarchy might be challenged. As Anna

Gilarek notes, feminist speculative fiction “consciously utilizes the tension between the present social inadequacy and the utopian anticipation, so as to enlighten . . . readers regarding the necessity of implementing reforms” (2015, 36).

In doing so, Alderman draws upon the theorizations of Darko Suvin, who identifies science fiction as a mode “whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternate to the author’s empirical environment” (1972, 375). By encouraging new ways to conceive of human society, Suvin contends that the genre creates space for those who are oppressed to resist, a means to confront “a set normative system” (374). Such a confrontation occurs through what Suvin describes as “cognitive estrangement,” the presentation of a world which is “other” to contemporary empirical reality, but similar enough that it resembles a “possible future” (378). This framing—a means of denaturalizing the familiar—both underlines existing cultural and political fault-lines and suggests the potential for new ways of thinking and behaving. As noted, this paper thus contends that via the effects of cognitive estrangement, *The Power* exposes the violence of gender norms which have “become ‘normal’ and hence difficult to resist—or even to recognise” (Barr 1987, xix)—and by doing so, contests structures of power which inscribe cultural narratives of female monstrosity and male supremacy.

ON GENRE, GENDER, AND NARRATIVE POWER

In *Feminism Unmodified*, Catherine MacKinnon describes the interconnections between gender, power, and violence, arguing that gendered difference is “imposed by force” that hides behind a notion of gender as a “biological or social or mythic or semantic partition, engraved or inscribed or inculcated by god, nature, society.” Such a construction “helps keep the reality of male dominance in place” (1987, 3), made natural via iteration, or in line with Judith Butler, constituted through “a *stylized repetition of acts*” (1990, 139; emphasis original). As a function of patriarchy, the insistence on gendered difference not only promotes phallocentrism but also makes misogyny central to organizing social and political systems—as suggested, for example, by President Trump’s boastful accounts of “pussy grabbing,” or the abuses of privilege exercised by figures such as Harvey Weinstein, Kevin Spacey, and Larry Nassar. While the election of Trump is regarded by many as an historical aberration, the

Republican administration can also be understood as a disturbing cultural marker that makes clear the gendered distribution of power; as indeed can those revelations of sexual assault emerging from Hollywood and beyond. In such a framework, sexual violence is often positioned as intrinsic to the exercise of authority, which is almost always encoded as male and involves female victims. As MacKinnon surmises, gender is predicated on inequality, representing “a social status based on who is permitted to do what to whom” (1987, 8).

Within such a cultural context, *The Power* continues the work of speculative feminist fictions in scrutinizing stereotypical notions of gender, but more specifically, in seeking to unravel the symbiosis of gender, power, and violence. Indeed, before turning to a close reading of the novel itself, it is important to first situate *The Power* within a tradition of women’s speculative fiction more broadly. While traditionally male-dominated, the feminist intervention into speculative fiction (SF) and its sub-genres since the 1960s (Wolmark 1988), highlights an affinity between the politics of an ideology seeking to challenge existing cultural values and a medium defined by its construction of “impossible possibilities” (Barr 1987, xii). Indeed, Sarah Lefanu observes the imbrication of science fiction and feminism in terms of how the genre is “ideally placed for its interrogative functions. The ‘unities of self’, whether in terms of bourgeois individualism or biological reductionism, can be subverted” (1988, 95). In line with Rosemary Jackson’s claim that speculative fiction is primarily subversive, the genre offers a means through which the marginalized are able to denaturalize and thus dismantle hegemonic systems of power. By envisioning scenarios in which the “other” is positioned as “self” within reimagined worlds, SF enables a challenging of cultural norms that transforms the “perceived to perceiver, passive to active, object to subject” (Webb 1992, 186). Given the focus of feminism on contesting male superiority and arguing for a social order that is not defined by gendered mythologies, SF thus offers a radical space in which the illusions of patriarchal ideology might be revealed via “a process of estrangement that can examine social and sexual hierarchies” (186). By positing alternate realities in which women are no longer denied access to power, the “provocative feminist images of the future” (Lefanu 1988, 185) within narratives such as *The Power* seek to instigate real cultural change. Margrit Eichler contends:

... science fiction, more than any other form of fiction ... holds the potential ... to create non-sexist futures. Since no contemporary

society that we know about is *not* based on a sexual hierarchy, we cannot imagine non-sexist future simply by extrapolation. The only way we can take even more modest steps forward . . . is by imagining what is not. (Eichler 1981, 52)

According to Jenny Wolmark, the emergence of feminist speculative fictions is in many ways “at odds with the whole history and development of a SF as a genre which, by virtually excluding women, has imposed very real limitations on their actual and potential contributions” (1988, 48). The “advent of the so-called New Wave SF writers” since the 1960s highlights a significant shift in the genre’s capacity to address “different social and political concerns,” namely those concerned with issues of cultural and gender inequality. It also signals a popularizing of SF among more heterogeneous audiences, situating the mode at an “intersection between feminist and popular readings of narratives” (48–49, 51). Writers such as Marge Piercy, Joanna Russ, Ursula Le Guin, James Tiptree Jr., Sally Miller Gearhart, and Margaret Atwood explicitly sought to challenge the structures—and strictures—of human society, their narratives repeatedly calling into question the values of dominant patriarchal ideology. Russ’ *The Female Man* (1975), for example, posits four parallel worlds which question the cultural construction of women and femininity, including Whileaway, a utopian future in which no men exist, and a universe which literalizes the battle of the sexes as an actual war between men and women. Le Guin’s *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) envisions a planet, Winter, whose people, the Gethenians, are ambisexual, thus reinventing social orders reliant on gendered systems of power, while *The Dispossessed* (1974) imagines a world of total equality, in which men and women complete the same work, names are asexual, sexual identification is fluid, and there are no entrenched political or economic hierarchies or formal familial structures. Piercy’s now-classic *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976) offers a double-vision in which a bleak contemporary reality is juxtaposed against the possibilities of a future utopia in which patriarchy, racism, homophobia, class tension, and environmental destruction no longer exist. Instead, there is an abolition of hierarchies, ecological harmony, and sexual equality, an image of a world in which the activist goals of the social movements from the 1960s and 1970s have been achieved.

Such speculations, as Wolmark contends, test the limits of dominant ideologies by proposing fictional landscapes in which “the reconstruction of gender can take place” via imaginings that directly conflict with “existing social structures” (1988, 56). While many of

these alternate futures are often deeply problematic, as discussed below, they nonetheless denote significant acts of “cultural intervention and struggle” (56). *The Power* thus enters into a context of feminist SF that has long worked to unravel prevailing systems of power via a process of defamiliarization through which the horrors of contemporary gender relations might first be exposed, and then re-invented as something new (albeit often incompletely). The lineage of Alderman’s narrative is most frequently traced to Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1985)—indeed, *The Power* might be read as the revenge fantasy of Gilead’s women—yet it arguably extends back further to Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s 1915 *Herland*, a female utopia in which there has been “no man . . . for two thousand years” (1979, 59), and “the tradition of men as guardians and protectors had quite died out” (76). There are no wars, kings, priests, or aristocrats, but instead sisters who “grew together—not by competition, but by united action” (79). The image of a country in which male supremacy does not exist but women devote “their combined intelligence” to the problem of “how to make the best kind of people” (79) offers a vision of matriarchal community echoed in the later works of Russ, Tiptree, Gearhart, and Suzy Charnas. According to Barr, such communities have “haunted our literary imagination. . . . As a literary idea, a community of women feeds dreams of a world that is beyond normal” (5). These demonstrations of female self-sufficiency actively refute the presence of male power, and in doing so, often also (perhaps ironically) reject the possibility for equality between the sexes by imagining societies or worlds in which men are either physically absent or forcibly removed.

The gentleness of Gilman’s female-centric utopia is radicalized in Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*, a vision of gendered segregation in which the patriarchal control of women’s bodies assumes its most absolute form. In the totalitarian state of Gilead, formerly North America, a Christian theonomy determines that women are the property of their male guardians—husbands, fathers, heads of household—and are denied access to freedom or power, including restrictions against reading and the ownership of material goods. Those who are able to bear children endure the horror of politically sanctioned, ritualized rapes, whilst those who resist are brutally punished in a system of exhausting omnipresence: “The Republic of Gilead . . . knows no bounds. Gilead is within you” (Atwood 1985, 33). The female communities described by Atwood are diametrically opposed, comprising of those who enable the repressive rule

of Gilead and those who actively seek to undermine—and escape—its control. It is an inversion of Gilman's Herland, the utopic state established in peaceful liberation from patriarchy. Gilead, alternatively, perversely seeks to re-frame its abuses as a form of paternalistic protectionism from the terrors of the past: "You see what things used to be like? That was what they thought of women" (128). A narrative of autocratic control is articulated within a rhetoric of safeguarding women from male violence. Indeed, Fiona Tolan notes that feminist SF often responds to the vulnerability of women within patriarchy by "creating safe utopian spaces in which men [are] physically prevented from violence," a characteristic of the genre ironized by Atwood in *The Handmaid's Tale* to transform a utopic ideal into a dystopian nightmare (2005, 22).

The Power, then, does not emerge in a vacuum but continues to play upon and subvert the speculative fictions of other feminist writers attempting to conceive of societies that critique, or seek to operate beyond, patriarchal ideology. While its (violent) revelation of the power structures of patriarchy and its proposition of a female-ruled world connect Alderman's narrative most clearly with the works of Atwood and Gilman, it is part of a continuing tradition of feminist SF, a subgenre which insists on the capacity of the mode to imagine subversive versions of the contemporary world. In doing so, Alderman draws upon those mythic stereotypes which subjugate women in order to reveal the cultural roots of misogyny, but also to suggest the destructive potential of gendered narratives that position "woman-as-monster" (Kelly 2016, 88). As noted by Barbara Creed, the monstrous-feminine typically identifies "what it is about a woman that is shocking, terrifying, horrific, abject" (1993, 1), evoking something that ought to be contained, if not annihilated. In *The Power*, this is realized literally via the narrative's novum: a "skein" on the bodies of women and girls, delineated as a "strip of striated muscle" that is able to generate a devastating electrical current (Alderman 2016, 20). It is an ability marked by the threat posed by the alien female body. Yet as Casey Ryan Kelly notes in a reading of the film *Teeth* as a subversion of female monstrosity, "strategic appropriations of the monstrous-feminine" might be able to direct attention to "cultural discourses that subject women to masculine violence" (2016, 87). Indeed, by "redeploying masculinist narratives against the hegemonic grain" it is possible to "subvert patriarchal ideology" (87) and highlight those cultural constructs that deny women agency and voice. In these terms, *The Power* might be understood as a narrative

which appropriates and re-locates the image of “woman-as-monster” in order to subvert “the patriarchal mythologies girding contemporary political efforts to curtail women’s . . . freedoms” (88).

The politics of inversion might suggest that such a strategy risks merely replicating a structure in which power is always divided upon gendered lines, exchanging a castrated object for a castrating subject. Inverting paradigms, however, is arguably essentially pragmatic, a means through which to observe how inequality is manifested in order to debunk its seeming naturalness and provoke transformation. Angela Carter argues that such narrative strategies are focused on “trying to find out what certain configurations of imagery in our society, in our culture, really stand for, what they mean, underneath the kind of semi-religious coating that makes people not particularly want to interfere with them” (quoted in Sage 2001, 11). The danger of reiterating prescriptive systems in *The Power* is mitigated via textual codes which signal parody, and what Lucy Atkins describes as a “self-referential play on notions of fact and fiction, authorship, genre and gender” which destabilizes assumptions and forces readers to question the function of ostensibly “simple” power reversals (2016, 39). Alderman’s framing constructs the text as a piece of historical fiction written 5000 years in the future by Neil Adam Armon (an anagram of Naomi Alderman) via an exchange of letters between Neil and his scrutinizing editor, Naomi. Their discussion about the work, which bookends the narrative and echoes the paratextual “historical notes” in *The Handmaid’s Tale*, neatly flags its parodic context, emphasized through the patronization of Neil, the humor associated with the notion of a “world run by men” (Alderman 2016, x), and Naomi’s casual assertion of authority which mimics the infantilization and sexualization of women:

Wow! What a treat! I’ve been flicking through the pages and can’t wait to dive in. I see you’ve included some scenes with male soldiers, male police officers, and “boy crime gangs”, just as you said you would, you saucy boy! I don’t have to tell *you* how much I enjoy that sort of thing. (Alderman 2016, x)

Positioned as paratexts, the letters are intensely self-reflexive yet also a mimicry of historiographic metafiction that “lay claim to historical events and personages” (Hutcheon 1988, 5). Indeed, in its treatment of patriarchy as a historical form of social organization, *The Power* aligns with Linda Hutcheon’s conceptualization of historiographic metafiction as possessing “theoretical self-awareness of

history and fiction as human constructs” which enables a “rethinking and reworking of the forms and contents of the past” (5). Through the construction of a “counterfeit history” (Steele 2016, 17), Alderman highlights how inversions or reversals might work in terms of a continuum of re-visioning that is transformative even while it might, on a surface level, appear repetitive. Stephen Benson notes that “to an extent, narrative itself is always a remembering or a retelling, yet when generic norms become static the repetition is passive. It is only by drawing out other submerged, partially silent narrative voices that we can seek to hear the conflict and tension . . . to repeat actively rather than passively” (1996, 109). To repeat in the passive sense is not only self-defeating, but a dealing in “false universals, to dull the pain of particular circumstances” (Carter 1994, 5). To repeat in the active sense, however, offers an explosive means through which to resist passive consumption, and gives space to those who have traditionally been relegated to the margins. *The Power* can thus be understood as the product of a kind of postmodern parody-pastiche, a “value-problematising, de-naturalising form” (Hutcheon 1988, 94); a repetition with difference.

THE SHAPE OF POWER: REVISING NARRATIVES OF CONTROL

The Power, as noted, is thus quasi-metafictional, structured via an embedded narrative of a manuscript about an imagined history, which recounts an era during which women developed the power to emit electricity from their hands and reassembled world order into a dominant matriarchy by violent revolution. The document chronicles the experiences of Allie/Mother Eve, Roxy, Margot, and Tunde, all of whom struggle to navigate the realities of a rapidly changing world. This “historical novel” written by Neil begins with a fragment from the Book of Eve concerned with the structure of power: “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. The shape of power is the outline of a living thing straining outward, sending its fine tendrils a little further, and a little further yet” (Alderman 2016, 3). The extract from Eve, a self-stylized prophet and later President of a newly matriarchal nation state, is ironically potent. It signifies a notion of power as stemming from the natural world and connects such cosmic insight with a tradition of religious testimony and historical discourse. Further, in its suggestion of the ecological structure of

human power—as something in line with the movement of oceans and lightning, for example—the statement is also a mimicry of scientific attempts to justify gendered differences by way of biology: “We are electrical. The power travels within us as it does in nature . . . nothing has happened here that has not been in accordance with the natural law” (3). The evocation of “natural law” functions to situate human behavior within a scheme that is not only predestined but also central to social organization, which depends upon a ruling class as it relies upon being fed by tributaries: “Orders travel from the centre to the tips” (3). An emphasis on interconnection fails to disguise the violently hierarchical vision being espoused, one which is contingent on the demonstration of physical and political strength, most particularly in terms of maintaining control through the implementation of change:

It follows that there are two ways for the nature and use of human power to change. One is that an order might issue from the palace, a command unto the people saying “It is thus.” But the other, the more certain, the more inevitable, is that those thousand thousand points of light should each send a new message. When the people change, the palace cannot hold. (Alderman 2016, 4)

The cycle of power described is ultimately one of dictatorship and revolution, which denies the potential for real transformation to occur. The placement of Mother Eve’s tract after the peritextual exchange between Neil and Naomi is thus crucial in highlighting the power politics at play—while a matriarchy might also resemble the corruptions of patriarchy, its function in the narrative is not to suggest a new way of being, but rather to underline an existing dynamic in which self and other perpetually collide. The possibility of matriarchal rule, then, is not the point—as Michael Schaub notes, “what a man reads as a horrifying dystopia, a woman reads as a fairly accurate state of the world as it is today” (2017). Indeed, *The Power* is littered with reminders of the close connections to contemporary realities, anchoring the speculative nature of the fiction within the trauma and violence suffered by women. Russ thus argues that feminist SF consists not “of what is on the page,” but in the relation between reality and “the reader’s knowledge of actuality” (1995, 21). Although such a dialectic or tension is “always shifting” (21), the insistence on grounding the text mitigates the dismissal of the narrative as a revenge fantasy, in which monstrous female bodies destroy recklessly. Alternatively, the gifting of a female-centric

superpower enables a form of liberation in which women are able to reject being voiceless, and to speak to those horrors committed within patriarchal regimes. In one harrowing account, for example, a woman describes how her entrapment as a sex slave was enabled by a culture of silence and complicity: “The police knew what was happening and did nothing. . . . The Mayor knew what was happening, the landlords knew what was happening, *postmen* knew what was happening” (Alderman 2016, 94).

As the role of Mother Eve suggests, part of the reversal process involves the reclamation of religious texts and ideologies. Eve is the pseudonym of Allie, who kills her father after years of sexual assault. Like the sex slaves trapped in a basement room, the violation of Allie is enabled by the collusion of a silent mother, who views the abuse as a means of controlling a disloyal husband and as righteous punishment for the “little whore” who was adopted “out of Christian charity”: “at least he’s not catting around the neighbourhood, and that girl earned what she’s getting” (Alderman 2016, 30–31). David Gilmore contends in *Misogyny* that such “antiwoman dogma” is at the root of “ecclesiastical misogyny” (2001, 85), which positions women’s bodies as the source of all evil: “Woman, the . . . evil root, and corrupt offshoot, who brings to birth every sort of outrage throughout the world . . . Woman subverts the world; woman the sweet evil, compound of honeycomb and poison” (86). In this context, the power to electrocute enables women to escape the sexual violence which patriarchal religious practices both protects and naturalizes. The notion of the ability to evoke change, both individual and collective, is described as cumulative, yet once the realization of strength is sparked, it escalates rapidly: “As he plunges, she knows that she could do it. That she has the strength, and perhaps she has had it for enough weeks or months, but only now she is certain. . . . It seems the simplest thing in the world” (Alderman 2016, 31). Fittingly, once escaping from the horrors of sexual violence, Allie finds refuge with nuns in a convent, a sisterhood that offers respite from male violence: “The nuns, for the most part, are kind, and the company of women is pleasing to Allie. She’s not found the company of men has much to recommend it” (42).

Yet their traditions are aligned with a culture of demonizing female sexuality. Gilmore argues that “virtually every faith, monotheistic, polytheistic, apostolic, or animist,” displays hostility towards women, most particularly in terms of ideas about the “abject” nature of “menstrual blood and female reproductive functions” (2001, 79).

Further, Gilmore notes how, in the majority of messianic religions, “it is always First Woman, never First Man, who, because of innate character flaws, capitulates to the devil’s blandishments,” a motif of women as “the primum mobile of evil” that can be found in “practically all . . . origin myths” (79). As the number of refugees in the convent grows, despite the imperative to “suffer the little children” (Alderman 2016, 46), fear of the girls’ power is translated into Biblical terms as demonic possession, anxiety about which outweighing rational attempts at scientific discourse. When one sister suggests the cause of the “mutation” might be “caused by pollution” (45), for example, she is instantly refuted: “It is the Devil. The Devil walks abroad and tests the innocent and the guilty, giving powers to the damned” (45). The monstrosity of the women is also sexualized as a form of trickery which threatens men, likened to the unseen menace of the vagina dentata: “Have you seen what they can do? They have powers that men are not meant to know” (45). In line with Julia Kristeva’s discussion of abjection and the sacred, the virginal nuns—models of how the abject might be purified (1982, 17)—must exclude the girls, whose taboo abilities, linked with their sexuality, jeopardizes the sanctity of the convent through the threat of otherness and sin (Alderman 2016, 17). The opportunity of salvation, however, is possible, requiring an adherence to the patriarchal norms prescribed via religious strictures: “You would have to become a nun to stay here. And you might decide you want other things from your life. A husband and children, a job” (43).

Allie, however, recognizes the potential evoked by a new generation of women possessed with—and by—power. Guided by a persistent and familial voice which speaks to her in those “hours of need” (Alderman 2016, 46), Allie decides that the emergence of the female-centric superpower signals that God is “telling the world that there is to be a new order . . . old centuries are done. Just as Jesus told the people of Israel that God’s desires had changed, the time of the Gospels is over and there must be a new doctrine” (46). As the behavior of the nuns reveal, religious frameworks frequently urge the containment of women in order to protect male authority, suggesting that female “otherness” will compromise the stability of the state and radically unsettle the “divinity” of patriarchal systems of thought. Thus, while the construction of Mother Eve is undoubtedly political, permitting Allie to realize her increasing megalomania, it is fundamentally based on enabling women as both individuals and as communities to reject relegation as “other.” The manifestation

of Eve, however, is not based on the passive serenity of the Virgin Mary, but the antithesis via a reimagining of the “phallic mother” (Creed 1993, 157). A “powerful and dangerous” figure, the representation of Allie as possessing “allegedly masculine character-traits”—such as strong, authoritative leadership and physical strength—is also emphasized by the phallic framing of her development of the Power (157). Inspired by the ability of electric eels to “remote control’ the muscles in their prey by interfering with the electric signals in the brain” (Alderman 2016, 49), the metamorphosis of Allie into Mother Eve is predicated on her ability to send out probes of electricity that penetrate and occupy the bodies of others. In this way, Eve shapes the power as phallus, a demonstration of strength that neatly parodies the imbrication of two key patriarchal institutions: the Church, in her role as a Pope-like spiritual leader, and the State, in her eventual ascension to presidency:

The more the authorities say she’s illegitimate, the more the old Church says she’s sent by the Devil, the more women are drawn to Mother Eve. If Allie had any doubt before this that she had been sent by God with a message for Her people, the things that have happened here have left her in no doubt. She is here to look after the women. God has appointed her to that role, and it is not for Allie to deny it. (Alderman 2016, 119)

The most important transformation that emerges from the new spiritual order, however, is the re-visioning of religious and spiritual texts in ways that position female voices as central. Indeed, in choosing Eve as pseudonym, Allie is attentive to the need to rewrite a misogynistic narrative of sin, in which a woman brings evil into the world: “Maybe she was right to do it. Maybe that’s what the world needed. A bit of shaking up. Something new” (Alderman 2016, 46). In tackling scripture, Eve makes clear how religious belief, regarded by adherents as absolute, highlights how faith is vulnerable to the instability of narrative creations. By recognizing the ways in which religious power is situated textually, Eve is able to challenge how history is constructed as a series of “narrative emplotments of past *events* that construct what we consider . . . *facts*” (Hutcheon 1988, 92; emphasis original). Significantly, Mother Eve achieves such a re-narrativizing not by rejecting the Gospels outright, or even the notion of God, but by redirecting attention toward those voices and experiences that have historically been silenced or denied:

Jews: look to Miriam, not Moses, for what you can learn from her. Muslims: look to Fatimah, not Muhammad. Buddhists: remember Tara, the mother of liberation. Christians: pray to Mary for your salvation. You have been taught that you are unclean, that you are not holy, that your body is impure and could never harbour the divine. You have been taught to despise everything you are and to long only to be a man. But you have been taught *lies*. God lies within you, God has returned to earth to teach you, in the form of this new power. (Alderman 2016, 114–15)

In the installation of a matriarchal order, the role of religion in demonizing women is increasingly unraveled, as the narrative systematically deconstructs the vilification of women's "unclean" bodies as the harbingers of sin. Indeed, while religious organizations are not overturned, the spiritual premises which position the male as dominant are rejected. Gilmore argues that the Manichean opposition between "man (spirit) and woman (flesh)" is regarded as "God's intention: unquestionable and immutable" (Alderman 2016, 85). The transcendental quality of masculinity thus "naturally" situates men at the center of power, as "divine right" decrees the sanctity of the male body, and the impurity of female physicality. In *The Power*, such logic is rejected: in "Bolivia . . . they've proclaimed their own female Pope" (171). In practice, religious power is simply reversed, and continues to manifest in corruption and deception—Mother Eve eventually uses her power to position herself as a world leader and wage a nuclear Armageddon. Yet such an inversion is crucial in its ability to displace the rhetoric that positions women as lesser, as objects of flesh marked by immorality. It also, by re-directing the focus from male-defined religious tracts to those that privilege the voices of women, addresses a gap in history, one in which women are peripheral, if not entirely absent.

Running parallel to the reversal of religious power from male to female dominance is a political battle for state leadership, concentrated primarily in Moldova, "the world capital of human sex-trafficking," and the United States (Alderman 2016, 93). It is in Moldova that the transfer of power is realized most rapidly and most violently, as it transforms from a state of absolute male rule to the declaration of a feminist utopia. In this context, the ability of women to protect themselves from sexual abuse is regarded as a miracle from God, as they transfer the power from girl to woman in a united force against systemic oppression: "They pass the thing from hand to hand

in the dark and marvel at it. . . . They believe God has sent a miracle to save them, as He rescued the Children of Israel from slavery. . . . In the dark, they were sent light” (93). After an uprising, a new nation state is proclaimed by Tatiana Moskalev, the wife of a former dictator, who utilizes the shift in power to establish military control and pose a significant threat to international peace relations:

On the thirteenth day of the fifth month of the third year after the Day of the Girls, Tatiana Moskalev brings her wealth and her connections, a little less than half her army, and many of her weapons to a castle in the hills on the borders of Moldova. And there she declares a new kingdom, uniting the coastal lands between the old forests and the great inlets and thus, in effect, declaring war on four separate countries. . . . She calls the new country Bessapara, after the ancient people who lived there and interpreted the sacred sayings of the priestesses on the mountaintops. (Alderman 2016, 98)

The imbrication of church and state is again leveraged as a means through which to gain political traction and to justify criminal acts of war. While these behaviors illustrate the dystopic nature of the matriarchal system proposed by Alderman, they also make clear how the transference of power operates within a closed system of abuses. Yet the rhetoric of Bessapara, which focuses on rebuilding the nation state in exclusively female terms, highlights Michel Foucault’s conceptualization of the productive nature of power. In this framework, while Tatiana’s wielding of control is ultimately a “negative, coercive . . . repressive thing,” it is also a “necessary, productive and positive force” (Gaventa 2003, 2) that compels widespread institutional change and radicalizes global politics. Indeed, Foucault’s insistence on ceasing to “describe the effects of power in negative terms” acknowledges that power is also constructive: “In fact power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production” (1977, 194). While the realities produced by Tatiana’s leadership often manifest as sadistic abuse, such violence is a crucial component of Alderman’s critical examination of the impulse to dominate and the operation of power. As Abigail Nussbaum observes, it is thus in part “about the social conditioning that teaches us to look at people who do these things and see, not bullies and warlords, but leaders and visionaries” (2017). Indeed, the often-liminal space between tyrant and freedom-fighter is one Tatiana regularly plays upon in the garnering of support, a political

maneuver that persistently frames the exercise—and abuse—of power as a moral cause:

Tatiana gives a speech about the heart-rending cruelty done by the regimes of the North, and the freedom she and her people are fighting for. They listen to stories of women who join together in small bands to seek Our Lady's vengeance on those who have escaped human justice. Tatiana is moved almost to tears. (Alderman 2016, 228)

The eventual failure of Tatiana to successfully establish a female utopia, however, is arguably an acknowledgement of the inability to merely invert systems of power in the expectation of difference. As Jessa Crispin argues in *Why I Am Not a Feminist: A Feminist Manifesto*, such a model of order merely underlines the ways in which women are conditioned to fight for access to the rewards of patriarchal power, rather than to conceive of ways of being that are outside or beyond what patriarchy has designated as normal. As Crispin notes, “now that women are raised with access to power, we will not see a more egalitarian world, but the same world, just with more women in it” (2017, 57). Determinants for success are defined by male interests and values, whilst the rewards and pleasures of power mitigate the desire to construct something other: “women in positions of power are much less likely to attempt to dismantle this system of inequality. Power feels good. . . . It gives you things, as long as the boot is not on your neck” (58). Indeed, the construction of Bessapara functions as a form of cognitive estrangement, as its totalitarianism offers a frightening image of the nation state that is both recognizable and other in its exposure of the horror of current gender relations. Via its inability to envisage something entirely new, it reveals the need for the kind of radical change—what Crispin describes as a “cleansing fire” (xi)—that is not circumscribed or delineated by the “patriarchal imagination” (150).

In contrast to the brutality enacted in Moldova, the transference of power in the United States is figured as a nuanced system of game-playing. In what has been read as an eerily prophetic account of the election campaigns of Donald J. Trump and Hillary Clinton, Alderman questions how the demonstration of female strength might not result in intense vitriol and dismissal, but in the restructure of the American political establishment. Via Margot, a middle-aged politician, the narrative explores the kind of institutional crisis that occurs with the expression of an alternative force of power, which “even in supposedly egalitarian countries like the U.S.” provokes an

insistence on oppressive governmental and military control (Nussbaum 2017). The widespread manifestation of the electrical superpower results in systematic testing, for example, to determine who has such an ability, and to control their access to public spaces: “We’re going to get this test. Bring it in state-wide, all government employees. . . . No arguments. We need to know for sure. You can’t have someone employed in government buildings who can do that. It’s like walking around with a loaded gun” (Alderman 2016, 63). Interestingly, while powerful girls are (mistakenly) regarded as easily contained, it is anxiety about “grown women” that most suggests the potential for revolution, a recognition, perhaps, of how those with long-term experiences of engrained cultural inequality would push for the most radical change. Indeed, discussions about the historical existence of women who “spoke with lightning” (63) notes how such strength might have been purposively oppressed. As one male commentator observes, “if a power like this existed, maybe we bred it out deliberately, maybe we didn’t want it around” (63). The “we” in such a statement is emphatically male, and speaks to a long history of the physical repression of women’s bodies. Questions about the origins of the power are presented within male-dominated discourses represented by those in government, academia and news journalism, which reveal a search for truth, but more importantly, socio-political efforts to quell the possibility of what might be unironically termed “alternative facts”: “It’ll pass. We keep the girls separate from the boys. There’ll be an injection within a year or two to stop this thing happening and then we’ll all go back to normal” (64). The exclamations of online conspiracy theorists, however, best articulate the real fear behind official cries for organized action: “THEY’RE GOING TO TRY TO KILL US” (240; emphasis original).

The brutal political determination to control those manifesting the power—to “go back to normal”—is justified as a response to increasing acts of violence, as young girls and women come to realize their strength. That the female body is regarded as a “loaded gun” (Alderman 2016, 63), an inherently phallic descriptor, evokes an historical conceptualization of women as dangerous, provoking male fears of destruction as realized by figures such as the monstrous-feminine and the *femme castratrice*. In one instance, the Governor of Wisconsin experiences such heightened panic about the waves of revolution, including acts of rebellion initiated by Allie and those witnessed in Moldova, that he contends “they should shoot those girls. Just shoot them. In the head. *Bam*” (85). Margot’s strategy,

however, subversively mobilizes a government insistence on containment in order to construct a community of powerful women: “One: set up safe spaces for the girls to practice their power together. . . . Two: identify girls who have good control to help the younger ones learn to keep their power in check” (88). Essentially functioning as a “training camp” (88) for girls to learn how to most effectively utilize their new superpowers, Margot’s scheme is accused of using “*public money* to train . . . *terrorist* operatives to use their weapons,” and of supporting “*fucking jihadis*” (90; emphasis original). Yet in this way, Margot is able to undermine attempts to relegate women to the margins within a rhetoric of pastoral care, which ultimately mocks a desperate political push for abstinence. Instead, she produces a network of strong, ambitious, well-resourced, and powerful women that is motivated to provoke widespread change—indeed, she generates an army.

The emphasis on containment echoes the “war on women,” described by Kelly as “a 30-year-long systematic effort by American conservatives to impose severe restrictions on women’s reproductive freedoms and sexual autonomy” (2016, 92). The revelation of the electrical superpower serves to literalize the anxiety associated with the female body, while the resulting conflict, both literal and symbolic, described in the narrative “gives concrete political form to what is currently articulated as fearful about women in public culture” (92). As women continue to move into political spaces, Margot campaigns for state governorship, during which gendered arguments about the suitability of a female leader dominate public debate: “She’s divorced, after all, and with those two girls to raise, can a woman like that really find *time* for political office?” (Alderman 2016, 165; emphasis original). In line with the patriarchal valorization of motherhood as the ultimate expression of successful femininity, Margot’s ostensible failure to perform such a role is scrutinized by the opposing candidate. After a devastating comment which questions her fitness as a mother, her response is visceral: Margot sends a ripple of electricity into her opponent’s ribcage (167). The resort to physical violence is initially regarded as political suicide, and in line with cultural convention, Margot “apologises more than once” (168). Her use of power is further highlighted as evidence of women’s inability to draw upon “reasoned discourse and calm authority” when emotional, particularly in relation to the demands of high-pressure environments: “Some people . . . find it tough to keep their composure in challenging situations” (168). Yet unlike the reality of contemporary

Western politics, the public response to Margot illustrates a push to see fearless women hold power: “when they went into the voting booths in their hundreds, and thousands, and tens of thousands, they’d thought, You know what . . . she’s strong. She’d show them” (167). It is, perhaps, a utopic or fantasy re-imagining of a real-world reality that failed to produce such a result. But it serves to emphasize how the diminishment of women who seek power occurs entirely within misogynistic terms, within an essentialist cultural narrative that insists on the inherently irrational nature of women. The implications of winning power are, then, part of a process of a rewriting of social norms as well as the psychological and behavioral scripts that have been naturalized as appropriate for women. As Margot’s reception of success suggests, such transformations do not occur in an instant: “She thinks she needs to ask for forgiveness, still, for the thing that brought her into office. She’s wrong” (169).

“A TERRIBLE DEFORMITY”: THE NIGHTMARE OF THE FEMALE BODY

In the representation of women as dangerous, able to injure and kill men, and overturn a patriarchal world order, Alderman literalizes male fears concerning the hidden power of women. In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva defines the representation of woman as monstrous in terms of abjection, that which “does not respect borders, positions, rules” but “disturbs identity, system, order” (1982, 4). A means of “separating out the human from the non-human and the fully constituted subject from the partially formed subject” (Creed 1993, 8), abjection is a delineation of self and other. Indeed, abjection in Kristeva’s terms enables a shifting of perspectives, a subversion of established literary and cultural norms to reveal the politics—and the revulsion—of the inside: “Abjection . . . is immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady: a terror that disassembles, a hatred that smiles, a passion that uses the body for barter instead of inflaming it, a debtor who sells you up, a friend who stabs you” (Kristeva 1982, 4). The demonization of the female body in *The Power*, symbolized by the skein and the electrical power it produces, aligns with such patriarchal fears about the destructive potential of women, particularly as it relates to sexuality and deception, and an association with the unclean. As noted, the male response to those who possess the power is thus violent, focused on limiting access to public spaces and corralling those deemed to be a threat via military force. As abject beings, they must be “radically excluded” (2): “They send out . . . men

in helicopters and soldiers on the streets, armed with guns and live ammunition” (Alderman 2016, 61). An insistence on borderlines, on reinstating those “positions and rules” that have been defied, compels an urgent need to contain women’s bodies both physically and psychologically. Suzanne Hatty further notes in *Masculinities* (2000) how the construction of the female body as “abnormal organism, as diseased state” is combined with “attempts at coercive correction” (123) to force it to meet the expectations of male desire. One of the protagonists, Roxy, for example, describes how a religious ethic of abstinence (disguised within a context of pastoral care) is fundamentally sexual:

D’you know what they’re teaching girls in school in England? Breathing exercises! No kidding, bleeding *breathing*. Bleeding “keep it under control, don’t use it, don’t do anything, keep yourself nice and keep your arms crossed,” you know what I mean? And like, I had sex with a bloke a few weeks back and he was practically begging me to do it to him, just a little bit, he’d seen it on the internet; no one’s going to keep their arms crossed forever. (Alderman 2016, 102)

The presence of “abstinence culture,” Kelly notes, “reveals that the valorization of women’s purity is premised on a terrifying dread” of their bodies (2016, 97). As women learn to harness their individual and collective power to rebel against the forces which oppress them, the violence of the narrative escalates to expose “the cultural roots of male malevolence” (99). In the replication of patriarchal norms in a matriarchal world, Alderman demonstrates how the fear of women has been perpetuated via tropes of female destruction—the monstrous-feminine, the *femme castratrice*, the *femme fatale*—which focus on the annihilation of men via trickery, and sexual and psychological violence. By exhibiting these imagined figures as actual identities, Alderman makes real the mythical nightmare of the female body constructed by patriarchy, and in doing so, “points to the dangerous implications of the monstrous-feminine as a cultural axiom that men frequently express their dread of women through violence” (99). As Kelly contends of the subversive strategies employed in *Teeth*, such an approach is effective in two key ways: it enables a critical examination of cultural misogyny and it offers a vision of empowerment that “exaggerates the qualities of female monstrosity to reimagine women’s bodies as natural sources of strength” (99).

Yet given the predominance of the mother-figure within *The Power*, particularly in terms of Creed’s monstrous phallic mother,

it is significant that Alderman fails to address the issue of women's "embodied experience on a practical level" (Hoyle 2017). That is, there is no examination of the biological differences between male and female bodies in relation to how women "carry, bear and often nurse children" (Hoyle 2017). A number of feminist speculative fictions specifically seek to reimagine pregnancy in order to free women from its physical burdens and responsibilities, as well as its manipulation by patriarchal ideology, through which the female body is contradictorily designated as a "space" that is both monstrous and idealized. In Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*, for example, babies are conceived and born out of test tubes, while in Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness*, the androgynous and asexual Gethenians only assume a gender whilst in a hormonal state known as kemmer. An individual can thus be both a father and a mother during their lifetime, enabling striking statements such as "The King was pregnant" (1969, 100). In Gearhart's *The Wanderground* (1979), women are able to reproduce without men via a process of parthenogenesis, whereas cloning ensures a peaceful male-free society in Tiptree's "Houston, Houston, Do You Read?" (1978). But as Hoyle contends, "despite their physical inferiority to women, men in *The Power* still won't have to deal with unwanted pregnancy, or pregnancy as the result of rape; they won't have to spend nine months pregnant and then give birth" (2017). Women thus remain ensnared not only by child-bearing, but also by cultural narratives of female monstrosity which stem from Kristeva's archaic mother, defined by a "fear of her generative power" (1982, 77). Creed notes that such a figure is denoted as the primeval "black hole," a "force which threatens to reincorporate what it once gave birth to," associated with death and the "obliteration of self" (1993, 28). The perpetuation of such a myth, which inscribes a "fear of losing oneself and one's boundaries" emphasizes a social order that privileges "separateness over sameness" (29), echoing the gendered divisions that prevail in the future envisioned by *The Power*. By failing to shift such borderlines, women remain trapped by biology but more significantly, by the mythologization of the female body as inherently threatening, a reality playfully revealed by one of Naomi's paratextual editorial letters: "Men have evolved to be strong worker homestead-keepers, while women—with babies to protect from harm—have had to become aggressive and violent" (Alderman 2016, 333).

One of the more contentious issues associated with *The Power* is its representation of sexual violence. As women gain agency, their

wielding of power becomes increasingly extreme, resulting in anarchist groups, for example, and the implementation of systems which hauntingly evoke genocidal regimes: “Any man who does not have a sister, mother, wife or daughter, or other relative, to register him must report to the police station, where he will be assigned a work detail and shackled to other men for the protection of the public. Any man who breaks these laws will be subject to capital punishment” (Alderman 2016, 243). Such a scenario suggests a parallel with Tiptree’s “Houston, Houston,” in which male intruders expecting to dominate a future all-female world are dispassionately killed: “We simply have no facilities for people with your emotional problems” (1978, 97). Nussbaum notes that “it’s not surprising that the women who find themselves possessed of real power in real numbers for the first time in, quite possibly, all of human history, would be just as corrupted by it as any man before them” (2017). Yet part of the strength of the text is the tension it creates between the pleasure of a narrative about women in control, and the horror of the abuses they violently commit. Importantly, their individual and collective female superpower is persistently figured in sexual terms, a literal and symbolic appropriation of a phallocentric culture. The framing makes clear the primal fear of women explored in the text, but also extra-textually in regards to how cultural misogyny defines the female body as perpetually trapped within a virgin/whore dichotomy. In this context, women are supposed to be passive recipients, denied the role of an active, desiring agent. Initially, the ability of women to use electricity to excite sexual partners is framed as titillation, as a force that is thrilling and exciting:

There’s a girl and a boy making love in a back alley. She coaxes him with a crackling hand at the small of his back. The boy turns around to see Tunde’s camera pointing at him and pauses, and the girl sends a flicker across his face and says, “Don’t look at him, look at me.” When they’re getting close, the girl smiles and lights up the boy’s spine and says to Tunde, “Hey, you want some, too?” . . . He looks at the footage on the screen. It’s sexy. He’d like someone to do that to him, too, maybe. Maybe. (Alderman 2016, 55)

The reversal of sexual power, in which the body of the male participant is entirely controlled by the will of the woman, defies social conditioning which demands female compliance. Yet by replicating sexual dynamics based on existing power relations, Alderman highlights how patriarchy defines the female body as an object to

be used, with or without consent, for male pleasure. Experimentation among adolescents that engages with the power as play mimics fumbling sexual initiations; however, in the scenarios posited in *The Power*, such experiences position women at the center of both controlling and controlled desire, rather than as its voiceless conduit. That is, these women act, rather than being acted upon. In those situations of consent, the ability to manipulate nerve-endings for sexual gratification is treated ambiguously, once more illustrating both deep-seated anxiety about the potential of women's bodies, as well as the possibilities of pleasure: "He is afraid. He is excited. He realises that he could not stop her, whatever she wanted to do now. The thought is terrifying. The thought is electrifying" (Alderman 2016, 15). The male body is increasingly objectified, repeatedly framed as something disposable, and controlled by the appetites of a female libido. Indeed, those boys who request the stimulating effects of electricity are often characterized in terms of perversion, as "deviants and abnormals" (151), whilst their desire justifies a rhetoric of exploitation that is not unlike explanations concerning the legitimacy of hard-core pornography: "One [girl] had done the thing to a boy because *he asked her to*: this story holds much interest for the girls. Could it be that boys like it? Is it possible they want it? Some of them have found internet forums that suggest that this is the case" (41-42; emphasis original).

Juxtaposed against the use of power as a mechanism for pleasure, is its used to liberate those women suffering from sexual abuse. As noted, the rapid spread of the superpower in Moldova reflects women fighting back against sex-trafficking and systematic oppression, a radical and fierce resistance to their imprisonment by men. As the journalist, Tunde, notes, the ability of women to injure and kill those who have denied their humanity results in a "tsunami" of destruction, a "show of force" (Alderman 2016, 133) that signals an end to patriarchy as both practice and ideology: "A dozen women turned into a hundred. A hundred into a thousand. The police retreated. The women shouted. . . . They understood their strength, all at once" (56). In the overturn of power, the narrative depicts graphic instances of rape and violence, scenes in which male victims are imprisoned, tortured, and murdered by gangs, cults, and fundamentalists. As men are increasingly stripped of their legal rights, "revenge bands" (251) across Moldova and its surrounding nations set about a program of systematic murder, notorious for its brutality and acts of sexual humiliation, such as crucifixion:

It was a man with long, dark hair hanging down over his face. He had been tied to the post by plastic cords at his wrists and ankles. . . . There were the marks of pain across his body, livid and dark, blue and scarlet and black. Around his neck was a sign with a single word in Russian: *slut*. He had been dead for two or three days. (Alderman 2016, 264)

One of the most horrific scenes in *The Power* involves a raid upon a refugee camp, during which its male inhabitants are raped and slaughtered alongside the “gender-traitors” (Alderman 2016, 251) who attempt to protect them: “A wife, or perhaps a sister, tries to stop them from taking the pale-skinned, curly-haired man who’s with her. . . . They overwhelm her easily. . . . One of them grabs the woman by the hair and the other delivers a bolt directly through the woman’s eyes . . . the very liquid of them scrambled to a milky white” (280). The descriptions of abject violence, including mutilated corpses, the filming of sexual assault on mobile phones, and the desecration of bodies is undoubtedly disturbing, yet it operates as a necessarily haunting reminder of the physical realities suffered by women. As noted, the parodic nature of the text functions by way of a double coding, in which the meaning of the text is read *through* the cultural narratives from which it stems. In this way, the horror of scenes in which men are annihilated is actually read as the destruction of women, as the inevitable result of a social system based upon misogyny. As Lorna Piatti-Farnell notes of fictional portrayals of rape, the “contested separation of ‘the real’ and ‘the fictional’ dimensions of rape inevitably unveil its representations not as separate from the dynamics of actual living existence, but as loaded critiques of the broader cultural spectrum in relation to sexual violence” (2017, 240). It is an idea made particularly potent in the aftermath of the raid, in which corpses, “the utmost of abjection” (Kristeva 1982, 4), lay scattered and uncovered: “No one is here to protect these people, and no one is concerned for them. The bodies might lie in this wood for a dozen years and no one would come this way. They do it because they can” (Alderman 2016, 283).

Such a strategy is undoubtedly provocative, yet a crucial means through which to emphasize an extant dystopia. The depravity demonstrated by the female radicals is less a nightmare vision of a future in which women might replicate male behaviors than a reflection of the contemporary reality of gendered division. Indeed, as Kelly suggests of *Teeth*, the text “imports this political context” into the narrative by “structuring a fictional universe not unlike our own

in which the confluence of misogynistic cultural forces summons” avenging heroines (2016, 92). The order of the narrative is essential, as details about the rape of women and girls establishes a world order in which extreme sexual violence is already an entrenched and naturalized aspect of patriarchal rule. In this scenario, those moments in which revenge fantasies are enacted function as catharsis, and refute a cultural insistence on equality which appears at its most strident only when there is a suggestion of the loss of male power. Moreover, *The Power* is able to “creatively subvert” the demonizing role of the monstrous-feminine by constructing a series of protagonists who are “at once victim and monster, punished and punisher—[women] whose violent actions ironically points to roots of violence against women in society” (92). Through the reversal of those who typically enact violence, Alderman parodies the notion of women’s monstrous bodies, exposing mythical narratives of female destruction as tropes that seek to justify oppression: “A fist fight breaks out on a popular news discussion programme between a scientist who demands that the Electric Girls be investigated surgically and a man of God who believes they are a harbinger of the apocalypse and must not be touched by human hand” (Alderman 2016, 20–21).

Importantly, the overturn of patriarchy does not occur without resistance, nor without the complication of the power that stems from the female body. Indeed, the rise of women provokes an impetus to punish that emerges from newly disenfranchised men, leached of their cultural and political capital. As noted, this manifests in the military deployment of armed forces to corral the women, and political attempts to legislate against the freedoms permitted of female bodies, but also in more insidious forms. The disintegration of male power and influence provokes an underbelly of crime, for example, through which skeins are surgically—and often forcibly—removed and stitched into the bodies of men: “More than 50 per cent of the time, if a skein is severed, the person dies” (Alderman 2016, 171). Given the links between the ability of women to conduct electricity and their sexuality, such an act can be viewed as akin to genital mutilation. The loss of the skein destabilizes a sense of subjectivity, and is represented as a violation of both the physical and psychic self: “There’s a twang all through her body when they cut through the final strand on the right-hand side of her collarbone. It hurts, but the emptiness that comes after is worse. It’s like she died, but she’s still too alive to notice” (236). Arguably, the forced removal of the skein manifests male castration anxiety, emphasized through

attention to concerns about the insignificance of men in the emergent new world: “They’ll only keep the most genetically healthy of us alive . . . one genetically fit man can sire a thousand—five thousand—children. And what do they need for the rest of us? They’re going to kill us all” (180). In line with Freudian thinking, Stephen Neale argues in the context of the horror genre that “most monsters tend, in fact, to be defined as ‘male’, especially in so far as the objects of their desire are almost exclusively women” (1980, 61). As a result, “it could well be maintained that it is woman’s sexuality, that which renders them desirable—but also threatening—to men, which constitutes . . . that which is really monstrous” (61). Creed further notes that it is the “male fear of castration which ultimately produces and delineates the monstrous” (1993, 5).

The acts of castration via forced skein removal thus parody a phallogentric culture in which anxieties about male loss and fears about female sexuality underpin a misogynistic ideology of control. The manifestation of such a fear results not only in the barbaric mutilation of women in order to deny and re-possess their power, but also via an insistence on curtailing their bodies: “We need laws now to protect men. We need curfews on women” (Alderman 2016, 180). The image of a monstrous female self, then, and fantasies of her destruction, function to “soothe” male castration anxieties via the annihilation of that which threatens (Creed 1993, 5). In *The Power*, however, such reassurance is potently denied: “The night was filled with monsters now” (Alderman 2016, 265).

“DEVIANTS AND ABNORMALS”: ON AN ABSENCE OF DIFFERENCE

Despite the critical vision of patriarchy offered by *The Power*, it remains silent on how issues of race and sexuality intersect with the machinations of power. In line with *Herland* and *The Handmaid’s Tale*, *The Power* conceives a world in which repressive socio-political structures are exposed, and a violent cultural narrative that defines women as monstrous “others” is both contested and undermined. However, it also arguably repeats the failures of its literary lineage by failing to acknowledge the oppression experienced by those whose identities do not comply with a “norm” established as white, cis-gendered, and heterosexual. Roxane Gay has described the persistent absence of non-white and non-Western characters on popular television as a “numbing sea of whiteness” (2014, 5), an image which correlates to the distinct lack of diversity that plagues not only

Alderman's narrative but also its predecessors. In an introduction to *Herland*, for example, Lindy West describes the "tremendously, excruciatingly antiquated" nature of the text, which is "rife with gender essentialism, white supremacy and anti-abortion rhetoric" (2015, ix). Whilst acknowledging it is a "product of its time," West nonetheless questions the efficacy and contemporary relevance of the feminist vision described by Gilman's female utopia:

... characterising women as mystical earth mothers is not exactly ground-breaking ... Nor is populating your book entirely with white people, except for a few vague references to jungle "savages"; nor is promoting the idea that womanhood is an anatomical designation instead of an innate personal one; nor is meeting the line "you surely do not destroy the unborn!" with a look of "ghastly horror." (West 2015, x)

Similar critiques have been made of *The Handmaid's Tale*, which maintains a stubborn silence on the politics of race occurring within the fundamentalist state of Gilead. As Priya Nair (2017) observes, Atwood not only fails to account for "the anti-Black violence and enslavement of Black people that American society was grounded in and continues to operate on today," but also positions the experiences of white women as universal, thus erasing the complex histories suffered by women of color. Nair notes that the central premise of the narrative—women as property deemed valuable by their reproductive ability—steals from the "distinct oppression that Black women were forced to navigate. By taking the specific oppression of enslaved Black women and applying them uncritically to white women, *The Handmaid's Tale* ignores the historical realities of an American dystopia founded on anti-Black violence" (2017). Cate Young contends that the narrative thereby suggests "there was no historical point at which racism has ever been a pressing concern" (2017), a position emphasised by Soraya Nadia McDonald, who argues that in a "hierarchical society propelled by religious fundamentalism, just about everything in the history of [America] suggests that racial divisions would become far more deeply entrenched, not less" (2017). In this scenario, black women remain voiceless, their experiences detailed as little more than a footnote of official records despite the appropriation of their suffering and their histories. As Noah Berlatsky contends, *The Handmaid's Tale* thus "cleanses the past," removing all reference to American slavery and avoiding obvious parallels between black oppression and

the regime of Gilead (2017). Indeed, while Atwood's narrative has gained increased interest due to the television adaptation serialized by Hulu (2017), and is popularly regarded, as with *The Power*, as a startling and graphic commentary on contemporary gender politics, its insistence on a post-racial world refuses to acknowledge the realities of race politics in a dystopian present.

The problem, then, is a failure of intersectionality in which a "general erasure or ignorance of race" (Gay 2014, 5) positions white women as the default victims of patriarchal hegemony. It is important to note, however, that numerous counter-narratives exist. Women writers of color such as Octavia Butler, Jewelle Gomez, Nalo Hopkinson, Tananarive Due, and N.K. Jemisin utilize feminist SF as a means to challenge such dynamics, and to posit worlds in which the "tension between the possible and the impossible" (Lefanu 1988, 22) involves the denaturalizing of intersecting structures of power. As Nair observes, such authors force an acknowledgment that "for Black people in American dystopia, building visionary, impossible futures is not new" (2017). Butler's protagonist in *Survivor* (1978), for example, defiantly challenges dominant SF norms by being black, female, and sexually autonomous, whilst the *Parable* series (1993) imagines a racist theocracy evocative of Gilead, but which focuses on how black and interracial communities are targeted for death and exploitation by the regime. Rather eerily, the first book in the series, *Parable of the Sower* (1993), features a dictator whose slogan is "Make America Great Again." Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring* (1998) depicts a heroine, a woman of color, who battles poverty and single-parenthood in a future dystopia, whilst Gomez's *The Gilda Stories* (1991) is powerfully subversive, featuring a protagonist who is black, a lesbian, and a vampire, whilst the narrative confronts slavery, homophobia, and racism. Gomez describes how the book was initially declined by publishers: "'The character is black. She's a lesbian. And she's a vampire,' the publisher said, 'That's too complicated.'" Gomez continued, "I thought, 'Well, I'm two of those three. What are you trying to say?'" (Kost 2016).

While no narrative might always successfully negotiate the difficulties posed by the competing politics of privilege and otherness, the possibilities of transformation enabled by feminist SF at least offer, as West describes, the opportunity for something "a little more messy . . . because women are people, not a hive-mind" (2015, xiii). Interestingly, West also proposes a twenty-first-century vision of *Herland*, one which would be "intersectional.

My twenty-first-century Herland would dismantle all systems of oppression—not just those that affect straight, white, cis, able-bodied, neurotypical women” (xiii). If, as Lefanu argues, SF feminist fictions offer the opportunity to explore the “myriad ways in which we are constructed as women” (1988, 5), then such an exploration cannot be limited to the experiences of a particular few. While a number of critics contend that Alderman’s narrative is not fundamentally about gender but about the operations of power (Tisdall 2017), it remains necessary to decode the “different and sometimes contradictory social dynamics that constitute and situate Black women and other subjects in relation to others” (Crenshaw quoted in Bello and Mancini 2016, 15). Indeed, Kimberlé W. Crenshaw, who first coined the term “intersectionality” as a means to address the specific forms of discrimination faced by black women, argues that understanding the competing dynamics which comprise a subject is central to unravelling how power is “reified through institutional and social structures,” those forces which “constitute and naturalise” cultural power that is so often defined in terms that are white, male, and heterosexual (15).

While the ambitious scope and transgressive imaginings of *The Power* has often protected the narrative from criticism of its lack of diversity (Tisdall 2017), it is difficult to ignore both the white-washing of its central characters and the superficial depiction of non-heterosexual cis-gendered sexual identities. The absence of an exploration of race is arguably made all the more puzzling due to the identities of two of its central narrators: the journalist, Tunde, who is identified as Nigerian, and Allie, who is described as biracial. Neither Tunde nor Allie consider how white privilege might influence the unequal distribution of power, despite Tunde writing a critical analysis of the violent revolutions resulting from the manifestation of the power, and the development of the new nation state of Bessapara (Alderman 2016, 242). The characterization of Allie is framed within a context of multiple abuses, while her identity portrays a complex intersection of psycho-social dynamics: she is a neuro-atypical woman of color, a product of the foster system, and a victim of sexual and physical assault. Her positioning is presented pithily by Alderman: “Mrs Montgomery-Taylor, what do you think your husband is doing to that sixteen-year-old mixed-race girl you took into your house out of Christian charity?” (30–31) The violence directed toward Allie functions as punishment for her ostensible transgressions, and whilst such suffering is offered as motivation for her later

incarnation as a Messianic tycoon, there is no reflection on how the binds of otherness might intersect with questions of race and power. Alternatively, both Tunde and Allie, by treating race as absence, “shore up whiteness as the default and normative racial category through which gender, sexuality, class and so on are expressed” (Carbado 2013, 823).

In such a scenario, *The Power* not only “flattens out” (Hoyle 2017) the complex and constituting dynamics which define any hierarchical society, but also constructs whiteness as the normative standard, so natural as to seem unremarkable. Indeed, white power, Richard Dyer claims, “secures its dominance by seeming not to be anything in particular” (quoted in Ma 1998, 2). The riots in Delhi, the uprisings in Saudi Arabia, and the establishment of Bessapara are focalized through Tunde as events occurring in response to the brutal subjugation of women, particularly, as noted, in relation to the horrors of sex trafficking in Moldova. The rise of Tatiana, whose totalitarian urges might be understood as a tendency within feminist SF to depict “extreme feminists” who are “willing to kill” in order to achieve a utopic ideal (Barr 1987, 6), also signals a non-Western response to liberation which transpires within a particular time and place, and which involves culturally-specific experiences of violation. Yet such incidents are treated as part of a broad stroke of oppression rather than as situated within a complex matrix of history, racial politics, and power. Western feminism, Crispin contends, has always focused on “a middle-class white woman” as its model, resulting in an inability to recognize those whose identities and experiences fall “outside” of visibility: “Her desires and needs cannot stand in for the needs of all women. And yet we’ve focussed on facilitating her dreams for much of recent feminist history” (2017, 28). As Tisdall notes, *The Power* thus fails to consider “all the reasons for women’s gendered oppression” (2017), which, as Hoyle contends, results in a “narrow focus on how power acts on people and shapes the world” (2017).

According to Wolmark, by “presenting the problems of social change in terms of gender,” narratives such as *The Power* attempt to “redefine the dominant ideology, but at the same time, by maintaining the separation of gender from politics,” it also “reproduces that ideology” (1988, 54). Indeed, the narrative not only positions whiteness as the universal standard for female experience, but also denies the presence of sexualities which are not heteronormative. However, while there are no explicitly LGBTQ characters in the narrative, there is an analogous exploration of “variations in sexuality or

transgendered identities” (Hoyle 2017) via skein anomalies. Margot’s daughter, Jos, for example, is framed as experiencing a disjuncture of self, struggling with manic highs and lows, unable to properly control or utilize the power, and needing intervention to help control the fluctuations of the skein: “There are still days . . . when she has no power at all. They’ve tried linking it to what she eats, to her sleep, to her periods, to exercise, but they can’t find a pattern” (Alderman 2016, 149). The description of Jos also alludes to non-heterosexual desire, noting that she “quite likes girls. She quite likes boys who are a bit like girls” (154). Given that Jos is one of the few characters signified as queer, there is, arguably, a problematic imbrication of her dysfunctional skein and an “othered” sexual identity. Such a pairing evokes a rhetoric of biological fault, an error of neurological wiring that might be rectified via the regime of Margot’s NorthStar training camps, a “force for good” designed to train and regulate the use of the power in young girls (149). While it is a stretch to suggest that such training echoes the horrors of “conversion therapy,” it remains that the power is coded and reified within a system that is both heteronormative and cis-gendered.

More overtly, Alderman constructs an analogy for transgender experience via a rare “chromosomal irregularity” that results in skeins growing on boys and young men (2016, 153). While some “died when their skeins tried to come in,” and others “have skeins that don’t work,” such bodies are regarded as both abnormal and deviant: “they keep it to themselves; there have been boys who’ve been murdered for showing their skein in other, harder parts of the world” (153). According to Hoyle, such analogies fail to convince: “First, because it’s unnecessary to have analogies when you could just have LGBTQ characters; and second because this plays into a biological reading of sexuality and trans-identity as a deviancy or illness” (2017). While the paratextual framing which positions the narrative as an historical text produced by Neil—a presumably white male—might explain some omissions of experience, it remains that *The Power* fails to traverse what Devon Carbado describes as “transdemographic terrain” (2013, 811). If the narrative is indeed less focused on the nuances of unequal gender relations and more interested in the construction and distribution of power, it needs to examine a broader concept of selfhood—including the significance of race, class, sexuality, and disability—in order to understand how social order is predicated on “multiple axes of difference” (823). As Neil’s final remarks in his

correspondence with Naomi ironically contends: “we can think and imagine ourselves differently once we understand what we’ve based our ideas on” (Alderman 338).

“BURN IT ALL DOWN”: CONCLUSION

Importantly, the scenarios posited by *The Power* recognize the damaging potential of destructive masculinity in as much as it details the trauma inflicted by cultural misogyny. Through the inversion of gendered behaviors, the notion that “you are the hunter or you are the prey” (Alderman 2016, 265) is interrogated to highlight how such dichotomies only serve to perpetuate an imbalance of power: “You are weak and we are strong. You are the gift and we are the owners” (269). As argued, however, by reversing gendered tropes in order to critically examine them, Alderman is able to re-construct female monstrosity as “a natural response to . . . male hostility towards women” (Kelly 2016, 94). In doing so, *The Power* “self-consciously identifies both repressed and explicit fears of women’s bodies” (94), and deconstructs such myths as controlling functions of patriarchy. Through its systematic reversals, Alderman imaginatively, if incompletely, “upends the very foundation upon which civilization rests. Things will not be able to continue as they were, and complete upheaval might well be inevitable” (Nussbaum 2017). Indeed, it is Mother Eve and Margot who come to realize, albeit mistakenly, that the solution is a nuclear Armageddon, the only means through which old paradigms might be defeated, and something begun anew: “Of course, the old tree still stands. There is only one way, and that is to blast it entirely to pieces” (Alderman 2016, 23).

As argued, it is the parodic nature of Alderman’s text that is key to re-visioning power relations in a way that compels readers to reflect upon the oppressive effects of patriarchy. In this way, *The Power* is doubly coded, involving a process of reading *through* the cultural narratives from which the novel stems in order to access the subversive strategies at play. The parody of the text is thus “both deconstructively critical and constructively creative” (Hutcheon 1988, 98), calling into question “unexamined notions about what might constitute historical truth” (95). Such questioning, however, is contingent on a particular mode of identity politics. Indeed, while critics have emphasized the anti-feminist premise of the novel due to its imagining of a violent and corrupt matriarchy, it is in its absences

that *The Power* is most problematic. In the suggestion of a universal experience of womanhood that is both white and heterosexual, the narrative elides the importance of understanding perspectives that are non-white, non-Western, and queer. By seeming unconscious of how “power is complicated by its unequal distribution within genders, or by white, cis, straight privilege” (Hoyle 2017), *The Power* is unable to fully critique the violence of normative gender constructs, and the prevailing damage of heteropatriarchy. Alternatively, notions of womanhood and femininity are trapped within broad strokes which, whilst making visible the operations of patriarchal power, ignores “the distinctive forms of oppression experienced by those with intersecting subordinate identities” (Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach, quoted in Carbado 2013, 814).

WORKS CITED

- Alderman, Naomi. 2016. *The Power*. London: Penguin.
- Armistead, Claire. 2016. “Naomi Alderman: ‘I went into the novel religious and by the end I wasn’t. I wrote myself out of it.’” *The Guardian* (Australia edition), October 28, 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/oct/28/naomi-alderman-interview-the-power>.
- Atkins, Lucy. 2016. “Girl Power: Women Dominate the World in a Darkly Witty Play on Gender Roles.” *Sunday Times*, October 23, 2016. <http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/A467425627/GPS?u=deakin&sid=GPS&xid=4186b905>
- Atwood, Margaret. 1985. *The Handmaid’s Tale*. London: Virago.
- Barr, Marleen. 1987. *Alien to Femininity: Speculative Fiction and Feminist Theory*. New York: Greenwood Press.
- Bello, Barbara Giovanna, and Letizia Mancini. 2016. “Talking About Intersectionality: Interview with Kimberlé W. Crenshaw.” *Sociologia del diritto*, no. 2, 11–21.
- Benson, Stephen. 1996. “Stories of Love and Death: Reading and Writing the Fairy Tale Romance.” In *Image and Power: Women in Fiction in the Twentieth Century*, edited by Sarah Sceats and Gail Cunningham, 103–14. London: Longman.
- Berlatsky, Noah. 2017. “Both Versions of *The Handmaid’s Tale* Have a Problem with Racial Erasure.” *The Verge*, June 15, 2017. <https://www.theverge.com/2017/6/15/15808530/handmaids-tale-hulu-margaret-atwood-black-history-racial-erasure>.
- Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Butler, Octavia. 1978. *Survivor*. New York: Doubleday.
- . 1993. *Parable of the Sower*. New York: Little, Brown & Company.

- Carbado, Devon W. 2013. "Colorblind Intersectionality." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 38 (4): 810–45.
- Carter, Angela. 1994. "An Interview with Angela Carter." By Anna Katsavos. *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 14 (3): 11–17.
- Charles, Ron. 2017. "The Power is our era's Handmaid's Tale." *The Washington Post*, October 10, 2017. https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/books/the-power-is-our-eras-handmaids-tale/2017/10/10/032a5866-ado5-11e7-9e58-e6288544af98_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.a4bd8d6cof79.
- Creed, Barbara. 1993. *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*. London: Routledge.
- Crispin, Jess. 2017. *Why I Am Not a Feminist: A Feminist Manifesto*. Carlton: Black Inc.
- Eichler, Margrit. 1981. "Science Fiction as Desirable Feminist Scenarios." *Women's Studies International Quarterly* 4 (1): 51–64.
- Foucault, Michel. 1977. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Vintage.
- Gaventa, John. 2003. *Power After Lukes: A Review of the Literature*. Brighton: Institute of Development Studies.
- Gay, Roxane. 2014. *Bad Feminist*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Gearhart, Sally. 1979. *The Wanderground*. Boston: Alyson Publications.
- Gilarek, Anna. 2015. "The Temporal Displacement of Utopia and Dystopia in Feminist Speculative Fiction." *Explorations: A Journal of Language and Literature*, no. 3, 34–46.
- Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. 1979. *Herland*. London: Vintage. First published 1915.
- Gilmore, David. 2001. *Misogyny: The Male Malady*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Gomez, Jewelle. 1991. *The Gilda Stories*. Ithaca, NY: Firebrand Books.
- Harges, Mary C. 1998. "Role-Reversal in Speculative Fiction: An Alternate Vision of the Future in *Temblor*." *Hispanófila*, no. 123, 31–36.
- Hatty, Suzanne. 2000. *Masculinities, Violence and Culture*. London: Sage.
- Hopkinson, Nalo. 1998. *Brown Girl in the Ring*. New York: Little, Brown & Company.
- Hoyle, Victoria. 2017. "The Power by Naomi Alderman: A Review." Angela Ruskin Centre for Science Fiction and Fantasy. May 12, 2017. <http://csff-anglia.co.uk/clarke-shadow-jury/the-power-by-naomi-alderman-a-review-by-victoria-hoyle/>.
- Hutcheon, Linda. 1988. *A Poetic of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. New York: Routledge.
- Jackson, R. 1981. *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*. London: Routledge.
- Jordan, Justine. 2016. "If Girls Ruled the World." *The Guardian* (Australia edition), November 16, 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/nov/02/the-power-naomi-alderman-review>.

- Kelly, Casey Ryan. 2016. "Camp Horror and the Gendered Politics of Screen Violence: Subverting the Monstrous-Feminine in *Teeth*." *Women's Studies in Communication* 39 (1): 86–106.
- Kost, Ryan. 2016. "Author Hopes Vampire Story Draws New Blood." *SFGate*, April 11, 2016. <https://www.sfgate.com/books/article/Author-hopes-vampire-novel-draws-new-blood-on-7241301.php>.
- Kristeva, Julia. 1982. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- La Ferla, Ruth. 2018. "Naomi Alderman on the World that Yielded *The Power*." *The New York Times*, January 29, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/29/style/the-power-naomi-alderman.html>.
- Lefanu, Sarah. 1988. *In the Chinks of the World Machine: Feminism and Science Fiction*. London: Women's Press.
- Le Guin, Ursula. 1969. *The Left Hand of Darkness*. New York: Time Warner International.
- . 1974. *The Dispossessed*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Ma, Sheng-mei. 1998. *Immigrant Subjectivities: Asian American and Asian Diaspora Literatures*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Mackinnon, Catherine. 1987. *Feminism Unmodified: Discourses on Life and Law*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- McDonald, Soraya Nadia. 2017. "In *Handmaid's Tale*, A Postracial, Patriarchal Hellscape." *The Undeclared*, April 26, 2017. <https://theundeclared.com/features/hulu-handmaids-tale/>.
- Nair, Priya. 2017. "Get Out of Gilead: Anti-Blackness in *The Handmaid's Tale*." *Bitch Media*, April 14, 2017. <https://www.bitchmedia.org/article/anti-blackness-handmaids-tale>.
- Nussbaum, Abigail. 2016. "*The Power*." *Strange Horizons*, February 27, 2016. <http://strangehorizons.com/non-fiction/reviews/the-power-by-naomi-alderman/>.
- Piatti-Farnell, Lorna. 2017. "For God's sake, cover yourself: Sexual Violence, Disrupted Histories, and the Gendered Politics of Patriotism in *Watchmen*." *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics* 8 (3): 238–51.
- Piercy, Marge. 1976. *Woman on the Edge of Time*. London: Del Rey.
- Russ, Joanna. 1975. *The Female Man*. London: Gollancz.
- . 1995. *To Write Like a Woman: Essays in Feminism and Science Fiction*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Sage, Lorna. 2001. *Moments of Truth: Twelve Twentieth-Century Women Writers*. London: Fourth Estate.
- Schaub, Michael. 2017. "Electrifying 'Power' Flips the Gender Script to Unsettling Effect." *National Public Radio*, October 11, 2017. <https://www.npr.org/2017/10/11/555689738/electrifying-power-flips-the-gender-script-to-unsettling-effect>.
- Steele, Francesca. 2016. "Girl Power, and Now its Deadly: Women Rule in a World of Violent Role Reversals." *The Times*, October 15, 2016.

- <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/the-power-by-naomi-alderman-8ofx3zcgg>.
- Suvín, Darko. 1972. "On the Poetics of the Science Fiction Genre." *College English* 34 (3): 372–82.
- Tiptree, James Jr. 1978. "Houston, Houston, Do You Read?" In *Star Songs of an Old Primate*. New York: Ballantine.
- Tisdall, Laura. 2017. "Because They Could." *Laura Tisdall: Writer and Historian* (blog). April 15, 2017. <https://drlauratisdall.wordpress.com/2017/04/15/because-they-could/>.
- Tolan, Fiona. 2005. "Feminist Utopias and Questions of Liberty: Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* as Critique of Second Wave Feminism." *Women: A Cultural Review* 16 (1): 18–32.
- Webb, Janeen. 1992. "Feminism and Science Fiction." *Meanjin* 5 (1): 185–98.
- West, Lindy. 2015. Introduction to *Herland*. In *Herland and the Yellow Wallpaper*, by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, vii–xviii. London: Vintage.
- Wolmark, Jenny. 1988. "Alternate Futures? Science Fiction and Feminism." *Cultural Studies* 2 (1): 48–56.
- Young, Cate. 2017. "*The Handmaid's Tale* May be Race-Blind, But That's Not a Good Thing." *Cosmopolitan*, June 14, 2017. <https://www.cosmopolitan.com/entertainment/tv/a10001322/handmaids-ales-race-problem/>.

DR. ALYSON MILLER teaches writing and literature at Deakin University, Australia. Her scholarship focuses on scandalous and taboo literature, with particular attention to anxieties relating to censorship, gender, feminism, and dystopian fictions. One of her recent publications is *The Unfinished Atomic Bomb: Shadows and Reflections* (Rowman and Littlefield 2018), an edited collection of essays concerned with the memorialization of the atomic bomb.