

**Introduction: Why is Gore Vidal important today?**

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One of the most distinctive characteristics of Vidal is his diversity in his writings; his work ranged from novels to short stories, to plays and screenplays, and to essays and reviews. This is an interesting fact in his writing career because, as Vidal himself claimed in an interview, it is, to a certain extent, responsible for his exclusion from the academic world. However, this diversity in his writings should situate Vidal in an important place in American literature / culture in that a review of his output (from the 1940s to 2000s) might help us to look at American literary history and politics in different ways. Rather than looking at particular movements or techniques, we should look at him as someone who not only used the past to comment on the present, but believed in literature as a vehicle of political and social commentary. Surveying his work helps us to understand how American cultures have changed over the last six decades; as well as understanding something of Vidal's public persona as a transmedial personality, a media celebrity who used different media – books, television and films – to communicate his views.

Vidal lived in Italy from 1963 to 2003, which provides him with a point of view letting him see his own country as an outsider. Like many readers of the *Journal of American Studies in Turkey*, he looked at American cultures from abroad; this is not only an alienating experience, but also a realistic one, helping him understand better the place of the United States in the contemporary world order. He explained this phenomenon as follows:

I'm realistic. Come to me and show me a small cancer and I'll tell you you've got a small cancer that should be cut out. That's realism but in America it's called cynicism. You're supposed to say, ah, you've got a little beauty blemish here and I have some marvelous Max Factor that will hide it. That's the American way of handling

things. Anyway, I'm a diagnostician, not a cosmetician (Stanton and Vidal 39).

It is his realism that makes him distinct and worth examining his works today. This realism which turns out to be a witty and sarcastic style in his writings makes him an important critic that should be taken seriously.

We believe that Vidal is an important subject for the *Journal of American Studies in Turkey*. Not only does he provide an invaluable perspective on American history past and present – showing how both impact on one another from an insider as well as an outsider's perspective, but his willingness to use any possible medium to communicate his viewpoint marks him out as a unique personality – someone who understood how television, films, and books addressed different sections of the public, and tried to adapt his viewpoints to these different audiences. Hence he was not only a transnational but also a transmedial figure. He challenged the boundaries of what we might understand as “literary,” or “historical” texts, as well as prompting us to rethink what “America” represents as a social, political and institutional structure.

Bearing these ideas in mind, we have assembled a collection of contributions that not only pay tribute to Vidal's talents as a writer, but also recognize his views of American history and politics as communicated through different media. We invited several writers and academics from different parts of the globe to write about him; while some of them point out his faults, as well as his virtues, all our contributors recognize his influence on contemporary American letters. We include a survey of Vidal's work in films – the first of its kind to appear anywhere – as well as providing fresh insights into his literary output by printing specially-commissioned reviews of some of his best-known books. This issue does not attempt to be comprehensive in its coverage; rather we have tried to offer a series of snapshots on Vidal's life and work, in the hope of stimulating further research. We hope you enjoy reading this issue as much as we have enjoyed compiling it.

### **Works Cited**

Stanton Robert J., and Gore Vidal, eds. *Views From a Window: Conversations With Gore Vidal*. Secaucus, N.J.: Lyle Stuart Inc., 1980. Print.