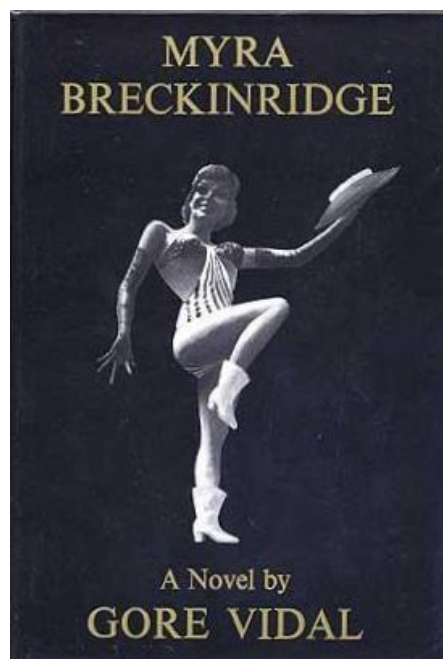




Myra Breckinridge

Gore Vidal

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Myra Breckinridge Gore Vidal

Determined to reinvent himself and explore new territory in his work, Gore Vidal published a provocative satirical work destined to be on a collision course with social conventions in 1968. Written as a diary, Myra Breckinridge, someone determined not to be possessed by any man, recounts her day as she lives it out in the Hollywood of the '60s. Feminism, transsexuality, and a host of cinematic jokes abound.

Myra Breckinridge Details

Date : Published 1968 by Little, Brown & Company

ISBN : 9781125979488

Author : Gore Vidal

Format : Hardcover 264 pages

Genre : Fiction, Humor

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From Reader Review Myra Breckinridge for online ebook

mwpm says

"The novel being dead, there is no point to writing made up stories. Look at the French who will not and the Americans who cannot. Look at me who ought not, if only because I exist entirely outside the usual human experience..."

- pg. 2

Fede says

Let's face it: sometimes we all feel the physical need to behave like dirty bastards and say something terrible. In those moments, the dark spell of Bad Taste becomes irresistible and we are able to burst out laughing in a fancy restaurant, catching the attention of as many people as possible, and spout:

"Hey, guys: a nigger, a kike and a wop meet in the changing room of a massage parlor. The nigger pulls down his pants and the wop says ..."

It's a compulsion, something we (usually) do among friends and possibly not in public places... where niggers, kikes and my fellow wops would lynch us right away.

Why are we so base? Why do we feel the compulsive need to be so sordid?

Because it's liberating. Because we escape the prison of social convention and we get rid of the daily burden of being absolutely nice and clean and polite and smiling. Because we declare to the world that we aren't racist, antisemitic, homophobic, Ku Klux Klan sympathizers precisely because we're still able to tell a stupid joke and laugh of its (our own) stupidity.

Well, whenever I feel like this and have no CEO willing to spend the night in a fancy restaurant with me, I read "Myra Breckinridge" by Gore Vidal. It always works, folks. Trust me.

"Myra Breckinridge" is the literary triumph of Sleaze; it's the celebration and the most ferocious satire of pop-culture to date. Written in 1968, this shamefully underrated novel hasn't lost its hilarious, outrageous, scandalous wit. It's the ultimate reaction to the hypocrisy of any 'politically correct' diktat, that farcical form of respect our society cunningly came up with to cover its own sense of guilt.

It's the story of Myra, the sexy widow of Myron, who comes to Los Angeles to take possession of his mysteriously deceased husband's inheritance: part of the famous Academy run by uncle Buck, a school for wannabe actors, singers, dancers... a real goldmine for Buck, who couldn't care less about his starry-eyed pupils' career. He finds a perfect match in Myra, ruthlessly determined to rob him of the whole estate. Myra is hardly an unreliable narrator: her mind is cold like ice and sharp as a razor. She describes the human fauna crawling in the Academy, hopelessly dreaming of a bright future as movie stars and pop singers; she tells the reader about her absolute despise for these youngsters and the American culture of the 60s.

In fact her whole being is modeled after the great Hollywood stars of the decade 1935-45, the golden age of Garbo, Gable, Dietrich, Bogart, Marilyn & Liz Taylor; her encyclopedic knowledge of the film industry allows her to assume any possible identity through her chameleon attitude, so that any word, move, thought is part of a script she keeps on writing in her mind.

Myra has a more personal mission to accomplish, too: she wants to save mankind from extinction by destroying the traditional notion of sexual identity. Myra aims to create the new American Male, free from any sense of duty toward the old concept of manhood: reproduction, aggressive sexuality, predatory behaviour etc... this would be the only way to prevent the disasters caused by the increasing population all over the world (and revenge her allegedly bisexual husband after a life of frustrated desire). Of course she will start this evolutionist project in her own way... but I must hold my tongue now.

It's obviously a parody of the cheap psychology of those years, when theories and schools of any sort were proliferating to the point of becoming part of the popular culture of TV shows and illustrated magazines. Vidal is also deeply concerned about overpopulation and environmental matters that were hardly a priority in the late 60s.

Anyway, Buck finds out there's something wrong in Myra's story: was she really his nephew's wife? Is Myron really dead? Who is this woman come out of the blue to steal his money and destroy his career? When his lawyers are ready to strike, Myra will finally show her true identity... and shock the readers with the most simple revelation.
How come we didn't figure it out before ?!

We can't even say she's been lying all the time: who said she was a woman, after all?

As usual, Vidal's satire doesn't spare anybody. I mean, the protagonist of this novel is an evil transsexual who's determined to change the world by imposing his/her views on sexuality and Hollywood industry! Not your average villain, huh?

And yet, his sense of humour is not offensive at all. The American novelist and essayist was a homosexual born in Westpoint Academy, where his father was a flight instructor; he had a successful career both in literature and politics (as a Democrat); he wrote many excellent essays on the political failures of the USA and some incredibly modern novels, such as "Messiah" and "Kalki", about deranged religion and mass media. I can hardly imagine how anybody could ever feel offended by the way he ridiculed any prejudice and intolerance hidden behind the thin veil of our hypocritical freedom.

Only a bad conscience can't laugh of itself once in a while, a liberating burst of laughter that won't save the world but can't certainly make it worse than it already is.

Orsodimondo says

HOLLYWOOD QUEEN

Raquel Welch in tutto il suo splendore.

Che il grande paese, il Nuovo Mondo, avesse perso la sua innocenza, nel 1968, il fatidico anno in cui uscì questo romanzo, era un fatto già emerso, anche noto: ma che l'eroe a stelle e strisce potesse incarnarsi in un transessuale!

Il celebre capitolo 29.

Gore Vidal si chiamava in effetti Gore di cognome, una famiglia della buonissima società, imparentata coi Kennedy, fedeli al partito democratico fino al midollo. Omosessuale precursore di qualsiasi outing, ha vissuto a lungo in Italia, molto a Ravello (il recente biopic di Netflix è saltato per le note vicende legate al suo protagonista Kevin Spacey), ma all'epoca di questo romanzo scandalo abitava a Roma, in un superattico di Largo di Torre Argentina, insieme al compagno Howard.

Era il giugno del 1968: gli ci volle un solo mese per scrivere questo romanzo, il suo migliore, il suo più celebre, che cinquanta anni dopo ancora grida urla scalpita e strepita contro i benpensanti, diverte, illumina, fa ridere, è uno spasso.

Raquel Welch qui con Roger Herren che impersona Rusty: fu l'inizio e la fine della sua brevissima carriera.

La trama è tutto meno che semplice da riassumere, ha svolte e giravolte. Mi appoggio alla corrispondente pagina Wikipedia per una sintesi molto sintetica:

Il libro racconta la vicenda di Myron Breckinridge il quale, dopo un'operazione di cambiamento di sesso, diventa l'affascinante Myra. Giunto a Hollywood si presenta alla scuola di recitazione di suo zio, fingendosi la vedova di sé stesso, per ottenere in tal modo l'eredità che gli spetta. Il suo obiettivo, giunto nella "capitale" del cinema, è quello di distruggere il mito del "maschio americano".

Il progetto di Myron->Myra->Myron come enunciato dallo stesso Vidal era:

la distruzione delle ultime tracce residue nella razza della virilità tradizionale allo scopo di riallineare i sessi, riducendo così la popolazione mentre si aumenta la felicità umana e si prepara l'umanità per il suo stadio successivo.

Nel cast del film anche John Huston, primo a sinistra, e Mae West, al centro della foto.

Un uomo che diventa una donna *che nessun uomo possederà mai*, che dopo essere ritornato uomo, asessuato e felice, sposa una donna solo etero.

Nella scuola di recitazione, Myra diventa insegnante di Portamento ed Empatia (!!), finendo per irretire sia un giovane aiutante aspirante attore, Rusty, sia la di lui dolce fidanzata.

Vidal era già noto per la sua lingua tagliente stizzoso provocatoria (che non lo faceva amare da quell'altra lingua tagliente stizzosa e provocatoria di Truman Capote): il suo romanzo "La statua di sale" aveva già affrontato allegramente l'omosessualità maschile.

Qui però va oltre: le descrizioni sono meticolosamente anatomicamente pornografiche (il capitolo 29 su tutti), la sessualità bivalente del/della protagonista mortifica il culto della mascolinità, che si sa in US è roba seria, soprattutto a quell'epoca, presenta il sesso come l'espressione più palese del potere, si diverte a invertire i ruoli con la donna dominatrice che odia i maschi e la società maschilista, *gli uomini non li caccia, li annienta*, autentica femme fatale. Solo che non è una donna, è un lui che diventa lei e poi ritorna lui (operazioni a Copenhagen).

È un pastiche, una parodia, un romanzo pop, camp, comico, che fu attaccato dalla critica puritana (credo che Vidal subì anche un processo), ma vendette subito tre milioni di copie, e dopo aver fatto ricco il suo autore, che era già ricco, portandogli in tasca novecentomila dollari dell'epoca in diritti cinema, divenne un film mitico perché Raquel Welch impersonava Myra in bikini a stelle e strisce, cappello da cowboy e stivali bianchi, e perché quasi subito entrò nella lista dei peggiori 50 film di tutti i tempi.

In Australia non vollero pubblicarlo, in Inghilterra lo fecero ma in una versione edulcorata, che purtroppo è la stessa tradotta in italiano da Bompiani (per esempio, "cock" diventa "membro virile", "self abuse" diventa "ooohhh").

Ma ora credo che l'editore Fazi abbia rimesso le cose a posto pubblicando una traduzione dal vero originale.

PS

Nel 1975 Gore Vidal scrisse un seguito intitolato "Myron" e sostituì le parolacce con il nome dei giudici della Corte Suprema

Eric says

One of 1968's "shocking" bestsellers that is now a bit of a slog. (As *Couples* is to Updike; interestingly, the longueurs of both novels are attempts at Joycean stream of consciousness.) But Myra's voice is memorable, and that counts for something.

A says

I'm a bit baffled by all the people who are offended by the retrograde gender politics of this book. Is it transphobic? Sure, at times. It's also (at times) equally misogynistic as it is man-hating, homophobic as it is radically queer, elitist as it is populist, anti-hippie as it is anti-East Coast elite. The contradictions and topics to take offense at are limitless. This is a true satire, lashing out at all who stand in Myra's path (including Myra herself). Everyone and everything is so completely over-the-top and preposterous in this universe, and the plot is so patently ridiculous, I can't imagine you would ever take any of it seriously.

Anyway. I know it's very non-postmodern and anti-New Criticism of me to ask you to consider a book's context when reading it, but I think that's essential here. Yes, to our modern sensibilities, this book is quite clunky, reading like if J.K. Rowling tried her hand at ghostwriting a Chuck Palahniuk novel. But think of 1968, when this was a bona fide bestseller (back when that meant something about the culture at large), mentioned in the same breath as Updike's *Couples* and Portnoy's *Complaint* -- two genuinely misogynistic, unequivocally homophobic, and very very very *serious* works of art forced into dialogue with this completely inappropriate, absurdly fluffy yet penetratingly belligerent sexual romp.

Edward Lorn says

Imagine having written a book in the 1960s and been criticized over being queer, and then someone reading your book in this day and age and calling you homophobic. What's the phrase I'm looking for... "Can't win for losing?" Yeah. That's it.

For the record, Gore Vidal was an intellectual who believed sex was a tool of the weak-minded. He didn't care much for love or physical relationships, and this book, above all else, shows that. To his credit, Gore Vidal hated everyone equally, because everyone was dumber than him. At least he thought so.

Myra Breckinridge isn't very good but it's not bad, either. It's okay. I'm sure I would've been properly offended if I had read this in the 60s, but reading it in 2017 has killed some of its controversy. The only part that bothered me was the extended 30-page long rape scene. I was uncomfortable throughout, but I'm sure that was Vidal's aim.

If you plan on watching the Netflix documentary on Gore Vidal, know that it ruins this book. They discuss in depth the "twist" at the end without mentioning that it's a twist, so I ended up reading this whole book knowing the secret, which was disappointing.

In summation: Gore Vidal is dead. I'm sure he's not losing sleep over negative reviews. But I think he would find it funny how many people are still outraged over this book, almost fifty years after its publication. I hope one day to write something with that much staying power.

Final Judgment: A man who hated everything (even himself) proves he hates everything.

agatha says

Transphobic, misogynistic, anti-semitic, smug. The transsexual woman as insane, murderous rapist is a fairly tiresome & offensive storyline - especially when the ending involves Myra "recovering" from her insanity to return to life as Myron. Despite Gore Vidal's obvious pleasure with himself as some kind of subversive, the majority of the characters and storylines are actually fairly shallow & undeveloped. It appears that the success of the book relies on the reader responding with shock & disgust at the acts described - rather it was the Vidal's glee with his own cleverness & deviance that left me nauseous. Perhaps the graphic sex and depictions of "sexually deviant" behaviour & non-normative gender expression were unusual at the time of publication & might still challenge some readers. But depth and insight there is none. Dennis Altman has clearly never actually read any queer theory.

Worth noting, the anti-semitic rants littered through the book are far too close to things Vidal actually said to truly pass as fiction.

G.G. says

In the TLS of February 23 2018, Daniel Culpan ("a writer based in London") published this wide-ranging retrospective of Gore Vidal as novelist and critic that includes a convincing account of *Myra Breckinridge's* "comic nihilism":

In it Vidal anticipates the sour, slackening coda of the great countercultural dream: "free love" being replaced by pornography; the avant-garde being killed by Warhol's embrace of consumerist Pop Art; [Vidal's] own adored Golden Age Hollywood cannibalized by reality television.

For Culpan's full review, see: <https://www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/pu...>

Ryan says

This starts out as a really funny, satirical look at Hollywood in the throes of the sexual revolution, but it just becomes tedious, pointless and mean-spirited, like pretty much all of Vidal's books, which for some reason I keep reading. Maybe that says something about me.

Guillermo Jiménez says

Vidal logra atraparte desde la primera página. Capítulos breves van desenvolviendo una personalidad perversamente exquisita: Myra Breckinridge: “que no será poseída nunca por ningún hombre”.

Soberbiamente, Vidal logra ir tejiendo un conjunto complejo y organizado de quién es Myra, cómo llegó a ser quién es, quién fue, de qué época estamos hablando, al mismo tiempo que da una cátedra de literatura contemporánea: “no empezaré por el principio porque no hay un principio”, “pero dejémonos de metáforas. Nada se parece a nada. Las cosas son ellas mismas completamente y no necesitan interpretación”.

Escatológica, brutal, directa; cada página de esta novela es un mazazo durísimo a las convenciones sociales de su momento histórico, que tristemente pareciera seguir siendo el nuestro: un momento en donde la intolerancia y la incomprensión, en donde los estudios de género han hecho grandes avances pero aún hay batallas pendientes, un momento donde la incomprensión por lo otro, por lo ajeno, sigue siendo “justificante” para agredir, pisotear, ningunear y herir a cualquiera que no esté dentro de los roles definidos por “la sociedad”.

Mi recomendación sería que entraran a leerla sin leer nada más. Solo abriendo el libro por la primera página y yéndose directamente hasta el final. Se puede, porque es amena, es entretenida, es mordaz; Myra es un personaje inolvidable, una verdadera mujer con una lengua llena de veneno y furia, una mujer increíblemente segura, y una gran narradora.

Nunca había leído nada de Vidal y ahora quiero leerle todo.

Es el tipo de novelas que me hace detener la lectura para escribirle al Arturo y recomendársela. Así de pinche buena.

A ratos me recordaba mucho las pláticas que tenía con dos de mis grandes maestros, el Genaro y el Agustín, por las múltiples referencias al cine, a actores, a tramas y personajes, a situaciones particulares del cine y que Myra traslapa a la realidad, a su realidad, a la realidad de la novela que no es otra que no podamos imaginar sin dificultad, gracias a su detalle en las atmósferas, en las imágenes, en la narración, en muchas ocasiones: muy gráfica y detallada.

En la contraportada, citan a Bloom quien afirma de la novela: “Myra Breckinridge continúa proporcionándome un placer perverso”. Eso: “placer perverso”, sin caer en puerilidades ni vulgaridades, agregándole quizá la palabra “narcisista”, para hablar de una Myra perversamente narcisista.

Evan says

"I have no clear idea as to my ultimate identity once every fantasy has been acted out with living flesh. All that I do know is that I shall be freed of obsession and, in this at least, be like no one else who ever lived." Thus is the admirable if impossible goal of Vidal's self-titled anti-heroine/hero(?)... It's probably no surprise that the pursuit of it, and the methods employed, lead into directions not anticipated. And as a result, the rewards are unexpected. From cynicism a kind of tenderness emerges in Myra's outlook. Along the way, Vidal allows himself to hit (or miss) several satirical targets and explore myriad possibilities of gender roles, sexual identity and power.

I was going to give this a very solid three stars and a high recommendation until I reached a couple of bravura passages which tipped the scales upward a solid notch. Your mileage may vary, but within this flippant framework Vidal manages to make some thought-provoking points.

I might be the only one who sees a connection, but this deliberately transgressive bit of free impertinence crammed with pop culture archeology reminds me somewhat of Terry Southern's "Candy," except that Candy slayed all comers with complete cluelessness of her feminine charms whereas Myra is all too aware of them, and sets out on a path of deliberate destruction, vengeance, possession, power and fame. I compare the two also because the writers are just having a lot of fun with it, and so are we. I like the back and forth between Myra's diary and Buck Loner's tape recordings, each sizing up the other for the kill.

I can't decide, from sentence to sentence, how I feel about Vidal's tour de force approach. The parts where Myra says she doesn't feel like describing things or reconstructing dialogue strike me as a lazy copout; but Vidal can slough off any responsibility by saying it's the nature of his protagonist to do that sort of thing. Still, I'm probably overthinking this. I don't think Vidal set out to make great literature with this book, and yet there are bravura moments. The book strikes me overall as frivolous, and yet it's fun as hell. I love all the insider Hollywood references, and the sense of the decaying movie capital in the 1960s is well essayed. Vidal takes on a lot of satirical targets, shotgun-style.

I have to like any book, somewhat, that can riff on Parker Tyler. I like Tyler's film books. And I can't help but be giddy, regardless how far Vidal's tongue is in his cheek, when Myra says this: "Tyler's close scrutiny of the films of the Forties makes him our age's central thinker, if only because in the decade between 1935 and 1945, no irrelevant film was made in the United States." And later: "...I do entirely support [Myron Breckinridge's:] thesis that the films of 1935 to 1945 inclusive were the high point of Western culture."

Sue me, but I kind of agree.

The most famous or notorious part of the book is very likely a woman-on-man rape scene, the slow buildup and perpetration of which goes on for 30 pages in utmost detail. It takes one of the primal fantasies of the age before sexual enlightenment--playing doctor--and crafts it for the explicit age of Aquarius. It is probably the main reason this book sold millions of copies.

The following are some of my favorite passages from the book:

"But the very literalness of my victory deprived me of the anticipated glory. To my astonishment, I have now lost all interest in men. I have simply gone past them, as if I were a new creation, a mutant diverging from original stock to become something quite unlike its former self or any self known to the race. All that I want now in the way of human power is to make Mary-Ann love me so that I might continue to love her--even without possessing her--to the end of my days."

"But tonight she was subtly changed. I don't know whether it was the snaps at Scandia or the cold bright charm of the powerful Letitia or the knowledge that Rusty would never be hers again but whatever it was, she allowed my hand to rest a long moment on the entrance to the last fantasy which is of course the first reality. Ecstatically, I fingered the lovely shape whose secret I must know or die, whose maze I must thread as best I can or go mad for if I am to prevail I must soon come face to face with the Minotaur of dreams and confound him in his charneled lair, and in our heroic coupling know the last mystery: total power achieved not over man, not over woman but over the heraldic beast, the devouring monster, the maw of creation itself that spews us forth and sucks us back into the black oblivion where stars are made and energy waits to be born in order to begin once more the cycle of destruction and creation at whose apex now I stand, once man, now woman, and soon to be privy to what lies beyond the uterine door, the mystery of creation that I mean to shatter with the fierce thrust of a will that alone separates me from the nothing of eternity; and as I have conquered the male, absorbed and been absorbed by the female, I am at last outside the human scale, and so may render impotent even familiar banal ubiquitous death whose mouth I see smiling at me with moist coral lips between the legs of my beloved girl who is the unwitting instrument of victory, and the beautiful fact of my life's vision made all too perfect flesh."

"But Myron was tortured by having been attached to those male genitals which are linked to a power outside the man who sports them or, to be precise, they sport the man for they are peculiarly willful and separate and it is not for nothing that the simple boy so often says of his erection, partly as a joke but partly as a frightening fact, "He's got a head of his own." Indeed he has a head of his own and twice I have punished that head. Once by a literal decapitation, killing Myron so that Myra might be born and then, symbolically, by torturing and mocking Rusty's sex in order to avenge Myron for the countless times that he had been made victim by that mitred one-eyed beast, forever battering blindly at any orifice, seeking to scatter wide the dreaded seed that has already so filled up the world with superfluous people that our end is now at hand: through war and famine and the physical decadence of a race whose extinction is not only inevitable but, to my mind, desirable... for after me what new turn can the human take? Once I have comprehended the last mystery I shall be free to go without protest, full of wisdom, into night, happy in the knowledge that, above all men, I existed totally. Let the dust take me when the adventure's done and I shall make that dust glitter for all eternity with my marvelous fury. Meanwhile, I must change the last generation of man. I must bring back Eden. And I can, I am certain, for if there is a god in the human scale, I am she."

Kara Corthron says

I'm going ahead and giving this little piece of madness 5 stars. Much of it is brilliant, hilarious, and bitchily delightful (I think I just created that adverb). A lot of it is also horrifying. Vidal takes the concept of the unreliable narrator to the next level in Myra. And there are things that simply wouldn't fly today--a lot of outmoded language and casual attitudes that made my jaw literally drop. But it is satire and it was published in 1968. Keeping that in mind, it's pretty revolutionary. There is one scene in this book that made me SO uncomfortable, I had to keep putting it down. And it felt endless. But it was totally appropriate for the story despite its overwhelming cringe factor. I recommend it to those who have an open mind and to those who could use a mind opening.

Scott says

"Myra Breckinridge" is a classic, brilliant satire of Hollywood. A man, obsessed with bringing down Hollywood, gets a sex change to turn into a gorgeous actress hellbent on destroying mainstream cinema as we know it! Hilarious, really clever.

David says

"Frankly I can think of no pleasure greater than to approach an open face and swiftly say whatever needs to be said to shut it."

"Like so many male narcissists, he is, paradoxically, modest: he enjoys revealing himself but only on his own terms."

"Whenever I hear the word 'smegma', I become physically ill."

Vince says

Reading any work by Gore Vidal, I am always amazed at how well it stands the test of time. Many of the references in *Myra Breckinridge* are dated (and certainly would have been at the time of its publication as well), and yet the themes of the story still ring eerily true today. Sexual politics, gender roles, the nature of celebrity – all of these ideas play out today much as they play out in the novel. In particular, the quest for celebrity in the book calls to mind reality television stars of today.

The novel, presented primarily as a series of diary entries, is, on the surface, the story of Myra Breckinridge as she moves to Hollywood to receive her rightful inheritance as the widow of one Myron Breckinridge. While there, she gets tangled up with an Academy that teaches young people to be stars and uses these students as pawns in her game to shift ideas about gender and sex.

The novel has a light, satirical tone, but do not let that fool you. Myra Breckinridge is a dark and thought-provoking tale, as shocking today as it certainly was upon its release in 1968. One should be able to pause between chuckles to really explore what Vidal is presenting. For just as Myra is a larger-than-life comedic character, her ideas about the world are large and important and intriguing.

Jim Dooley says

I recently watched a documentary entitled “Best of Enemies.” It was about the 1968 Republican and Democratic National Conventions during which William F. Buckley, Jr. and Gore Vidal crossed verbal swords in front of a highly entertained America on the ABC television network. One of Buckley’s recurring ripostes during these sessions was that Gore Vidal was the writer of “Myra Breckinridge.” I remember this being regarded as a scandalous book when I was a young boy ... pornography, in some quarters ... that many households had tucked safely away (as they would later tuck away their copies of “The Joy of Sex”). Yes, a paperback copy even made it onto a secret shelf in my parents’ bedroom.

I recalled that the Big Secret of “Myra Breckinridge” wasn’t a secret at all. Everyone knew about it, which is likely why it sold so many copies to curious thrill-seekers. I know that it didn’t draw me today. I was more curious as to why Buckley thought that attributing the book to Vidal was considered a major insult in his mind.

Well, it is a very interesting read on multiple levels.

First of all, it is a shame that most readers knew the Big Secret before reading the book. The revelation is very nicely handled and the build-up “plays fair” with the reader. There are plenty of clues throughout. Of course, the Big Secret will likely have significant impact on very few readers today other than surprise. It is also a very tame work to carry the pornography label. I’ve read mainstream fiction that is more graphic.

What did amaze me is that Myra Breckinridge speaks with Gore Vidal’s voice. The book is written in the form of a journal or diary, and the passages written by Myra resounded with the phrases I’d heard Gore Vidal use in the documentary clips. They are very acerbic, less in a sense of demonstrating culture and knowledge than in belittling others. Vidal’s persona in the exchanges with Buckley were filled with such

rapid-fire retorts.

I believe this also means that the philosophy attributed to Myra was likely shared by the writer. Vidal had a need to self-justify. This doesn't mean that his propositions should be dismissed. Although satirical in nature, there is an uncomfortable "on target" awareness of the secret war going on behind the real Battle of the Sexes. In many ways, much of what he said about the state of relationships has gone from whispers in the 60's to revealing social commentary today.

Much has been written about the satirical base of "Myra Breckinridge." I read similar things about "American Psycho." I mention this because the latter was obsessed with brand names defining a lifestyle. This book is obsessed with motion pictures from the 30's through mid-40's defining a lifestyle in the 60's. Indeed, this may be a major drawback for modern readers who are not classic film fans. The references will have no meaning ... and there are a lot of them. (I would think that Humphrey Bogart and Clark Gable will still ring a bell, but many more will not.)

Finally, I didn't see the ending coming at all. This was a true surprise that made all kinds of sense. Still, I left the book thinking, "Wow."

In 1974, Gore Vidal wrote a sequel to "Myra Breckinridge." I will admit to being curious, yet I am not in any hurry to read it. This book was nicely self-contained and it had a definite, appropriate ending. Do I really want to know the further adventures? I don't have an answer yet. Perhaps it is because, to my knowledge, it doesn't have a plot-dampening Big Secret that everyone knew before reading.

Petergiaquinta says

I can't remember anymore if I actually read this book in its entirety or just stood there in the library browsing it at length like some old raincoat-clad pervert. But I should be able to remember it better, even if it did happen in the late '70s when I was in junior high, because I clearly remember that 10 years earlier the first *Playboy* I ever saw had a pictorial in it from the awful movie they made shortly after *Myra Breckinridge's* publication. I've never seen the movie in its entirety either, so it's probably true I haven't actually read this book cover to cover. And I'm not sure that's a bad thing on either count. For all the press in the wake of Gore Vidal's recent death, this weak book is what seems to be held up as his life's work (that and *Burr*), but all that lasts with me is seeing the smarmy guy preening on Dick Cavett or Johnny Carson. I know it's true that any man's death diminishes me, but I'm not sure the world's readers are all that diminished by the loss of Gore Vidal.

Rupert Smith says

If I had to choose one book that sums up what you might call 'the gay sensibility' it would be this, the story of a power-hungry transsexual rampaging her way through a dismal American college, ravishing hot jocks and referencing 40s films on every page. I was so obsessed by Myra Breckinridge in my 20s that I actually started writing my own diary in her voice. The sequel, Myron, is just as good. I was absolutely horrified when, after Vidal's death, serious literary commentators suggested that he would be remembered not for his novels but for his quips and chat-show performances. This is just good old homophobia rearing its ugly head, of course – never mind that he was one of the most entertaining analysts of C20th America, let's just dismiss him as a camp laugh. I'd say that his comic novels (particularly the Myra diptych, and Duluth) are his greatest achievement, but come on – Burr? Julian? Williwaw? Lincoln? I wish Myra herself would return to

settle a few scores with her 'art-deco lamp base'.

Brooke says

Writing does not get better than this, but it's definitely not for everyone. It's sick and twisted, but hilarious and beautifully written. Myra Breckinridge is the most powerful female character in books thanks to the voice given to her by Vidal. I could "listen" to her talk all day.

Zadignose says

A short, depraved, outrageous farce that amuses and bemuses. Both funny and unsettling. Comedy and tragedy collide.

Gore Vidal manages to pour scorn on everyone and everything, especially the culture of late 1960's Southern California and everything that went into making it what it was. The central character, Myra, is a seductive anti-heroine whom we may simultaneously root for and despise. The farce is apparent early when we see Myra as alternately a mouthpiece for Vidal and an object for his scorn... the mask is never rendered fully lifelike, as one must surely wonder how a 27 year old can sound so middle aged at times, a "spiritual child of the forties," looking in contempt and pity at the youth of today: *"It is so easy for these young people to be anything since they are so plainly nothing, and know it."*

There is a wealth of wit in the text, and many ideas on the nature of society, gender, the fate of man, power, intelligence, etcetera. The majority of these ideas are presented in such an overblown, excessive manner, and held at times to be plainly ridiculous, but it also seems apparent that there is genuine bitterness being expressed at the heart of the cynically humorous horror-show.

Vidal, through Myra, enacts some terribly sadistic, psychically harmful sex fantasies and has a laugh with it all. But it is also made clear that the author and protagonist are aware of the injustice and terrible consequences of these acts. A fantasy, fully realized, can be transforming and traumatic.

In the midst of this there are some golden innocents, archetypal, who are the suffering playthings that we may reasonably see as representative of the old American ideals being ravished and metamorphosed.

While the buildup to the denouement is full of many forms of tension, including the tension between what is *strictly for entertainment purposes* and what is *sincerely expressive*, the conclusion reasserts the farcical nature of the work. But this is not entirely reassuring. We've been through a lot in these few pages, and the tension lingers, as do the doubts and fears for the youth, the culture, and the future... and for Myra!
