

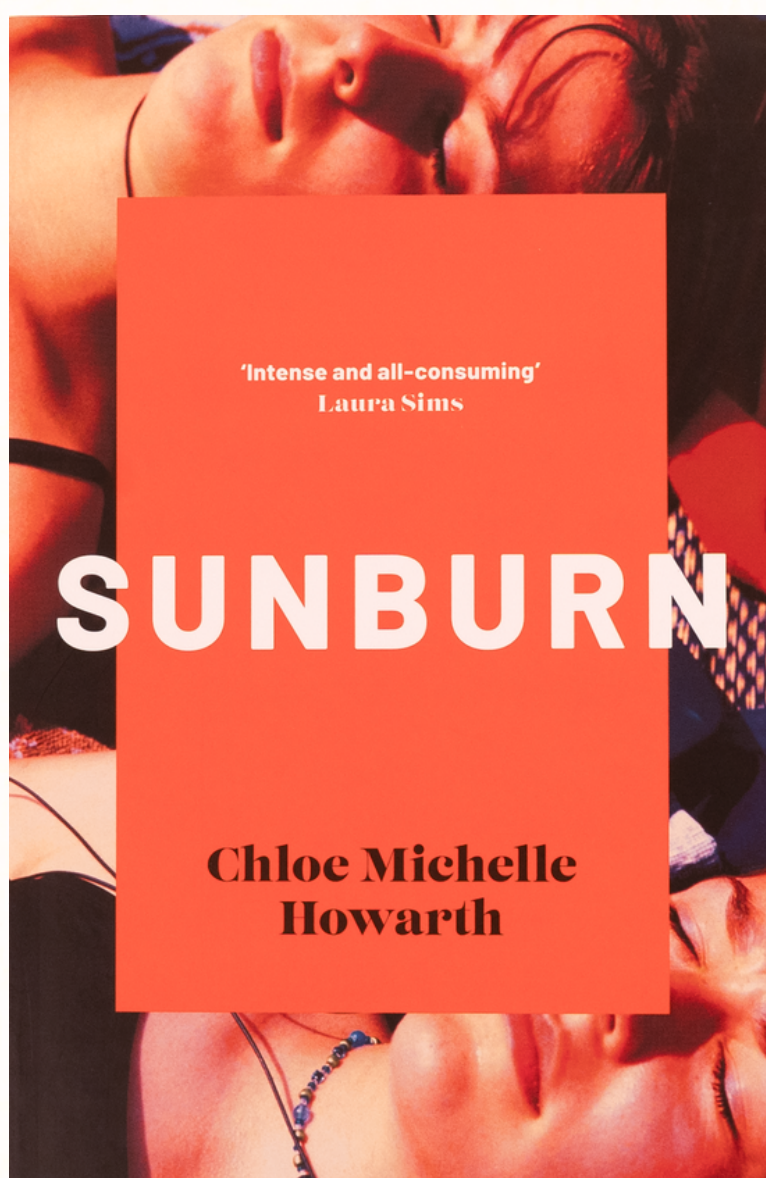
NERO

BOOK AWARDS

Reading Guides

Debut Fiction Shortlist

Sunburn by Chloe Michelle Howarth



Chloe Michelle Howarth was born in July 1996 and is an Irish writer. She grew up in the West Cork countryside, and the landscapes, culture, and people of rural Ireland have served as an inspiration for her writing. She first became interested in literature as a teenager, and in 2015, she moved to Dublin to study English, Media, and Cultural Studies in IADT Dun Laoghaire. During her time in college, she developed her love of writing, as well as performing and travelling. Chloe currently lives in Brighton.

'Sunburn is a vivid, fleshly portrait of teenage devotion, and the casualties that ripple out when identity is denied.' - **Debut Fiction judges, 2023 Nero Book Awards**

'Moving away from my mouth, her eyes look so deeply into mine, deeper than my cells, deeper than my soul. With this look, she takes a piece of me, and she will have it forever. I don't mind. For the first time in my life, I am not afraid to be seen for what I am.'

In the early 1990s, in a small Irish town, Lucy falls in love for the first time. Despite the all-consuming nature of her feelings, Lucy keeps her love a secret as, against all expectations, she hasn't fallen for her handsome best friend Martin but for another schoolmate, Susannah. Fearful of rejection from her traditional and conservative community, Lucy begins living a double life. A 'good girl', outwardly she appears as preoccupied with boys and parties as the rest of her friends, but Lucy has always felt out of place and knows that the traditional prospects of marriage and motherhood are not what she wants for herself. With the end of school and the opportunity to leave her small town approaching, Lucy must choose between two places, two people and two futures.

Told from Lucy's perspective, Howarth tenderly conveys Lucy's youthful naivety, adolescent angst, and bittersweet longing for Susannah. A moving coming-of-age love story, *Sunburn* is also

the story of a young woman navigating the pull of home whilst trying to remain true to herself.

In its exploration of family dynamics and the claustrophobia of living under the weight of other people's expectations, *Sunburn* is a compassionate novel that transcends place and time.

Discussion points:

- To what extent is Lucy's mother the 'villain' of this novel? Do you have any sympathy for her despite her pressuring Lucy to deny her sexuality?
- Susannah is much more comfortable with her sexuality and less concerned with the opinions of others in this regard. Why do you think this is?
- *Sunburn* is set 30 years ago in the early 1990s. How much has society changed in that time and do you think Lucy would make different choices if the story was set in the present day?