

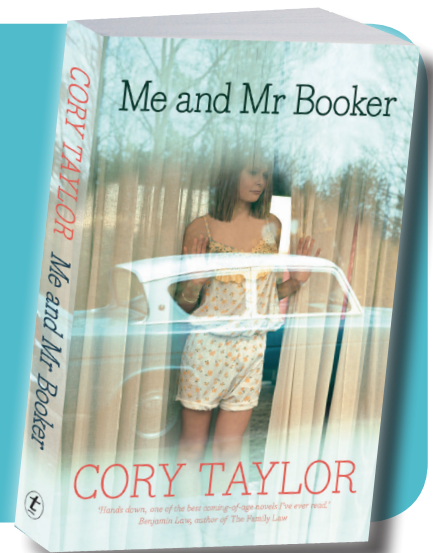
Me and Mr Booker

Cory Taylor

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Fiction, Trade Paperback



Praise

'Hands down, one of the best coming-of-age novels I've ever read.'

Benjamin Law, author of *The Family Law*

'One of the most assured debut novels I have ever read. Refreshing, surprising, sexy and ultimately very moving.'

Krissy Kneen, author of *Affection*

About Cory Taylor

Cory Taylor is an award-winning screenwriter who has also published short fiction and children's books. She lives in Brisbane. *Me and Mr Booker* is her first novel.

A reader's introduction to *Me and Mr Booker*

'But there was something in the way I appeared to people, and I'm really talking about the men married to my mother's friends, that made them stare. It had to do with whatever it was I was waiting for.'

Martha is sixteen and living in a town where nothing happens. Her father is crazy and her mother is unable to break free of his influence. Mr and Mrs Booker, on the surface, are the opposite of her life: stylish and charming. Mrs Booker wears French perfume while Martha's town smells of nothing. The Bookers make everything glow and Martha becomes part of their lives. It's not long before she begins to sleep with Mr Booker.

A disturbing mix of child and adult, Martha moves through a world that feels both contemporary and old. The people she observes are caught between ages and worlds too. While there is depth and insight in her observations, the reader is aware of connections that Martha does not make. She cannot see the parallels between her life and her mother's. Cory Taylor has created a compelling character to take us down the rabbit hole and back out again.

Taylor explores how the individual is shaped by factors such as family, geographical location, class, economic situation, societal expectation and fate. She does not present the reader with moral absolutes, but shows them relationships in their most complicated form.

Questions for discussion

1. Martha is an unsettling narrator. Do you think Taylor intends the reader to feel nothing but sympathy for her? Do you feel nothing but sympathy for her?
2. Taylor builds Martha beautifully throughout the novel, moving her towards a greater understanding of her world and Mr Booker. What does she see at the end of the novel?
3. 'There was something dangerous in the way he stared at me at that moment. It was so full of violence and sadness he seemed to be about to lift up the table and throw it through the window.' (p.14) What is your opinion of Mr Booker? Why is Martha so attracted to him?
4. Every character in this book evokes sympathy and antipathy. That's why it's such a powerful book. Do you agree?
5. The Bookers treat Martha as a daughter. Mr Booker has sex with her. Mr and Mrs Booker act like brother and sister and yet they are married. What point is Taylor making?
6. Is Victor 'poison'? He is, after all, the only one who voices dissent in the novel.
7. 'She liked to tell me there were forces all around us that we couldn't even see, and it was a question not so much of trusting them, but of accepting how helpless we were in the face of their power.' (p.96) Jessica is, in her own way, poison for Martha. Do you agree?

8. What is your opinion of Mrs Booker? Discuss the scene where she confronts Martha at Hilary's birthday party. Where do your sympathies lie? Do you agree with Martha's final comment in this chapter?
9. 'I also think that what happened had a lot to do with the kind of place we lived in then, which wasn't a city but it wasn't the country either.' (p.3) Cory Taylor explores how environment shapes people in this novel. However, environment can't bear all the blame. What other factors influenced the characters' actions?
10. Why does the novel reference *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*? Using fairytale elements in a novel like this is particularly disturbing. Do you agree?
11. *The Great Gatsby* is about much more than Daisy and Jay. It's a comment on American society. Why has Taylor referenced this book? In what ways is her novel about more than Martha and Mr Booker?
12. There are moments of wonderful humour in the book but they never set the reader at ease. How has Taylor used humour to explore the themes in her book?
13. Taylor's scenes are carefully constructed and highly disturbing. Discuss the one that unsettled you the most.
14. Discuss the use of symbolism in the novel. How has Taylor used animals, the weather and food for effect?
15. Every character longs in this novel and every character feels trapped in some way. The sadness lies in how they try to escape. Are they helpless in the face of the forces around them or are they weak? Or is Taylor making another point about human nature?