



# **Gore Vidal: A Critical Companion (Critical Companions to Popular Contemporary Writers)**

*Susan C. Baker, Curtis S. Gibson*

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Gore Vidal has been entertaining, and occasionally outraging, the American public for fifty years. In the course of his long career, Vidal has set new intellectual and artistic standards for American historical fiction and has also established himself in the first rank of contemporary social satirists. This is the first full-length study to include Vidal's most recent novels and the first designed to meet the needs of the general reader as well as students of contemporary literature. It includes discussions of *Lincoln*, *Empire*, *Hollywood*, and *Live from Golgotha*, as well as his earlier novels. Baker and Gibson show that while Vidal's novels are tremendously entertaining, they are also serious examinations of a recurring theme—the decline of the West in general and the decline of the United States in particular.

A biographical sketch of the writer precedes a general discussion of Vidal's early novels. Each of the following chapters examines an individual novel, from *Julian* (1964) to *Live from Golgotha* (1992), with special emphasis on artistic development and historical and intellectual context. To help the reader understand the recurring themes in Vidal's fiction, Baker and Gibson group the novels by type. First are the historical fictions, those of the ancient world (*Julian*, *Creation*), and the American Chronicles, Vidal's family saga of the United States over the course of its history. Second are the social satires, what Vidal calls his inventions, of which the best known is *Myra Breckinridge*. The discussion of each novel includes sections on plot and character development, thematic issues, narrative style, and an alternative critical approach from which to read the novel. A complete bibliography of Vidal's fiction, select bibliography of his other works, and bibliography of reviews and criticism of the works examined complete the book and will be helpful to students, librarians, and adult book discussion participants. This long-needed up-to-date study of Gore Vidal is a key purchase by secondary school and public libraries.

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