

## Body and Power: Study of Body Politics in *The Power*

Le Yu<sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>College of Foreign Languages, Dalian University of Technology, Dalian 116081, China

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\*Corresponding author: Le Yu

College of Foreign Languages, Dalian University of Technology, Dalian 116081, China

### Abstract

### Review Article

British science fiction writer Naomi Alderman's seminal work *The Power* constructs a thought experiment on how divergent bodies influence power structures. In a cybernetic world arising from genetic mutations of women, the body, imbued with symbolic attributes, becomes a tool for achieving liberation and equality. This paper aims to employ close textual analysis, drawing on Nietzsche's phenomenology and Wilhelm Reich's political psychology, to explore the intrinsic connection and dialectical relationship between the body and power. The body, as a tangible entity, a locus of strength, and an embodiment of life, forms the solid foundation of power, serving as a potent driving force for its development and its primal origin. Simultaneously, the body undergoes transformations under authority and contributes to the reproduction of social structures. Power itself harbors profound conflicts of force, thus inevitably sparking continuous and intense struggles as long as the will to power exists. *The Power*, as a cybernetic-themed speculative fiction, offers new possibilities for power dynamics, reflecting Alderman's imagination on constructing the human destiny community.

**Keywords:** Body; power; politics; Cyborg; Naomi Alderman.

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## INTRODUCTION

Contemporary American science fiction writer Naomi Alderman (1974–) studied under Margaret Atwood and has been named one of the best young novelists by *Granta* magazine. Alderman's work exhibits distinct feminist characteristics, reflecting her particular concern for the future of women. In her 2016 novel, *The Power*, Alderman combines science fiction with reality to propose a social model where gender roles are reversed. This work explores the role of the body in political and social structures, emphasizing that the body is not only a manifestation of personal identity but also a crucial medium for the distribution and exercise of power. This perspective expands the scope of research on body politics and has sparked widespread discussion about the relationship between the body and socio-political dynamics. *The Power* was awarded the Baileys Women's Prize for Fiction upon its publication, making it one of Alderman's most notable works to date.

As a feminist science fiction novel, *The Power* constructs a world that subverts traditional gender power structures. Women's bodies awaken an electric organ known as the skein, endowing them with abilities to discharge electricity akin to electric eels. This

supernatural power first manifests in adolescent girls, whose electric touch can activate the dormant skein in adult women. As this ability spreads throughout the female population, nearly all women harness this newfound power. This shift challenges patriarchal societal structures, precipitating a global gender conflict. The narrative culminates with the establishment of a matriarchal clan power structure, suggesting a transformative new social order.

*The Power* intricately explores the interconnections between atypical bodies and power politics, aiming to examine the multifaceted nature of power. Alderman's conception of power resonates with Michel Foucault's theories, which portray power as a pervasive force within social relations. Foucault posits that power is not merely possessed but is exercised through a network of relationships and social practices. Alderman creatively represents power through metaphors of trees, rivers, and lightning, emphasizing its ubiquity and relentless propagation. This representation not only enriches the symbolic dimensions of power but also deepens the reader's comprehension of its inherent characteristics. By offering a unique interpretation of the dynamics between power and the body, the novel

provides a fresh lens through which to view power relations in contemporary society.

The portrayal of women in *The Power* is diverse, reflecting a spectrum of reactions to their newfound abilities. Some women use their powers to exact revenge on past oppressors, others seek to protect and uplift their communities, while still others exploit their abilities for personal gain. This variety of responses underscores the novel's exploration of power as an inherently complex and multifaceted force. It suggests that the possession of power, regardless of gender, can lead to both positive and negative outcomes. Alderman's nuanced characterization challenges the binary opposition of good and evil, instead presenting power as a dynamic and fluid entity. Furthermore, *The Power* examines the implications of a societal shift where women hold the majority of physical power. This reversal prompts a reevaluation of gender roles and highlights the constructed nature of power dynamics. The novel suggests that societal structures are not immutable but are instead susceptible to change based on shifts in power. This theme resonates with feminist theory, which critiques the patriarchal underpinnings of social institutions and advocates for more equitable power distribution.

Alderman's use of speculative fiction allows her to explore these themes in a way that is both imaginative and provocative. The supernatural elements of the novel serve as a metaphor for real-world power dynamics, making abstract concepts more tangible for the reader. By envisioning a world where women possess a literal electric power, Alderman invites readers to consider the potential for radical social transformation and the complexities that such change would entail. Moreover, *The Power* engages with contemporary debates about gender and power, making it a relevant and timely work. The novel's exploration of power dynamics extends beyond gender to include broader questions about authority, control, and resistance. Alderman's depiction of a matriarchal society is not merely a simple inversion of patriarchy but a critical examination of power itself. The novel suggests that any concentration of power, regardless of who holds it, has the potential to corrupt and oppress.

In conclusion, *The Power* by Naomi Alderman offers a compelling exploration of the relationship between the body and power. Through its imaginative premise and rich symbolic language, the novel challenges traditional notions of gender and authority. It invites readers to reconsider the dynamics of power in contemporary society and the potential for transformative change. By highlighting the complex and multifaceted nature of power, *The Power* provides a valuable contribution to discussions of body politics and feminist theory.

### **Corporeal Power: Unveiling the Value of the Female Body in the World**

In traditional philosophy and Christianity, the body is not seen as equal to the soul or mind. According to Aristotle's theory of matter, the body is interpreted as a potential and somewhat dull material that, through the burning of its own heat, bestows tranquility and happiness on the soul. However, this dualistic thinking often limits the body to the category of a biological organism, thereby overlooking its complexity and profundity in philosophy, political science, and other dimensions, as the "lowest and most stable aspect of social relations (Howson A, 2005)." Traditional philosophy considers the body immutable, inferior to the noble and rational soul and mind. The female body, as part of nature, is viewed as passive and even sinful. However, essentialist views on sex and gender have been widely contested. Gender is constructed, unstable, and complex (Liang Y, 2015). As such views have become more widely accepted with the development of various theories, discussions about the meaning of the body have opened up, significantly challenging male dominance over women based on physiological differences. Feminist science fiction, with its rich imagination and thought experiments, serves as an ideal vehicle for exploring new meanings of body and gender issues in the new era.

In *The Power*, Naomi Alderman's speculative novel, mutated bodies grant women and girls the ability to protect themselves from male harm, particularly from sexual assault and abuse. This transformation empowers them to inflict harm on men in equally sexual and violent ways, as they now possess the extraordinary ability to control the bodies of their male counterparts. This newfound bodily empowerment subverts the traditional physical relationship between men and women, thereby altering power dynamics across political, economic, and religious spheres.

This shift in power dynamics is reflective of Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy, which posits that power is inherently rooted in the body. Nietzsche asserts that bodily power is the primary source and foundation of all power. By empowering women's bodies, Alderman's narrative aligns with Nietzsche's theory, illustrating how physical strength and control can fundamentally disrupt and reconfigure established power structures. Moreover, Alderman's exploration of bodily power extends beyond individual empowerment, suggesting broader implications for societal change. The alteration of power relations in various spheres underscores the interconnectedness of physical power with political, economic, and religious authority. This comprehensive reimagining of power dynamics serves as a provocative exploration of how shifts in bodily power can lead to a reconfiguration of societal norms and hierarchies. *The Power* offers a compelling narrative that intersects with Nietzschean philosophy, emphasizing the

primacy of bodily power in the establishment and maintenance of societal structures. Through the lens of bodily mutation and empowerment, Alderman challenges traditional power relations, proposing a transformative vision of gender and authority.

Nietzsche's phenomenology of the body presents a rich and comprehensive display of the body landscape, affirming the body's importance in three aspects. First, the body as a phenomenon is "richer, clearer, and more precise (Nietzsche W, 1910)." The body is a real existence, a robust presence. The significance of the body in the world is by no means inferior to that of the spirit, and faith in the body should prevail over faith in the spirit. In *The Power*, Ellie, by controlling the electrical current emitted by the skein, can heal others' bodies damaged by illness and control their muscles and bodies. This is considered miraculous, attracting a large following, and thus she becomes the new Eve—a messenger of the Virgin Mary in the new religion. The description of Ellie using her power is filled with a sense of sublimity: "God has touched them, and today they are reborn (Alderman N, 2017)." "They feel God is among them... calling for a new dawn in glory (Alderman N, 2017)." The "God" mentioned here is not the God of old Christianity but the God in the new religion established by Eve (formerly Ellie). Sister Veronica in the novel represents an adherent of old Christianity. She denies the power of the body, deeming the skein "evil" and "brought by the devil," forbidding the girls from displaying the power of the skein and grounding them. The dialogue in the book reflects this: "Didn't Sister Veronica realize that any one of you could open a window and climb down the drainpipe (Alderman N, 2017)?" "It's the Almighty's will that she didn't realize (Alderman N, 2017)." Sister Veronica's actions demonstrate Christianity's neglect and oppression of the body. In the new religion established by Eve, the skein is a gift from God to her followers. This new system unveils the body, emphasizing its primacy and opposing established social concepts and value orders. The body is more astonishing than the antiquated "soul," as Nietzsche said, "Believing in the body is more fundamental than believing in the spirit, for the latter is the result of unscientific observation of the body in a dying state, equivalent to believing that dreams are real (Nietzsche W, 1910)." Faith in the spirit is nomadic and blind, whereas the body provides a solid refuge for power; it is the basis of power.

Second, the body, as a robust refuge, is the prerequisite for "great health." Without the presence of the body, power is like water without a source, a tree without roots; all strength must start with the body. The body is a place where strength and various powers are displayed, and strength can manifest in multiple forms through the body. The ambitious politician Margot's psychological activity when her daughter Jocelyn activates her skein is as follows: "She felt that twist, she

felt perhaps she had always known it, it had always belonged to her. Her power was also in her hands. Her power was also waiting for her command to strike (Alderman N, 2017)." After gaining the skein, Margot's will to power becomes more vigorous, she becomes fiercer, but not reckless; rather, she expands her power in an undeniable way in the Nietzschean sense of "master," intolerant of provocation, becoming combative.

As Nietzsche posited, wherever there is a will to power, there will inevitably be conquest and reconquest, plunder and counter-plunder, leading to intense and unending struggles. Power itself is intrinsically fraught with deep contradictions, which can be understood through the lens of the master-slave dichotomy. This dichotomy is a fundamental aspect of Nietzsche's philosophy, illustrating the perpetual conflict between dominating and subjugated forces. Nietzsche's concept of the will to power suggests that all life inherently seeks to assert and enhance its influence. This assertion of power is not merely a quest for survival but a drive to impose one's will over others. Consequently, this drive results in a cyclical process of domination and subjugation. The master-slave dichotomy exemplifies this dynamic, where the "master" represents those who assert their will to power effectively, while the "slave" embodies those who are subjugated but also possess an inherent potential to resist and overturn the existing power structures. This philosophical framework underscores the inherent instability and conflict within power relations. The master-slave relationship is never static; it is a continuous process of struggle and redefinition. Each side seeks to assert its dominance, leading to a dynamic interplay of forces that perpetually shapes and reshapes societal structures.

In *The Power*, these Nietzschean themes are vividly embodied in Margot's gubernatorial campaign against her political opponent, Daniel. During the campaign, Daniel attempts to undermine Margot by questioning her motherhood, a tactic meant to provoke and destabilize her. This strategy, rooted in traditional patriarchal values, would have been effective in the past. However, Margot, now imbued with a powerful will to power and enhanced by her newfound physical abilities, can no longer tolerate such oppression. Margot's strength, amplified by her body's ability to generate electric shocks, becomes a weapon against Daniel. Her response to Daniel's provocation is not merely a personal defense but a manifestation of a broader struggle between oppressive and liberating forces. This continuous fighting and clashing align with Nietzsche's narrative of the master and slave, wherein the dynamics of power are constantly in flux, with each side vying for dominance. Margot's electrifying retaliation against Daniel symbolizes the reversal of traditional power structures. Her actions exemplify Nietzsche's idea that power dynamics are never static but are always subject to the will to power's transformative and often violent

impulses. By embodying this will to power, Margot transcends her former limitations and asserts her dominance in a previously male-dominated sphere. In conclusion, *The Power* intricately weaves Nietzschean philosophy into its narrative, particularly through the depiction of Margot's rise to power. The novel illustrates the inherent contradictions and struggles within power dynamics, echoing Nietzsche's master-slave dichotomy. Margot's journey underscores the relentless and often violent nature of the will to power, challenging traditional structures and redefining the parameters of strength and authority. This narrative not only aligns with Nietzschean thought but also provides a profound commentary on the fluid and contentious nature of power in contemporary society.

This attack should have become a political scandal, but when voters entered the polling station, "they thought, oh well, she is very powerful. She'll prove it to them." Nietzsche posits that if there are to be superhumans in the world, they must first manifest and proclaim the possibility of superhuman phenomena through a mythical body. In *The Power*, Margot's vigorous will to power embodies this Nietzschean ideal. Her seemingly omnipotent physical presence reflects the Nietzschean divinization of the body, enabling her to win the election. Margot's will to power is thus expressed and solidified through her corporeal form, leading the "slaves" to show allegiance to the will to power of the "master." This dynamic underscores Nietzsche's assertion that true power is rooted in the physical body and its ability to exert control and influence over others.

Third, the body serves as the manifestation of instinctual life. If bodily factors and their determinants solely influence the state of bodily existence, then the relationship between life and body is even more fundamental. The body inherently becomes a signifier of life. The bodily phenomena discussed by Nietzsche carry an intrinsic sense of authenticity derived from life itself. The body does not require external meaning; it possesses inherent significance, although this significance has often been obscured and forgotten. In *The Power*, Eve establishes a new religion with the body as a central totem, forging a connection among women worldwide. The more authorities condemn Eve's maternal figure as illegitimate, and the more the old church denounces her as sent by the devil, the more women are drawn to her. This dynamic underscores the body's authentic representation of life, which contrasts sharply with the seemingly false and flimsy constructs of law and religion. Women unite with unprecedented speed because the visceral reality of the body eclipses these external meanings. The novel vividly illustrates that the body, by embodying the real essence of life, clarifies women's perception of their existence. During Margot's activation of the skein, the pain she experiences—akin to electricity coursing through her body—brings her physical presence into sharp focus. This moment of acute

physical awareness triggers a profound recollection: she remembers the simplicity of childhood games, where she required no external props like guns, space helmets, or lightsabers; she only needed herself.

This emphasis on the body as the locus of power and identity aligns with Nietzschean philosophy, which posits that the body itself is the primary source of meaning and significance. Nietzsche's perspective highlights that the body, in its raw and unmediated state, holds a profound truth that external societal constructs often obscure. Alderman's portrayal of bodily power and its transformative impact on social structures exemplifies this philosophical stance. The novel suggests that reclaiming the body's innate power and significance can lead to a more authentic and unified existence, free from the artificial constraints imposed by traditional authority figures. In conclusion, *The Power* explores the profound connection between the body and life, emphasizing the body's inherent significance as a symbol of instinctual existence. By illustrating how the body can serve as a unifying and empowering force, Alderman's narrative challenges conventional power dynamics and invites readers to reconsider the foundational role of the body in shaping identity and social relations. This perspective not only aligns with Nietzschean thought but also offers a compelling critique of the ways in which external constructs can distort the true essence of human existence.

The body, as a tangible entity, a robust refuge, and the presentation of life, should be considered the solid foundation of power, a powerful driving force, and the original source of authority. Friedrich Nietzsche posits that power is, first and foremost, bodily power. However, he also acknowledges a critical paradox: power often manifests far from the body. In Naomi Alderman's *The Power*, this paradox is explored through a richly imaginative, cybernetic science fiction world that performs a thought experiment on the operation of bodily power. The novel illustrates the inseparable and essential connection between power and the body. Alderman's narrative demonstrates how the rapid establishment of new religions and political structures is rooted in this redefined bodily power. The novel depicts women gaining the ability to generate and control electricity through a physical mutation, thereby inverting traditional gender power dynamics. This bodily empowerment serves as the foundation for new societal norms and institutions, highlighting the intrinsic link between physical power and socio-political authority. Moreover, Alderman's exploration extends beyond mere power dynamics, delving into the rapid formation of new religious and political entities. This development suggests a critique of modern societal divisions and an exploration of potential bridging models. The novel's depiction of these new structures underscores the potential for bodily power to act as a unifying force in a fragmented social context. By embedding Nietzschean

concepts within a speculative framework, Alderman invites readers to reconsider the foundational role of the body in power relations. *The Power* not only aligns with Nietzsche's assertion of bodily power as the primary source of authority but also expands on this idea by demonstrating its implications in a modern, technologically advanced society. Through this lens, Alderman's work offers a profound commentary on the nature of power and its potential to reshape societal structures.

### The Interaction between Bodily Character and Socio-Political Structures

In the novel, war occupies a crucial position as a central image. In the historical process of regime change, the development trends in different fields all point to the inevitability of war breaking out, even fostering extreme militaristic tyrannies in certain regions. Some commentators believe that the novel aims to reveal that female rule is essentially no different from male rule, ultimately leading to a similar fate. This chapter aims to use Reich's political psychology as a theoretical framework, with the interaction between body character and sociopolitics as an analytical perspective, to deeply explore the deep-seated reasons for the political direction formed in the later stages of the novel, especially using the new regime established by Tatiana in Besapara as an example, analyzing the complex factors behind its brutal regime.

Wilhelm Reich posits that human character structure is divided into three distinct levels. The first level is the superficial layer, which embodies social cooperation and is not closely linked to the deeper self. This layer functions primarily in alignment with societal norms and expectations. The second level, known as the middle character layer, is entirely composed of cruel, sadistic, lecherous, greedy, and jealous impulses (Reich S, 1990). This level shares features with Freud's concept of the id, encompassing the subconscious or unconscious aspects of the psyche that concentrate the desires of the life instincts in an unrestrained state. The third and deepest level is termed the biological core. According to Reich, "in this core, under favorable social conditions, people are basically honest, diligent, cooperative, and kind animals, who will hate reasonably even when provoked (Reich S, 1990)." Reich's discussion does not isolate this deepest level of character but rather emphasizes its critical role in the energy exchange between individual character performance and sociopolitical dynamics. By linking character structure to sociopolitical phenomena, Reich effectively uses this framework to analyze and explain sociopolitical issues through the lens of character structure's existential defects. Furthermore, Reich establishes an intrinsic connection between character structure and sociopolitics, asserting that character structure not only absorbs social energy but also mirrors and reproduces the social structure of society. This bidirectional influence

implies that individual character traits are both shaped by and reflective of broader sociopolitical contexts. Reich's theory underscores the importance of understanding the interplay between personal character and societal structures to address sociopolitical problems effectively.

Reich's model offers a comprehensive approach to examining how deep-seated psychological impulses influence social behavior and political dynamics. By acknowledging the complexity of human character and its layers, Reich provides a nuanced perspective that integrates psychological theory with sociopolitical analysis. This approach allows for a more profound understanding of how intrinsic human tendencies can shape, and are shaped by, the societal and political environment. Through this lens, Reich's work contributes significantly to the discourse on the relationship between individual psychology and collective sociopolitical phenomena.

In *The Power*, most characters' ethical choices point to Reich's three levels of character, driving the formation of political models in different ways. The first level, social cooperation, is most common; Eve and Roxy have a clear cooperation model, with Roxy providing Eve with a platform for shelter and displaying power, and Roxy providing economic support for Eve's religious strength; after Tatiana is expelled from Kishinau, she absorbs the Moldovan diaspora to establish the new kingdom of Besapara; Saudi women protect male journalists, male journalists spread their revolution through the camera to the whole world, constantly expanding its influence. The second level highlights the animalistic side of humanity, mainly displayed in the chaos and war of the later stages. Male journalist Tunde gets caught in the melee, climbs up to the roof to take refuge but is then beaten and raped by women; soldiers display cruel, lecherous sides, and at the same time, they treasure wealth exceptionally. These attributes are also reflected in Margot after becoming a congresswoman; her relationship with the male journalist shifts from a cooperative relationship to a desirous gaze. Her North Star project was originally a safe space for girls, teaching them how to defend themselves; she also sent her daughter Jocelyn to this training camp, but later she only cared about how much bonus North Star could bring her, and her daughter also perished. Eve, on the other hand, can be seen to possess the third level of character structure; as an ally of Tatiana, she did not agree with the tyranny of Besapara from the beginning and eventually had to kill Tatiana as she became increasingly uncontrollable and nearly insane with animalistic tendencies. She retains a kind of original goodness, even though she suffered abuse and assault from her stepfather during her growth, she did not support Tatiana's vengeful extreme tyranny in the present.

Reich posits that the most meaningful level of character, the biological core, is fundamentally

determined by human biological characteristics as animals. Consequently, he argues that one should not harbor excessively high expectations for its capacity to achieve rationality or civilization. When the veneer of cultivation is stripped away, what emerges is not natural sociality but rather an abnormal sadistic character level. Tatiana's regime in Besapara exemplifies this notion, appearing to embody Reich's description. However, Reich's conception of abnormal sadistic character is rooted in essentialist presuppositions. In contrast, the animalistic nature exhibited by the women in Besapara is influenced by distinct sociopolitical conditions that reshape character structures. This suggests that the behaviors observed are not merely expressions of an innate sadistic tendency but are significantly shaped by the oppressive and traumatic environments these women endure. The regime in Besapara thus highlights the complex interplay between inherent biological drives and external sociopolitical forces in shaping human character. Reich's analysis provides a framework for understanding how sociopolitical contexts can influence and distort the biological core of human character. The case of Besapara demonstrates that while biological predispositions play a role, the sociopolitical environment is a crucial determinant in the manifestation of these traits. This underscores the importance of considering both innate and environmental factors when analyzing human behavior and character development.

Tatiana's behaviors are best understood not as expressions of subjectivity but as acts of revenge and imitation. This pathological character structure aligns closely with what Wilhelm Reich describes as the "brand" of the ruler's power imprinted on the bodies of ordinary people. The citizens of Besapara, primarily former Moldovan refugees, epitomize this concept. Moldova, notorious as a global hub for human trafficking, witnesses hundreds of thousands of women passing through its borders each year. "The use of their moist flesh and fragile bodies is sold here (Alderman N, 2017).", leaving an indelible mark of power on them. Reich posits that the "features" of the body subtly reveal the manifestations of dominant power in everyday life, exposing the ruling secrets embedded within societal structures. This bodily "feature," as manifested in real life, can be termed as body displacement. The phenomenon of body displacement primarily embodies two significant characteristics: firstly, the profound influence of authoritarianism on bodily representation and behavior; and secondly, the body's neglect of its fundamental properties as a biological entity. In Besapara, the pervasive impact of authoritarianism is evident in the way individuals internalize and mimic the behaviors and attitudes of their oppressors.

Tatiana's actions, therefore, are not merely personal responses but reflections of a broader social pathology where power dynamics are inscribed onto the body. This displacement underscores the loss of

individual agency and the transformation of the body into a vessel for external power structures. The neglect of the body's fundamental properties as a biological individual highlights a deeper alienation. Individuals in such contexts often disregard their intrinsic bodily needs and functions, focusing instead on conforming to the imposed power dynamics. This leads to a disconnection from one's own physicality, reinforcing the cycle of oppression and imitation. The concept of body displacement elucidates the complex interplay between power and bodily representation. Tatiana's behaviors, rooted in imitation and revenge, exemplify how authoritarian power can distort individual subjectivity and bodily integrity. Reich's analysis provides a critical framework for understanding these dynamics, revealing the intricate ways in which power imprints itself on the human body and perpetuates systemic control within society.

The influence of authoritarianism cannot be underestimated, as it occupies a significant position within social structures. This is particularly evident in the psychological framework of subordinates, such as servants or clerks, who often harbor a desire to emulate their superiors in pursuit of success and glory. This psychological tendency underscores the pervasive allure of authoritarianism and reflects individuals' profound identification with, and self-projection onto, authoritarian figures. This mechanism of self-projection is a crucial psychological process wherein individuals reshape their entire personality to align with the ideals and behaviors of the ruling class. As these individuals internalize the attributes of their superiors, they not only reinforce existing power hierarchies but also perpetuate the dominance of authoritarianism within the social fabric. By emulating the ruling class, subordinates essentially adopt a mindset that supports and sustains authoritarian structures. This phenomenon illustrates how deeply ingrained authoritarianism can become within the psyche, influencing personal identity and social dynamics. The desire to mirror one's superiors is both a testament to the power of authoritarianism and a critical factor in its perpetuation. This insight into the psychological dimensions of authoritarianism reveals its profound impact on shaping individual and collective behavior within hierarchical societies. The treatment of women in Moldova was, "They use her without law and permission, abandoning her without condemnation (Alderman N, 2017)," the power of the body is completely deprived, and they completely replicate this pattern in Besapara, which is the alienation of authoritarianism towards them. At the same time, in Besapara, the image of the new god is "intoxicated with the blood of those killed by Gali (Alderman N, 2017)," "Her name is Terror, her breath is Death (Alderman N, 2017)." Women are not brought to destruction for the purpose of life or rebirth, but are completely intoxicated by killing, which does not match the biological roots of animals.

The displacement of the body and the irrational character structure of the masses can trigger a crisis of civilization and social disaster, but Reich also believes that this “brand” or trauma on the body is not unchangeable. This requires intervention and repair of the body's displaced state in life patterns, deconstructing mysticism and its related political concepts at the living level, and repelling this overly radical tyranny through the reconstruction of real daily life structures. Roxy, after losing her skein, is no longer the warrior who “punches holes in the world”; she begins to reflect on the rules of violence and authority. She and male journalist Tunde hide in a tree, and after witnessing the soldiers' atrocities, she thus discovers her coexistence with others. As Merleau-Ponty believes, the presence of others is necessarily reflected and mirrored through my touch with others, this reflexivity is just like a mirror reflection, where my direct gaze at the mirror is also the moment the mirror feeds back the image to myself (Merleau M, 2004). Roxy, through her gaze at Tunde and other men, also confirms her own certainty and reality.

### **Idealization Tendencies Arising from the Fragility of the Body**

In this novel, the male journalist Tunde stands out as the only male character with his own perspective. By sheer chance, he becomes the first person to film women utilizing their electric shock abilities and upload the video online. This act marks the inception of a series of shocking events that ripple through the narrative. After selling the footage to a television station for five thousand dollars, Tunde opts to take a leave of absence from school and heads to the front-line to document the women's revolution and the ensuing war. His journey takes him to the most perilous locations, where he is profoundly moved by the women's pursuit of equality, while also witnessing the dark side of some women gradually losing control in the chaos of war. Tunde's experiences intertwine with those of Roxy, a character who lost her skein due to betrayal. Both Tunde and Roxy are deeply affected by power and have lost something significant. As they bear witness to the madness and brutality brought about by immense power, they develop a mutual understanding and emotional connection. The story concludes with the world erupting into war, and Roxy imagining their daughter, leaving a hope for coexistence and peace amidst the backdrop of the gender war.

Tunde's character is crafted to appear rather perfect. As a man, he braves the most dangerous battlefields to film, repeatedly facing life-threatening situations, not for money or fame, but driven by a profound empathy for those striving for equality. He positions himself at the forefront, recognizing that the world is on the brink of monumental change, yet he never considers his place in this new world. He narrowly escapes being assaulted by a woman amidst the chaos, but still endeavors to expose the conspiracy of

UrbanDox, the leader of the radical men's rights organization. Throughout the novel, other men label Tunde as a “gender traitor,” and his actions and choices indeed reflect his support for women against the backdrop of the gender war. However, Tunde's physical presence as a character is too weak, often rendering him more like an embodiment of “virtue” or some abstract concept. Consequently, when Naomi orchestrates a mutual understanding between Roxy and Tunde at the novel's end, aiming to illustrate the coexistence of men and women and leave a glimmer of peace, this setup appears unconvincing and displays an escapist idealization.

As natural, corporeal, perceptual, and objective beings, humans are constrained by natural laws and external environments. The body requires material nourishment to adapt to the environment; the senses are limited by the external world, unable to perceive all information and phenomena; and social, cultural, and moral factors influence and constrain our actions and thoughts. Simultaneously, as natural beings, humans possess natural power and vitality, which are the foundation of survival and development. These natural powers and vitality manifest not only in physiological functions but also in thinking, emotions, and will. Marx, in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, stated: “The objects of man's desire are, as it were, exist outside him independently; but these objects are necessary for him, for they are the objects of his needs, indispensable objects, essential for the manifestation and confirmation of his essential powers (Marx K, 2016).” The body bears social and temporal characteristics and needs to interact with objects. Daily practices and activities are closely associated with specific spaces. Through the body's frequent involvement, memories accumulate, emotions project, and labor is invested.

However, in Tunde's character, economic factors are greatly avoided. He has no desire for money, nor is he troubled by it, and he has no conflicts of interest with anyone. War and revolution are merely abstract images to him, even when he is physically harmed. These conflicts do not affect him, nor do they influence his ethical choices. He remains a static character. Material and cultural influences on Tunde are negligible; history leaves no mark on him, and his relationship with space is akin to that of his camera with its subjects—merely recording without close connection. Tunde's lack of physical presence leads to the absence of his objects of desire, weakening the display of his essential powers. Thus, the union of Roxy and Tunde at the novel's end appears overly idealized, not truly affecting the course of the conclusion, more like a utopian spark in the tense war atmosphere. Through analysis, it becomes evident that Tunde, as a male character, although his setting superficially demonstrates support and recognition for the women's revolution, lacks a profound realistic foundation and physical experience. His actions and

choices are driven more by morality and concepts rather than personal experience and material conditions. This unrealistic setting appears unconvincing and undermines the logic and internal tension of the story.

The novel attempts to explore coexistence and peace in the gender war through the relationship between Tunde and Roxy, but this exploration seems idealistic and unrealistic due to the thinness of Tunde's character. As a journalist, Tunde's experiences and perspective could have more deeply reflected the real aspects of war and revolution, but due to the limitations of his character setting, this reflection appears superficial and fragmented. This character setting has significant importance in the novel, but the lack of physical and realistic experiences makes his image appear thin and idealized. In the context of the gender war, through more realistic and detailed depiction, the complexity and internal tension of this character can be better demonstrated, thereby enhancing the logic and persuasiveness of the story. Tunde's character provides a unique lens through which the novel's central themes of gender dynamics and power struggles are examined. His role as a journalist allows for a narrative exploration of the media's influence in shaping public perception and the dissemination of revolutionary ideas. The decision to have Tunde as the first to capture and share the women's use of electric shock abilities serves as a narrative catalyst, igniting widespread upheaval and setting the stage for the ensuing conflict. Despite his pivotal role, Tunde's character is constructed with certain idealistic traits that distance him from the gritty reality of the situations he documents. His motivations are portrayed as altruistic, driven by a genuine concern for justice and equality rather than personal gain. This idealism, while noble, creates a disconnect between his character and the complex, often morally ambiguous world he inhabits. Tunde's lack of personal stakes—his indifference to financial gain, his absence of personal conflicts of interest—renders his character somewhat flat and unrelatable. He becomes a passive observer rather than an active participant in the revolutionary struggle he chronicles.

This passivity is further highlighted by his physical and emotional detachment from the events around him. Tunde's experiences of violence and danger do not seem to leave a lasting impact on him, which diminishes the authenticity of his character. The physical harm he endures does not translate into a deeper understanding or transformation, which would have added layers to his persona and provided a more nuanced portrayal of his journey. Instead, Tunde remains largely unaffected, a static figure whose actions are dictated more by narrative necessity than by organic character development (Feng L, 2023). The relationship between Tunde and Roxy is central to the novel's exploration of gender dynamics and power. Both characters are victims of power's corrupting influence, yet their responses to

this victimization are markedly different. Roxy's loss of her skin and subsequent emotional turmoil provide a stark contrast to Tunde's more detached, observational stance. The mutual understanding and emotional connection they develop are significant, suggesting a possibility for reconciliation and coexistence between genders. However, this relationship, while symbolically potent, lacks the depth and realism needed to fully convince the reader of its plausibility. The novel's ending, which sees Roxy imagining a future daughter and a hope for peace, is imbued with utopian idealism that feels unearned given the preceding narrative's focus on conflict and division.

Marx's assertion that “the objects of man's desire are, as it were, exist outside him independently; but these objects are necessary for him, for they are the objects of his needs, indispensable objects, essential for the manifestation and confirmation of his essential powers (Marx *K et al.*, 1975)” resonates with the thematic underpinnings of the novel. Tunde's lack of desire for material gain or personal power contrasts sharply with this idea, underscoring the inadequacy of his character's portrayal. His existence within the narrative does not fully embody the natural, corporeal, and perceptual characteristics that define human experience. Instead, he operates more as a narrative device—a lens through which the story unfolds—rather than as a fully realized individual (Gabilondo J, 1995).

The novel's attempt to depict a post-gender war society through Tunde and Roxy's relationship is ambitious but ultimately falls short. The idealistic portrayal of their connection, devoid of significant conflict or realistic challenges, undermines the narrative's credibility. A more grounded and complex depiction of their relationship, one that acknowledges the inherent difficulties and compromises involved in bridging deeply entrenched gender divides, would have provided a more compelling and resonant conclusion. Tunde's character in the novel serves as a crucial narrative pivot, yet his portrayal is hindered by a lack of realistic depth and personal stakes. The idealistic motivations and detached presence diminish the impact of the story's exploration of gender dynamics and power struggles (Rui L, 2022). The relationship between Tunde and Roxy, while symbolically rich, needs greater complexity and realism to convincingly support the novel's themes. Through a more nuanced and detailed characterization, the novel could better convey the intricacies of its central conflict and enhance the overall persuasiveness of its narrative.

## CONCLUSION

*The Power* is a contemporary science fiction novel that centers on women, using divergent bodies as a starting point to construct images of both strong and weak bodies. In this novel, women's representations are diverse, and the power dynamics shift continuously with

the mutation of bodies. Women with divergent bodies have constructed a matriarchal society that, on the surface, appears as an inverted patriarchy. Consequently, many commentators argue that the novel suggests a world ruled by women is not necessarily better than one ruled by men. This paper examines the body as a research object, aiming to highlight that the relationship between power and individuals is a more complex, mutually influencing dynamic process.

There are no fixed methods to solve power issues. Science and technology enrich the range of potential solutions, but they are neither the only nor the permanently effective methods. Power issues cannot be resolved once and for all; instead, they require continuous adaptation and innovation. The concept of cyborgs represents a hopeful new entry point. As a speculative fiction novel, "The Power" indicates new possibilities for the future, but it also acknowledges that new problems will arise alongside these possibilities. Addressing these new challenges requires a future politics of power that embraces a coexistent way of thinking, linking both genders, humans and non-humans, science and nature, to form a harmonious community of life.

The novel's portrayal of power dynamics through the lens of gender and body mutations serves as a critical examination of societal structures. By depicting women with extraordinary abilities that alter the traditional power hierarchy, "The Power" challenges the reader to reconsider preconceived notions of gender and authority. The matriarchal society presented in the novel does not offer a utopian vision but rather a critique of power itself, suggesting that the possession of power, regardless of gender, can lead to corruption and abuse.

This thematic exploration aligns with Foucault's theory of power as a pervasive force that exists within all social relations. Power is not merely possessed but is enacted through various practices, discourses, and institutions. *The Power* illustrates this by showing how the women's newfound abilities disrupt existing power structures and create new forms of dominance and subjugation. The novel emphasizes that power dynamics are fluid and contingent, shaped by the interactions between bodies, technologies, and social norms.

Moreover, the novel's speculative elements underscore the potential of science and technology to transform society. The women's ability to generate electrical power represents a form of bio-technology that radically alters human capabilities. This transformation raises ethical and philosophical questions about the role of technology in shaping human identity and social relations. As Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto" suggests, the boundary between human and machine is increasingly blurred, leading to new forms of existence and interaction (Haraway D, 2013). *The Power* extends

this idea by imagining a future where technological enhancements lead to new social configurations and challenges.

However, the novel also cautions against the uncritical embrace of technological solutions to social problems. The creation of a matriarchal society with its own hierarchies and injustices reveals that technology alone cannot resolve fundamental issues of power and inequality (Ting H, 2015). Instead, a more nuanced approach is necessary, one that considers the ethical implications and potential consequences of technological advancements. In this context, the concept of a harmonious community of life becomes particularly relevant. Such a community would integrate diverse perspectives and practices, fostering cooperation and coexistence between different genders, species, and technological entities. This vision aligns with ecofeminist and posthumanist theories that advocate for a more inclusive and interconnected understanding of life. By bridging the gap between science and nature, and between humans and non-humans, a harmonious community of life seeks to create sustainable and equitable forms of existence.

In conclusion, *The Power* offers a rich and complex exploration of power dynamics through its depiction of women with divergent bodies and extraordinary abilities. The novel challenges traditional notions of gender and authority, suggesting that power is a fluid and contingent force that shapes and is shaped by social relations. While science and technology provide new possibilities for the future, they also introduce new challenges that require a coexistent way of thinking. By embracing a holistic approach that integrates diverse perspectives and practices, we can work towards a harmonious community of life that fosters cooperation and coexistence. *The Power* thus serves as a speculative blueprint for imagining a future where power dynamics are more equitable and inclusive.

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