



## Myra Breckinridge/Myron

*Gore Vidal*

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## **Myra Breckinridge/Myron** Gore Vidal

No one remains untouched by the luscious Myra Breckinridge's quest for Hollywood fame. Her job teaching Empathy and Posture at the Academy of Drama and Modeling gives her the perfect opportunity to vamp, scheme, and seduce her way into the undiscovered lives and passions of others - while trying to keep a few secrets of her own. In the sequel, "Myron, " the Breckinridge saga takes and increasingy bizarre turn. Myron seems to be an inconspicuous man with a sweet wife and a Chinese catering business, and Myra - still determined to become a megastar - wages an outrageous battle for hormonal supremacy over the body she shares with Myron. Gore Vidal leads us through the move-star world of the fabulous forties as Myra attempts to alter cinema history.

## **Myra Breckinridge/Myron Details**

Date : Published September 1st 1997 by Penguin Classics (first published 1968)

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Author : Gore Vidal

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## From Reader Review Myra Breckinridge/Myron for online ebook

### Scott Rhee says

Gore Vidal's satirical novel, "Myra Breckenridge" was, at one point, shocking. That it is no longer shocking--and, in fact, so ridiculously un-shocking as to be a soap opera cliche---is a testament to how much society's views have changed on the book's primary subject matter.

Ostensibly, the book is about a lot of things. Vidal was a humorous and caustic social critic who, like some of his more relevant contemporaries (Kurt Vonnegut, Norman Mailer, Philip Roth), explored the inanity of the times (primarily the '60s and early-'70s) through a surrealist lens. "Myra Breckenridge" lambastes Hollywood, the Republican Party, and feminism, but the primary focus of his ire is on society's gender roles and sexuality in general.

"Myra" was written in 1968, during a time of great social change. It was, in fact, the start of what has been called the Sexual Revolution. Taboos were being destroyed. What was once considered "perverse" or "sexual deviance", and once found only in the underground, was getting mainstream attention. The general public was becoming more aware, if not more accepting, of issues that no one ever spoke about in good company.

Vidal, a bisexual who was not afraid to admit to his bisexuality during a time in which such things were, in some states, actually considered crimes, paved the way for more openly-gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered writers and artists with his depiction of a man named Myron Breckenridge who undergoes a sex change operation to become Myra Breckenridge, a beautiful but conniving seductress bent on destroying social mores and traditional gender roles.

The plot "twist" happens late in the book, and, when the book was originally published, I'm sure that it was shocking to conservative readers. It is, however, not much of a plot twist anymore, considering how well-known the book is in contemporary American literature. Yet even to those readers not familiar with the book, reading it for the first time, the twist should not be much of a surprise or a shock. Indeed, the twist has ironically been usurped and re-used countless times in movies and TV shows---especially soap operas---as to have become laughable.

Still, "Myra Breckenridge" has the distinction of being the first to use it, which makes it a significant---if somewhat dubious---achievement.

By today's standards, the book is almost silly. Vidal's characters are more blatant stereotypes and cardboard cut-outs used as targets than actual two-dimensional people. There is also a disturbing cruelty within the book, culminating in a violent rape scene that almost seems to be played for laughs. Perhaps it is because it is a rape of a big, brawny he-man by a diminutive transsexual: an image that may have been considered so ridiculous as to be unbelievable by '60s audiences. There is, however, nothing ever funny about rape.

Up until that scene, the book was a humorous---and harmless---satire. The scene, unfortunately, taints the remainder of the book.

It is Vidal's lesser-known but, in my opinion, much more entertaining 1974 sequel, "Myron" that Vidal's strengths as a witty social critic shine.

In "Myron", Myra no longer exists. She has been eliminated via rigorous psychotherapeutic sessions and numerous surgeries. (Gone are her now-famous breasts, and doctors have "recreated" Myron's well-endowed penis using fatty tissue from his thigh.) He is living happily in a modest upper-middle-class suburban home with his beautiful wife, Mary Ann. While he is unable to have children, of course, it is a small price to pay for finally getting rid of that evil alter-ego.

One night, while watching a Late Show presentation of a classic 1948 (fictional) film called "Siren of Babylon" starring Maria Montez, Myron is inexplicably "pushed" into the TV and enters the set of the film.

Stuck in 1948 Hollywood and unable to get back to his home in 1972, Myron must make the best of his situation. Unfortunately, Myra has returned, popping up at the most inopportune times.

"Myron" is a surrealist time travel "Jeckyll and Hyde" fantasy story that pokes gleeful fun at Nixonian era politics (Watergate has just broke, and Myron, an ardent Nixon supporter, knows that Nixon had absolutely nothing to do with it), American consumerism, and the cult of celebrityhood.

Myra has a plan to change history by infiltrating the film "Siren of Babylon" to subtly make changes that would alter viewers perspectives and usher in an era of complete sexual freedom by the 1960s. Myron, of course, catches on to the plan and must do everything in his power to stop her and her polymorphous perversity.

I liked "Myron" much better than "Myra Breckenridge" if only because it was a shorter, tighter novel and Vidal had learned to loosen the reins of his social outrage slightly in the six years between the novels.

It says a lot that both novels seem relatively quaint and almost infantile by today's standards, especially given the subject matter. We, as a society, have come a long way in terms of our awareness and acceptance of homosexuality, bisexuality, and transgenderism.

Clearly, Myra's plan succeeded...

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### **Imogen says**

I will give you one star because your prose is so delightfully bitchy, Gore Vidal- especially the introduction, told from the point of view of "Gore Vidal"- but no more because this book is *bad* stupid. Like, okay, sure, dumb fluff, sixties queerness, obsessing about the movies of the forties because you're a silly two-dimensional cartoon, all that stuff is great. But, just as you get to write about trans women without doing any research (and therefore just make stuff up, like 'estrogen impedes healing' and 'estrogen kills beards'), I get to call you on it. AND the thing with the mind-blowing disclosure that the protagonist is trans? It was boring the first time (even though, okay, Myra Breckinridge might actually have been the first time). Also rape isn't funny.

You know what is funny though? I am three songs into it and the new trail of dead album is *good*. I had given up on those guys, written them off as bar-owning hipsters more interested in navel-gazing and hiring violinists than in actually making the awesome screamy rocknroll they used to when I used to love them, but this record (the century of self) is- not a return to form, exactly, but at least it is loud and there is yelling.

Well look: there is no goodreads for records, except, like, amazon, and fuck amazon.

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## MJ Nicholls says

**Myra Breckinridge (1968)** is a scabrous genderbender satire about an untouchable woman(?) out to claim her fortune from a sleazy Hollywood mogul. If you're familiar with Gore Vidal's haughtiness from one of his incalculable TV appearances it might take a moment to settle into this female(?) voice, but once the farcical frolics begin the novel is heap-good-fun. Among the more notorious scenes are Myra's dildo rape of male chauvinist Rusty, and her failure to achieve Sapphic congress with the defiantly heterosexual Mary-Ann. Seen here in the appalling film version with the perfectly cast Raquel Welch. This book is notable also for Vidal's use of *nouveau roman* S-o-C in the mogul's narrative—his opinion on the French avant-garde was famously low, so what gives, Gore? Five stars. **Myron (1974)** is the patchy, semi-sci-fi sequel where Myron (the male Myra) is sucked back onto the set of *Siren of Babylon*, a fictional 1948 movie where his alter-ego Myra wrestles for domination of his/her body, like Michael Caine in *Dressed to Kill* but with castration instead of murder. Not for the squeamish this one. And largely incoherent, so not for anyone at all, really. Three stars.

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## Kat says

Myra Breckinridge is one Sick Twist. I found this book shocking...and I am not easily shocked. Myra is a trannie, a sadist, a revolutionary and completely nuts.

However, Vidal's 1968 title character cannot be classified with most of the one-dimensional psycho transgender characters so common in our cultural production (Dressed to Kill, Sleepaway Camp and Silence of the Lambs to name a few). Myra believes that all human relations are based on "the desire in each of us to exercise absolute power over others." Her quest is to become an "all powerful user of men." Though her methods are brutal, her fierceness is admirable and her biting social commentary is astounding.

Gore Vidal's writing is groundbreaking stuff. Beyond the explicit explorations of sex and power, he also slips in passages like the following:

"the good drive cars that fill the air with the foul odor of burning fossils, and so day by day our lungs fill up with the stuff of great ferns and dinosaurs who thus revenge themselves upon their successors, causing us to wither and die prematurely, as did they."

I recommend this book with the following warning

\*\*\*SPOILER\*\*\*

that it contains a long and detailed non-consensual sex scene

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## **Damon Suede says**

One of the most delicious, camp meditations on American pop culture ever committed to print. Gore Vidal has written a comedy of bad manners to rival Sheridan and Wilde.

Pointedly vulgar, deliriously savvy, this novel knows exactly what it wants to do from its first moments. The first-person narrator announces the death of metaphor early on and then relates the entire lurid saga sticking to those ideological guns. Hilarious and brilliant and exactly right for the character and the world depicted.

What's fascinating to me is that MYRON is actually the more "dazzling" of the two novels, and yet it is the earlier book that gets all the attention. No matter...

It is rude? Yes. Is it cruel. You'd better believe it. Is it funny? You will blow soda out your nose if you aren't careful about shtick-timing. Vidal's prose, characters, and setting have the kind of lunatic precision of *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* and more than a little of its libertine excesses.

Highly recommended to anyone with a sense of history and a sense of humor.

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## **Jackie says**

Laugh-out-loud funny. Shocking, vulgar, bawdy. Initially found it intriguing because no, had never read anything like this before. Found Gore Vidal to be clever and initially it held my interest -- picked the book up simply because I wanted to see what Vidal was all about as a esteemed writer of our time. While initially I felt that this was a 4-star work, I definitely dinged it for "the scene" toward the end with Rusty and Myra. Since I don't want a spoiler here, not going to elaborate.....but if you have read this, you definitely know what "the scene" is. It was traumatic and after that point, the humor was lost on me. Front end of the book felt light and fun: "When we arrived at the house, the door was opened by Clem, who wore nothing but glasses and a large door key on a chain about his neck. He is extremely hairy, which I don't like, and though he did not have an erection and so could not be fairly judged, his prick is small and rather dimpled-looking as if too many people had chewed on it..." Back end, however, just felt kind of perverted and heavy and dark (I don't think I am particularly prudish, either, but perhaps so and I am showing my stripes -- I have not read Jerzy Kosinski in many years, but loved his work...isn't he weird too? He never made me feel crappy...). Anyway, in the end I kind of checked out -- was disengaged, skimming, waiting for it to end. So, now I have read a Gore Vidal book. Check.

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## **Alex says**

Not the second one, that one's not supposed to be any good. Just the first one.

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## **Andy says**

Bah, humbug. Everybody loves this book, and all I see is an uptight Cape Cod queen getting jealous after reading "Naked Lunch" and thinking "I can write like that!" Well, you can't Miss Gore. I'll stick to watching

Raquel Welch tramp around in her foxy flag outfit.

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## Orion says

Today author Gore Vidal is mostly known for his *Narratives of Empire* series of seven novels on American history published between 1967 and 2000. These books (*Burr*, *Lincoln*, *1876*, *Empire*, *Hollywood*, *Washington, D.C.*, and *The Golden Age*) tell the history of the American Empire through the lives of two fictional families and their interactions with real figures in American history. Few recall the critical uproar caused by his 1948 novel *The City and the Pillar* that dealt frankly with male homosexuality. And while many recall *Myra Breckinridge*, it is usually the 1970 film (often listed as one of the worst films ever made), not Vidal's 1968 best-selling novel, that people remember. The 1974 sequel *Myron* is largely forgotten.

*Myra Breckinridge* and its sequel *Myron* are two novels that were very much a product of their times, the Sexual Revolution of the late 1960s. In his 1993 Introduction to this volume combining the two, Vidal quotes poet Thom Gunn as saying "These two books [are] the twentieth-century equivalents of *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*." They form part of a series of completely fictional novels that Vidal calls his satirical inventions, that also include *Messiah*, *Kalki*, and *Duluth*. In the 2014 biographical documentary *Gore Vidal: The United States of Amnesia* Vidal says of the novel: "When I start an entirely invented book like *Myra*, I seldom start with anything more than a sentence that has taken possession of me. In this case, 'I am Myra Breckenridge whom no man will ever possess.' Who was she? I could only find out if I kept on writing. It was not until I was half way through the story that I realized that she had been a male who changed his sex."

Told as a series of entries in a therapy journal kept by Myra for her analyst and doctor, the novel tells the story of her arriving in Hollywood to meet retired film star "Buck" Loner who now runs the Academy of Drama and Modeling on the fifty acres of land that once held his father's orange groves. Myra claims to be his nephew Myron's widow. She tells Buck that his sister, her mother-in-law Gertrude, always told her and Myron that her father's property was left jointly to her and Buck, and that she passed on the rights to her half to Myron and Myra. Myron was a film critic who studied the films of the 1930s and 40s. Myra tells Buck that Myron fell off the Staten Island Ferry and drowned. When Buck offers Myra a job teaching at the Academy as their lawyers work out the details of the inheritance, the plot is set for the novel.

I was surprised at how much of this novel is about film theory and criticism. Myra's stated goal in the novel is to finish writing Myron's book *Parker Tyler and the Films of the Forties; or, the Transcendental Pantheon*. I had to look up Parker Tyler who it turns out was a New York film critic who wrote on gay and underground films from the mid-40s to the mid-70s when he died. Throughout the book Myra exhibits an encyclopedic knowledge of the films of the first half of the 20th century. So while this book is one of the earliest novels about a transgender character, it is not really written to provide insight into the concerns and problems of a transgender person, which often disappoints its audience. Both these books are social satires on sexuality that explore Vidal's belief that people are basically bisexual and that gender roles and sexual orientation are social constructs established by societal norms.

If *Myra Breckinridge* is a satire on social norms with Myra as a modern Alice visiting a Hollywood wonderland, the second book *Myron* is a *Through the Looking Glass* time travel sci-fi satire where Myron, now happily married and living in the suburbs, falls through the screen of his television one night while watching the 1948 MGM movie *Siren of Babylon* starring Maria Montez. He lands on the set of the film in

production just at the scene he was watching, and is trapped in the Hollywood past with a group of other viewers who seem to stumble through the screen each time the film is aired on TV. The actors on the set cannot see these visitors from the future, but once Myron leaves the set, the local people outside the studio and across the street at the neighborhood hotel can see the people they call out of towners who have taken up residence there. Here Myron starts to struggle with his alter personality Myra for control of their body with comic effect. The locals and the other out of towners are left wondering at this strange person with dual gendered personalities. While Myron seeks to get back to his wife and life in the suburbs, Myra wants to save MGM at this crucial point in their history and recreate a golden age of film. She also has a plan to save the world from overpopulation that is unique. I find the time travel paradoxes handled quite well by the author. The two books together like this in a single volume make for great reading. They have inspired me to take a look at other of Vidal's satirical invention novels.

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### **Brooke says**

Another old blog...

I recently finished reading Gore Vidal's *Myra Breckenridge* and the sequel, *Myron*. I don't really know what more to say about this book other than it was about a freakin' SCHIZOPHRENIC TRANSEXUAL! It was pretty funny, in its own way, but is also kind of intimidating in its discussions of sexual power over others, and the things some (psychotic) people will do to attain that power. *Myra Breckenridge* was written entirely from the perspective of post-sex-change Myra (formerly Myron), who is posing as Myron's widow and teaches Posture and Empathy classes at an acting school in Hollywood. The sequel, *Myron*, is written after the sex change has been reversed, and Myron is the dominant personality...but not for long! The story gets incredibly insane, with the characters being sucked into the set of *Siren of Babylon* through the TV, suddenly going back in time from 1973 to 1948, Myra's favorite year for film. During the entire book, Myron and Myra struggle for control of their body, with ridiculous hijinks and strange happenings...not to mention dirty molestations of young "studs" and shocking sexual appetites.

For being a random pick off the shelf, this book was truly entertaining. Also, as I was mentioning the book to other people, many of them had heard of it. I hadn't heard of it, unfortunately, so I didn't get to sound smart and knowing about how well-known the book is....but that's ok. Now I know. It is well-known because it was so controversial at the time it was published (1969) and, for that matter, probably still is.

However, although it was funny and strangely intriguing, I also found it depressing at points. I suppose the hopeless romantic in me found it depressing to think of all sexual acts as vehicles for power and possession.... Also, the extreme amount of detail and planning that went into Myra's "destruction" of a young man by violating him when he was most vulnerable, was rather sickening. She was cold and power-hungry, and on a psychotic mission to revolutionize the patriarchal power of men, and at the same time, reduce world population and become a hero. The whole thing, although sick, is really hilarious in its very preposterousness. You just can't believe that any person, even a schizophrenic transsexual, would think that she/he alone could overthrow patriarchy and stop people from making babies.

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### **Jesse says**

I have no idea how this would read to somebody not familiar with classic Hollywood cinema (for as it is

cheekily reiterated on several occasions: "*in the decade between 1935 and 1945, no irrelevant film was made in the United States*", emphasis NOT mine), if only because so much of the razor-sharp humor is wrapped up in knowing things like the ridiculous plot of *The Seventh Veil* or the absurdity of offhandedly proclaiming *Since You Went Away* a masterpiece or the humor in finding "the curve to the masculine buttocks" of Tim Holt's character in *The Magnificent Ambersons* as "entirely attractive," etc, etc, etc.

But judging from many of the comments here that's not essential to enjoying the bewildering, campy fun of Vidal's satire, which slyly skewers everything from SoCal culture to East Coast intellectualism to psychology to film to television to pop culture via the supremely self-confident, blithely insular observations of the self-created titular character. Unfortunately the narrative is such a delicately-balanced confection that it can't sustain itself, and after the truly surreal "conquest" of Rusty I found each chapter less interesting than the succeeding one (and I couldn't help but be severely let down by the story's conclusion), but I found myself tittering ridiculously so often in public that I had to finally make the decision to read the novel only in the privacy of my own home...

*"Myra Breckinridge is a dish, and never forget it, you motherfuckers, as the children say nowadays."*

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### **Robert Zoltan says**

Two of the greatest satires ever written. Two of my favorite books of all time. I was reading a book by a current best-selling comedic author. I was in a state of un-grippedness. Read like a book being written in preparation for getting optioned as a movie (no style, which is very popular nowadays). I picked up *Myra Breckenridge* and read the first chapter (two pages long). I laughed out loud and was in awe. THIS IS WRITING.

Vidal is one of the greatest writers ever. One of my personal heroes.

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### **Sue says**

I remember hearing all of the uproar over this book when I was young but this was the first time that I had read it. Maybe I would have liked it better years ago but now I just don't see the appeal. I'd always heard that it was a sophisticated, witty novel. All I read was a story that was very antagonistic toward transgenders and (here comes a spoiler so if you don't want to know, please stop reading) I also can't get over the rape scene. I'm certainly no prude, but the fact that a teacher tortured and raped a student who trusted her just isn't my idea of good literature.

Sorry but I can't recommend this book.

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### **Will says**

I have to think that Gore Vidal's so-called "hyperreal" novels are only taken seriously because of his stature as an essayist (and reputation as a socialite). Thin plot, uneven pace, underwritten style, dated Hollywood references, flat characters, eccentric names: these novels are just Pynchon imitations gone wrong. *Myra* at least has its moments (all of which are near its beginning), but it spends 150 pages starting the book, then 60

pages trying to end it as quickly as possible: there's plenty exposition, a little resolution, but no rising and falling action, and the climax takes place within a subplot. *Myron* is hopeless. There's actually a character named Mr. Telemachus (even worse than *Myra*'s rock band, the Four Skins).

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## **Mark says**

Very daring in its day, this satire remains hilarious and thought provoking. Anais Nin, one of Vidal's lovers, was an inspiration for the grandiose voice of *Myra* while the perverse sophistication is the author's own. While these two books enabled many of us to cast aside our Sky God inhibitions the same prudes and hypocrites remain in charge. Well, they can't stop us being consensual adults in private or preventing the twenty year fetish club debauch I managed while, er, researching my own books. (Now deader than Cro-Magnon man.)

The maddest people I met, and briefly became, were those like *Myron/Myra* on the transgender spectrum (they'd probably want to dispute that term. And anything else you could think of.). S/he doesn't disappoint when it comes to howling at the moon although s/he's also wise and witty.

Good to see pretentious French film theory getting a well deserved ribbing but the major pleasure is *Myra*'s acid putdowns and worldly wise sensuality, some of it hot enough for erotica. And to think the Al Grauniad's Mark Lawson considered Vidal not as great as mega bores Phillip Roth or Saul Bellow. Gore Vidal covered more ground in more genres than any of the Great American Novel droners. While also succeeding in the theatre, Hollywood, television and as a genuine pre-trash celebrity.

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