

Freeman's: The Best New Writing on Power

John Freeman

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John Freeman, the former editor of *Granta*, edited this collection on power. Its stories and poems are astonishing in their global breadth, featuring chilling and vivid perspectives on brutal and sublime assertions of power in life around the globe.

From the six shorts that begin the book to Barry Lopez's "Fourteen Aspects of Power," harsh wisdom is delivered through florid storytelling and compelling details. The poems "A Note on 'Penelope' & 'Rereading the Classics'" and "Update on Werewolves" both offer feminist readings of power through the lenses of mythology and lore. "On Sharks and Suicide" explores the psychological urge toward self-destruction, including the constant juxtaposition of feeling trapped and having the power to free oneself.

The connecting thread is a microscopic analysis of where power comes from—those micromoments when something shifts and someone gains the upper hand. The female fighters in Sri Lanka detailed in "Captive," for example, turn the expected narrative of being captured and "forced" to fight into their own perspective on the freedom of their people. Every narrative defies the audience's expectations of one kind of power, always sliding in a new layer of complication and detail. The result is an awe-inspiring, diverse, and absorbing collection.

The essays and stories are, perhaps of necessity, rather dark—examining the impact of deprivation and poverty in "The Cottage" and the brutality of forced migration as a refugee in "Glass Cannon." There are moments of mild humor among the gritty details, however, in stories like "The Nastybook Wars," where perfectly described characters are examined against the grinding life of farm workers. The end result is an arresting compilation that prompts careful thought about the hidden politics of many otherwise everyday occurrences.

LAURA LEAVITT (November/December 2018)

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