

Myra in Middle-Age: The Creatrix in Her Contexts

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“America really is what Hollywood dreamed it.” (Vidal, qtd. in Delaney)

I

In 1968, two versions of *Myra Breckinridge* appeared: the complete text in the United States; and, in Great Britain, a text with “certain excisions” allowed by the author.¹ As the late Gore Vidal’s biographer, Fred Kaplan, noted, “In distant Australia, *Myra* itself became the text of a court case resulting in a ruling that allowed Australian readers to determine what books they would read” (589). The publication in 1986 of the revised *Myra Breckinridge* and *Myron* together in one volume effected a late transformation of these novels about transformation.² The most evident change to *Myron* was the removal of a joke which had become anachronistic - the substitution of the names of Supreme Court Justices

1 Gore Vidal. *Myra Breckinridge*. (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1968); *Myra Breckinridge*. (London: Anthony Blond, 1968).

The following references are those which were excised from the British text; page references are to the American text.

to masturbation: 11, 179-180.

detail of Rusty Godowski’s buttocks: 73, 163.

to the scrotum as seen from behind: 73-74, 182.

to the scrotum as seen from the front: 181.

to the sphincters of white males: 83.

Rusty Godowski’s sphincter: 165, 169.

a disparaging account of a penis: 102-103.

a complimentary account of a penis: 105.

to oral sex: 105, 237.

Myra’s fantasy of castrating: 107.

the aroma of intercourse: 109.

spanking: 164, 237.

to the pubic area: 168.

a discussion about the comparative sizes of penises: 172.

sadistic handling of Rusty Godowski’s scrotum: 174, 182.

lengthy description of Rusty Godowski’s penis: 176-178.

the penetration of Rusty Godowski and the pleasure of the rapist: 183-184.

2 All page numbers in text will refer to the Andre Deutsch edition of *Myra Breckinridge* & *Myron* unless otherwise specified.

for the sexual parts of the body as well as the act of sexual intercourse. The substitution had been Vidal's facetious response to the Supreme Court decision in 1973 that each community had the right to decide for itself what constituted pornography, an historic moment applauded by Myron himself when he is informed thereof:

I was pretty thrilled to learn that the Court says that whatever is obscene is what your average John Q. Citizen thinks is obscene and no Commie talk about freedom of speech and the first Amendment allowed (*Myra Breckinridge* & *Myron* 368).

Apart from very minor alterations, however, it is essentially the original American *Myra Breckinridge* which, in 1987, became available for the first time in both the United States and Britain, leading at least one British reviewer to remark how much "dirtier" the novel had become (Sage 54).

The "dirtiness" of *Myra Breckinridge*, while serving its own purposes, has at times distracted readers from appreciating its complex antiphonal relation to other works of literature. Hence judgments such as that of Mitchell S. Ross, who declared that Vidal's novel "is not at all a work of art, stewing as it does in a vat of ephemera" (282). In her recent study of censorship in Australia, Nicole Moore asserted that:

Gore Vidal's *Myra Breckinridge* [sic] is hardly a serious novel at all. It is aggressively satirical, an absurdist parody of a post-sex-change America that is itself merely performance, a citation only of the glorious Hollywood past and beyond parody in its celebrations of meaninglessness and play (269).

I regard Myra and her agendas rather more seriously, arguing that – rather than being a work of limited artistic value, dealing in ephemera - *Myra Breckinridge* audaciously evokes and engages with a vast range of literary history, examining as it does the interrelationships between film and the novel form, and the novel and its antecedents. The belatedness of cinema in terms of cultural history - which Myra herself vehemently denies

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- correlates in *Myra Breckinridge* with the belatedness of the human race itself, for which she seeks a radical solution.

At first glance, *Myra Breckinridge* and *Myron* might be dismissed as dated works, bearing little relation to the Vidal's "serious" historical fiction. However - albeit through the perspectives of rather idiosyncratic protagonists - these novels address the concerns with which Vidal was consistently preoccupied throughout his career. These include: censorship; the moral right of consenting adults to engage without interference in the sexual acts of their choice; the cultural shift from literature to cinema to television; the deleterious effect of the cult of "celebrity"; and - always - the human drive to exert power over others. In an interview with Jon Wiener (1988), Vidal observed that the critic Peter Conrad had been shrewd to observe that, rather than a sequel to *Myra Breckinridge*, *Myron* was really a sequel to *Burr* (qtd. Peabody and Ebersole, 112). I would assert that the novel *Hollywood* (1989) - the sequel to *Empire* and the sixth in the *Narratives of Empire* series - is logically the "prequel" to *Myra Breckinridge*. The heroine Caroline Sanford - Vidal's fictional great-grand-daughter of Aaron Burr - ends up re-creating herself as an actress and film-producer, and influencing the motion-picture industry with all the enthusiasm of Myra, and rather more success.

A successful newspaper publisher aged forty when *Hollywood* opens, Caroline is persuaded to work for the government in Hollywood, after the American entry into the First World War. Her *entrée* into the cinema industry is facilitated by George Creel, the former employee of William Randolph Hearst who became Woodrow Wilson's chairman of the Committee of Public Information. Creel's committee is effectively an organ for propaganda and censorship.

"She will persuade - as my representative -
Hollywood to make pro-American, pro-Allies
photo-plays..."

"Which means anti-German..."

"Yes!" Creel's eyes shone (109).

However, after the pro-German Hearst discovers that his former protégé Caroline looks good on the screen, she agrees to act in a propaganda film, directed by (another of Vidal's invented characters) Timothy X.

Farrell, entitled “The Huns from Hell.” She subsequently invents for herself a second identity, as Emma Traxler from Alsace-Lorraine.³ Farrell awakens Caroline to the unconstitutional ramifications of the new censorship laws. She is astonished to learn of the case of Bob Goldstein, the producer of *Spirit of ‘76* (1917), who is about to be imprisoned for ten years. This silent film about the American Revolution had depicted British soldiers committing atrocities, and was thus deemed to be inciting hostility towards an ally. The reader detects the authorial voice emerging when the narrative turns to the subject of the imperiled First Amendment:

Where was the much-worshipped Constitution
in all of this? Or was it never anything more than
a document to be used by the country’s rulers
when it suited them and otherwise ignored?
(129)

After the war, Farrell decides to make a film about Eugene V. Debs, the leader of the Socialist Party, who had received one million votes for president in 1912. Charged “with violating, through the exercise of free speech, the Espionage Act of 1917” (203), Debs is sentenced to ten years in prison. Tim makes his film, “The Strike Breakers,” which is withdrawn after release because of its sympathetic portrayal of Communism. Only by re-writing the title cards to favor management and denounce the striking workers does Tim manage to avoid indictment and to have his picture re-released.⁴

In *The City and the Pillar* (1948), Vidal treated the subject of the cinema industry’s careful concealment of homosexuality through his protagonist Jim Willard’s involvement with the (fictional) actor Ronald Shaw. He returned to this theme in *Hollywood* via the sub-plot of an unsolved historical murder, near the end of the novel. Caroline becomes infatuated with the English director William Desmond Taylor, and cannot

3 Here Vidal conflates his personal history with that of his character - his own great-grandmother on his father’s side was Emma de Traxler, whose mother was named Caroline.

4 Norman Mailer treated the subject of censorship of film-makers in greater depth with his skillful characterization of the director Charles Francis Eitel in *The Deer Park* (1955). Eitel loses his job when he refuses to co-operate with a congressional investigating committee at the height of the McCarthy era. Eventually, unable to work, his courage broken, he recants and is subsequently allowed to resume his career. Vidal’s Tim Farrell is less concerned about the moral dilemma raised by the expedient of compromise.

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at first understand why Taylor never attempts to consummate their relationship. Only after he is shot does she learn that Taylor's former servant had routinely procured boys for his employer. In the wake of both the Taylor affair and the Fatty Arbuckle scandal, Hollywood welcomes the appointment of Postmaster General Will Hays to the position of censor or "czar" of the industry. Caroline and Tim Farrell decide to retire "Emma Traxler" and form their own studio, maintaining an alliance with Hay whilst attempting to produce a more subtle and powerful form of propaganda than had hitherto emerged from Hollywood:

They had used the movies successfully to demonize national enemies. Now why not use them to alter the viewer's perception of himself and the world. Thus she would be able to outdo Hearst at last (448).

Caroline and Tim agree that the most effective formula through which to test their theory is the creation of a supposedly typical American town, within which a series of stories can be developed: "The town must seem very real while at its center there would be a family for the whole nation to love." (481) *Hollywood* ends as the first Sanford-Farrell studio production, "Hometown," is scheduled for release in 1924.

Vidal remarked that, in *Hollywood*, "The story anticipates what Louis B. Mayer did at MGM in the Thirties with the Andy Hardy series, which created the idea of America. Not only for Americans, but for the whole world" (Johnston 21). In *Myron*, it is the Andy Hardy films, disseminating "the values of Andy Hardy's father, good Judge Hardy as played by Lewis Stone" (Myron 249), which inspire the resurrected Myra Breckinridge in her quest to save MGM studios from bankruptcy. At the end of *Hollywood*, Caroline sells her share of the *Washington Tribune* to her half-brother and co-publisher, Blaise Sanford. No longer a newspaper publisher, rejuvenated by cosmetic surgery and with her alias discarded, she is ready to become a "creatix," with an ambition to "invent the people"; she has become, in other words, an anticipation of Myra Breckinridge. Or, rather, Myra could be read as a crazed, extreme descendant of Caroline. However, whereas Caroline and her aspirations can be assimilated into the society delineated in *Hollywood*, the terminally eccentric Myra, must suffer - to borrow Richard

Chase's concise definition of a recurring theme in American fiction - "the chastisement of distorted ideals" (184).

Vidal often referred to the strong influence of cinema upon his own life and career, this being most explicitly elaborated in *Screening History* (1992). In an interview with *American Film* in 1977, he observed that

Mine is the first generation of writers brought up on talking films and I think we were more affected by films than any of the other narrative forms. Tell me somebody's favorite actor when he was ten years old, and I'll tell you who he is. Could Norman Mailer have existed without John Garfield? He's been playing Garfield, and I've been doing George Arliss (Stanton and Vidal 212).

Three years earlier, he had told an interviewer from *Paris Review* that he was "most affected by George Arliss. Particularly his Disraeli. I liked all those historical fictions that were done in the thirties" (Stanton and Vidal 147). Vidal's comment that he had been "doing George Arliss" for years might be interpreted as facetious; however, Myra - as Marcie Frank comments - "takes for granted that people imitate the role models that they absorb in their encounters with small and big screens" (113). Baker and Gibson, thinking along similar lines, astutely observe that "*Myra Breckinridge* suggests that personality is shaped by the ensemble of one's models; assembling a self is a process of emulation" (154). To this extent, then, one of the more serious subtexts of *Myra* and *Myron* is an exploration of the enduring philosophical question of whether there is such a thing as an authentic "self." Although Vidal entitled his first memoir *Palimpsest* (1995), suggesting the concept of a perpetually revisable self, he insisted upon a clear distinction between hypocrisy and other, more ludic, forms of self-presentation. Explaining his personal definition of Puritanism to this writer in 1985, he asserted:

To me, sex and Puritanism have nothing to do with each other. Puritanism is a way you regard your obligations to society. Most obvious - you do not tell lies. I live in a culture where everyone lies. [...] there's no authenticity, and this drives me up the wall. Misrepresentation of oneself

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or of one's product, since this is a commercial civilization, gives me a horror, and that is of course a Puritan revulsion (Neilson 47).

For Myra Breckinridge, "authenticity" more simply connotes reverent attention to cinematic archetypes. Myra conceives of the stars of the cinema as a Pantheon of fixed types, "and they are truly eternal, since whenever one fades or falls another promptly takes his place, for the race requires that the pantheon be always filled" (101-102) Her faith in the concept of a finite stock for the cinematic Pantheon resonates with Vidal's own trope of the "repertory company," over which each writer has command:

I use somewhere the idea that every writer has a given theatre in his head, a repertory company. Shakespeare has fifty characters, I have ten, Tennessee has five, Hemingway has one, Beckett is busy trying to be none. You are stuck with your repertory company and you can only put on plays for them (Ruas 73-74).

Vidal expanded farcically upon this notion in *Duluth* (1984), through the "simultaneity effect," according to which any character can appear simultaneously in several works of fiction. The names of the characters may or may not change, but the function of each remains the same from plot to plot. Some characters retain a memory of their former existence in earlier works and attempt to maintain an influence over the events within these texts. As if to illustrate the "simultaneity effect," Dr. Mengers – who reconstructed Myron Breckinridge's genitalia in the intervening years between *Myra Breckinridge* and its sequel - reappears briefly in *Duluth* as an ear, nose and throat specialist, and is mentioned in *Kalki* as Teddy Ottinger's "one-time shrink."

Myra and *Myron* wear their eclectic intertextuality with insouciance. Baker and Gibson suggest that Poe's Gothic short studies are "significant precursors," as studies of monomania: "The real terror of such stories lies less in their macabre events than in the fact that, as readers, we are led to accept the logic of madmen" (153). In *Myron*, Myra's alter ego – however ludicrous his pieties may at times seem – does offer a salutary alternative point of view to Myra's "logic." Whereas Myra perceives lust, admiration and awe in the gaze of others, Myron more accurately reads the adverse

reactions – ranging from wariness to terror – which her behavior has actually aroused. Christopher Bram has remarked of *Myra Breckinridge* that: “It suggests an American *Orlando*, but where Virginia Woolf’s cross-gendered fantasy is soaked in British literature, Vidal’s is soaked in American cinema” (120). Richard Poirier has rightly perceived that *Myra Breckinridge* belongs to the tradition of those novels whose appropriation and subversion of earlier literature is overt, although the art form which is the principal focus of both satire and nostalgia in *Myra Breckinridge* and its sequel is the Hollywood cinema of the 1940s (139). *Myra Breckinridge*’s stance in relation to Hollywood movies is comparable to that of Henry Fielding’s *Shamela* (1741) and *Joseph Andrews* (1742) with Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela* (1740); Choderlos de Laclos’ *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* (1782) with Richardson’s *Clarissa* (1748); and Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* (1605) to the literature of chivalry. Like Quixote, Myra is “mad in patches, full of lucid streaks,” although in her case her monomania may be more attributable to what she has seen rather than, as is the case of Quixote, to what she has read (Cervantes 583). Both Alonso Quixano and Myron Breckinridge assume new names and wreak havoc under the delusion that they are performing a mission for the good of humanity. At the end of their respective novels, each resumes his former name and repudiates his previous actions.

Through Myra’s warped yet observant narrative consciousness, *Myra Breckinridge* and *Myron* constitute an astute comment on American culture in the guise of a critique of fetishism. As such, they imbricate and exploit the fetishizing gazes of pornography, of Hollywood in the 1940s, and also of the Menippean satire of ancient Rome, named after the 3rd Century BCE Greek parodist and polemicist, Menippus. In an early article on *Myra Breckinridge*, Purvis E. Boyette cogently cited Northrop Frye’s elucidation of the Menippea:

Some of the features of this satire are an attack on a philosophy, grotesque exaggeration, caricature, the diminution of human beings into animals or machines, and a radical dislocation of conventional perspectives. When these characteristics are reflected in the structural forms of a fiction, we are reading satires and not novels, and our aesthetic criteria are, in consequence, sharply altered (229).

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As Rosemary Jackson suggests, Menippean satire “was a genre which broke the demands of historical realism or probability” and “tells of descents into underworlds of brothels, prisons, orgies, graves: it has no fear of the criminal, erotic, mad or dead” (14-15). The descriptions of the late Myron’s sexual encounters, and an orgy in which Myra participates, demonstrate Vidal’s indebtedness to the Menippean satire, particularly the *Satyricon* of Petronius and *The Golden Ass* of Apuleius.⁵ *Myra Breckinridge* depicts the parties of Californian youth as a Sixties equivalent to the Roman orgies represented in the *Satyricon*. The orgy hosted by Clem Masters is a Dionysian rout, and Clem himself identifiable as the sexually voracious wood-deity Pan, but Pan degenerated to an absurdity - an untalented and plagiarizing music student with “goatish” arms and a pitiful “acorn” of a penis.

II

Myra introduces herself as a self-created chimera, her name - so close to that of her late husband Myron - clearly a rebus. She has arrived in Hollywood with several tasks to accomplish. The first is the literal recording of her day to day existence, suggested as therapy by her analyst, friend and dentist, Dr. Randolph Spenser Montag. Secondly, she intends to claim a half-share of the highly successful Academy of Drama and Modeling owned by Myron’s uncle, Buck Loner, the former Singin’ Shootin’ Cowboy of radio and screen fame. Thirdly, she plans eventually to complete the late Myron’s unfinished book, *Parker Tyler and the Films of the Forties: or the Transcendental Pantheon*. Myra’s principal purpose, though, is to re-create the sexes in such a way that procreation will decline, if not altogether cease. She is profoundly concerned by the uncontrolled increase in world population.

In a late restatement of his theories on population, Thomas Malthus appealed for moral restraint, for chastity, expressly abhorring “unnatural passions and improper acts to prevent the consequences of

5 In an aside in the essay “The Hacks of Academe”, Vidal referred to the *Satyricon* and *The Golden Ass* as “two very good novels” thus offering his own contribution to the debate about the beginnings of the genre. Originally published in the *TLS*, 20 February 1976. Reprinted in *Matters of Fact and Fiction: Essays 1973-1976* (London: Heinemann, 1977), 90.

irregular connections” (153). Myra’s deviation from the principles of her preceptor surpasses that of the most ardent members of the Malthusian lunatic fringe. She alleges that every society has a secret desire to destroy itself, exemplified by the encouragement of mindless breeding in a world of diminishing resources, and she prophesies a purgative chiliastic fire necessitated by the exhaustion of the global food supply. Her proposed solution is the destruction of accepted sexual roles and the creation of a society in which people engage freely in the very “passions, acts and connections” proscribed by Malthus. An ambivalent philanthropist, Myra acknowledges the appeal of the prospect of the end of the human race, but decides that she must at least make an effort to preserve life by recreating “Man.”

Whilst their respective lawyers negotiate her share of the Academy, Buck Loner agrees to employ Myra to teach Empathy and Posture. Thereafter, his perturbed reactions to each encounter with his niece, recorded on his dictaphone, periodically erupt into Myra’s narrative. He is a gross and venal creature, none of whose clients, the students, ever finds work outside the Academy. Many never leave. In his earlier career as “the Singin’ Shootin’ Cowboy” - as famous as Roy Rogers and Gene Autry - Buck was constantly astride the faithful Sporko. The steed’s name surely connotes both the Italian “sporco” (“dirty”) and the American slang “to pork” (“to penetrate sexually.”) These days Buck rides financially on the youthful illusions of the students, and sexually on the delusion that he is still actively virile rather than completely dependent on the vigorous hands of the East West Home Masseuse Service.⁶

Myra’s attention is soon drawn to two of her students; the arrogantly virile and inarticulate Rusty Godowsky, who is on probation for car theft, and his girlfriend, Mary Ann Pringle. She envisages the teenagers as contenders for two currently vacant archetypal roles in the cinematic pantheon – “inarticulate brute hero” and “gentle girl singer.” Myra decides that her primary plan, the realignment of the sexes, will start with the complete destruction of Rusty’s masculine identity, resulting in his abandonment of the desire to have only heterosexual intercourse, and to

6 In 1969, Vidal said of his character, “I think my portrait of Buck Loner in *Myra Breckinridge* comes closest to my view of the average American man at this time and place” (Stanton and Vidal 127).

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produce several children. Rusty Godowsky's name evokes that of Stanley Kowalski, whose assault upon his sister-in-law in the penultimate scene of *A Streetcar Named Desire* (first performed in 1947) pushes the already unstable Blanche DuBois into insanity.⁷ At Myra's hands, Rusty effectively becomes an inverted Stanley, in an ironic act of homage to Vidal's friend Tennessee Williams. The next stage in Myra's plan is to seduce Rusty's girlfriend, so as to know absolute power and to be uniquely free of unfulfilled obsession.

Myra is befriended by Letitia Van Allen, a powerful casting agent, whom Myra persuades to assist Mary Ann's career. Myra lures the artless Rusty to the Academy's Infirmary, where her systematic humiliation of him culminates with his being raped with a dildo. Buck's lawyers have meanwhile proved that evidence of Myra's marriage was forged, and she asks Dr. Montag to fly over from the east to testify that he witnessed her marriage to Myron Breckinridge. Mary Ann, distraught at Rusty's unexplained rejection, moves in with Myra. Letitia delightedly informs Myra that Rusty is living with her, and that his sexual behavior is now sadistic and violent.

When Buck's lawyers announce that there is no proof that Myron is dead, Myra and Dr. Montag are compelled to reveal that Myra is really Myron, having undergone a sex-change operation two years earlier. Buck capitulates. As a result of her experiment upon Rusty, Myra's own drives have undergone a transformation. She now desires only Mary Ann, who remains incorrigibly heterosexual. Whilst Myra is reflecting on her dilemma, she is struck by a car whose driver is never identified. The accident catalyzes her return to the identity of Myron. Whereas the earlier Myron had been attracted only to men, the new Myron at the novel's conclusion is happily married to Mary Ann, with a phallus constructed by the doctor who had saved his life. Rusty is by this time a major box-office success, renamed Ace Mann, having thus, ironically, achieved the representative status which Myra had intended for him. In a reversal of Myron's own sexual trajectory, Ace Mann's inclinations are now resolutely homosexual.

It was the critic Kenneth Tynan's search for contributions for the revue *Oh! Calcutta!* (1967) that prompted Vidal to begin writing *Myra Breckinridge*. Vidal never did write a contribution for the revue, but "it

7 This scene is largely retained in the 1951 film, directed by Elia Kazan.

was Ken's suggestion that I ought to contribute that set me to pondering; hence, holy Myra Malthus Ora pro Nobis."⁸ Through "Myra Malthus," as well as in his essay "Pornography," Vidal makes a connection between the issues of global over-population and official control of a society's sexual mores. In both novel and essay, he argues that the fact of over-population means that it is no longer possible to maintain that heterosexual acts are exclusively "right" and "natural." According to this rationale, governmental suppression of homosexual acts, whether viewed as "crimes" or "sins", only perpetuates the production of unnecessary additional children.

Meanwhile, effort must be made to bring what we think about sex and what we say about sex and what we do about sex into some kind of realistic relationship. Indirectly, the pornographers do this. They recognize that the only sexual norm is that there is none. Therefore, in a civilized society law should not function at all in the area of sex except to protect people from being "interfered with" against their will (568).⁹

Vidal offers a straightforward definition of pornography in the essay of that name: "Pornography is usually defined as that which is calculated to arouse sexual excitement" (561). At some remove from the catalyzing spirit of *Oh! Calcutta!*, Vidal has denied any desire for *Myra Breckinridge* to titillate the reader, who is advised instead to focus on the use of old films in the book (Stanton and Vidal 106). In *Myra Breckinridge* the heroine's "mission" leads her to humiliate and later rape a young man, Rusty Godowsky. He subsequently becomes involved with a middle-aged woman who relishes his brutal and injurious treatment of her. In *Myron*, a youth known only as Half-Cherokee is sexually humiliated, and another, Steve Dude, is bound, shaved, and barely escapes castration. A third youth is neutered. These episodes are depicted explicitly and in detail, even in the semi-expurgated British edition of *Myra Breckinridge*. The issues of what constitutes pornography and whether the pornographic content of a

8 Letter to Heather Neilson, dated 2nd. April 1988.

9 Vidal's attitude to pornography is consistent with his attitude towards other crimes which he perceives to be "victimless" - prostitution, gambling, and the use of drugs.

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given work can be justified in terms of that work's "literariness" are beyond the scope of this piece.¹⁰ However, Vidal's deflection notwithstanding, it is accepted here that pornography is indeed an aspect of *Myra Breckinridge* and *Myron*, although its impact is in part defused by the camp tenor of Myra and her vision. Susan Sontag's observation that "In naive, or pure, Camp, the essential element is seriousness, a seriousness that fails", is pertinent here (Sontag 283).¹¹ Catharine R. Stimpson has astutely argued that in *Myra Breckinridge* Vidal is actually "satirizing the pornographic tradition and at the same time correcting its errors" (194), a point reiterated by Dennis Altman, who remarks that where Vidal is "most radical [is] in his anti-sentimentality" (135).

Rather ironically, the "pornographic" elements of *Myra* and *Myron* function precisely to situate the two novels within the mainstreams of literary tradition. Besides its sources in the Menippean satire, the "pornography" in *Myra Breckinridge* and *Myron*, like the writings of the Marquis de Sade and

10 For an examination of these issues, see Susanne Kappeler. *The Pornography of Representation*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1968. My reason for concluding that *Myra Breckinridge* and *Myron* can appositely be described as pornographic lies in my acceptance of the definition of pornography drawn up by the Minneapolis City Council which, in 1983, was considering proposed ordinances to add pornography to the legislation as constituting a form of discrimination against women. The following is that definition, expressed in a slightly abridged form by the lawyer Catharine MacKinnon.

"We define pornography as the graphic, sexually explicit subordination of women through pictures or words, that also includes women dehumanised as sexual objects, things or commodities. enjoying pain or humiliation or rape, being tied up, cut up, mutilated, bruised or physically hurt, in postures of sexual submission or servility or display, reduced to body parts, penetrated by objects or animals, or presented in scenarios of degradation, injury, torture, shown as filthy or inferior, bleeding, bruised, or hurt in a context that makes these conditions sexual...

"Erotica, defined by distinction as not this, might be sexually explicit materials premised on equality.

"We also propose that the use of men, children or transsexuals in the place of women is pornography." ("Pornography, Civil Rights and Speech", Francis Biddle Memorial Lecture, Harvard Law School, 5 Apr. 1984 qtd. in *Pornography and Sexual Violence: Evidence of the Links*. London: Everywoman, 1988, 1-3).

11 Vidal notes in the introduction to *Myra Breckinridge & Myron* that Myra's "gospel" has been favorably compared with the camp novel *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (viii). Although Lorelei's diary never broaches the subject of the population explosion, her creator Anita Loos did so in an astonishingly Myra-like aside in her 1963 introduction to the book.

"Miss Loos [...] if you were to write such a book today, what would be your theme?" And without hesitation, I was forced to answer 'Gentlemen Prefer Gentlemen' [...] But if that fact is true, as it very well seems to be, it, too, is based soundly on economics, the criminally senseless population explosion which a beneficent nature is trying to curb by more pleasant means than war" (*Gentlemen Prefer Blondes/Gentlemen Marry Brunettes*. London: Picador, 1982, 16).

Choderlos de Laclos, has roots in the most “respectable” of antecedents, Samuel Richardson’s *Clarissa*. The intimate sacralization of Mary Ann Pringle’s genitals near the end of *Myra Breckinridge* - evoking Sade’s ironic sacralization of the female body - is a turning on its head of the worship of virginity manifested in *Clarissa*. *Clarissa* is idealized, and thus distanced, as a pious virgin: Mary Ann is reduced imagistically and verbally by a synecdochic process. The ways in which these female characters are positioned exemplify the dual aspect of a fetishizing vision.

John Weightman first observed the similarity between *Myra Breckinridge* and *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* (281), an observation that so pleased Vidal that he referred to it in the Introduction of the revised edition of *Myra Breckinridge & Myron* (viii). Both texts are the subversive heirs of *Clarissa*, in which the thoughts and actions of both *Clarissa* and her scheming rapist Lovelace are equally available to the reader through their prodigious correspondence. In *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, the privileged viewpoint is that of the seducer, the Vicomte de Valmont, and his fellow conspirator Madame de Merteuil. The Vicomte contemplates drugging his intended victim, “to make her a new *Clarissa*”, while the girl herself keeps *Clarissa* and *Christian Thoughts* by her bedside. (de Laclos 304). Likewise, the rapist Myra is in control of what appears before us, “her” reader – although her journal is ostensibly written for the eventual perusal of her therapist and dentist, Dr. Montag - thus inviting our complicity. Like Lovelace and Valmont, Myra becomes obsessed by a single object of prey. As in *Clarissa*, Myra’s narrative climaxes in an act of rape, although the rape of *Clarissa* is, as Terry Eagleton has described it, a sort of unrepresented gap in the text (61). The rape of *Clarissa* results in the death of both victim and rapist, and in *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* both the seducer and the seduced must also die. *Myra Breckinridge* swerves comically from this trajectory, with Myra’s rape of Rusty leading not to death but instead to an unforeseen metamorphosis for each.

The Golden Ass was Vidal’s model for the depiction of Myra/Myron’s journey of gender dysphoria. To state the obvious, in many ways Myra’s transsexuality is hardly representative, although she occasioned enthusiastic correspondence from transsexual readers to the author (Stanton and Vidal 83). Myra’s regression into Myron at the end of *Myra Breckinridge* is a Menippean metamorphosis, resulting from her dangerous over-reaching, and misapplication of will. If a “dystopia” can be defined as an imagined

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society in which total conformity is enforced, then Myra's own absolutist vision is as much to be condemned as the strict normative codes of gender roles and sexual orientation against which she is plotting. In *The Golden Ass*, stolen magic transforms Lucius into an ass, instead of the bird whose shape he had intended to assume for one night. Unable to procure the roses which he must eat in order to resume his own shape, he is condemned to remain an ass for a year. However, the goddess Isis then intervenes, delivering him with a rose garland during one of her sacred ceremonies, in exchange for his lifelong service. Myra, too, is on a quest for roses, the "roses" of Rusty Godowsky's body, which she fetishizes as such. His body is dehumanized and inventoried: "small roselike inverted nipples" (131), the sphincter "a tiny pale pink tea rose" (136), and the "deep shiny rose" of the head of the penis (146). However, it is the attainment of Myra's quest - the devouring of Rusty's "roses" - which awakens her remorse and catalyzes her retransformation. The physical metamorphosis which is the result of the hit-and-run assault is but the ultimate stage in her seemingly imperative transition into a proudly monogamous, heterosexual, male devotee of the Republican Party. Like Apuleius' Lucius, Myron must pay for the return of his own body with lifelong service - in Myron's case to Christian Science and middle-class marriage.

Whereas classical mythology is evoked for allegorical purposes in *Myra Breckinridge*, Vidal's parody of the contemporary French novel is explicit. Shortly before the first American release of *Myra Breckinridge*, *Encounter* published Vidal's overview of the theoretical writings of Alain Robbe-Grillet and Nathalie Sarraute, entitled "French Letters: Theories of the New Novel" (1967). The two writers appeared to Vidal to want to "relate themselves to great predecessors" and to take for granted that "the highest literature has always been made by self-conscious avant-gardists" ("French Letters" 95, 97.) Vidal strongly disagreed with the implication of the French theories - that art is based on nothing that precedes it - and with Robbe-Grillet's apparent assumption that words can describe things with absolute precision. If Robbe-Grillet's concept of the representative power of words is taken to a logical extreme, he declares, then

the ambitious writer must devise a new language
which might give the appearance of maintaining
the autonomy of things, since the words, new-
minted, will possess a minimum of associations

of a subjective or anthropomorphic sort. No existing language will be of any use to him, unless it be that of the Trobriand Islanders: those happy people have no words for 'why' or 'because'; for them, things just happen ("French Letters" 106.)

Those Trobriand Islanders reappear in the first chapter of *Myra Breckinridge*, unmanned in the fantasy life of its heroine. Myra, too, has studied the contemporary French novel; however, she largely adopts and concurs with the ideas of the French New Novelists.

Essentially, each of us is nothing but a flux of sensations and impressions that only sort themselves out as a result of the most strict analysis and precise formulation, as Robbe-Grillet has proposed but not accomplished (*Myra Breckinridge & Myron*, 37).

Robbe-Grillet and Sarraute reject the notion of psychological depth and the depiction of character in fiction, asserting that only the absolute presence of things can be recorded. Robert F. Kiernan has pointed out Myra's conscientious attempts to imitate Robbe-Grillet's prose by avoiding subjective analysis as far as she is able (98-99). Her description of the very large stain on the white wall of her apartment suggests a parody of the repeatedly described stain in Robbe-Grillet's *La Jalousie* (1957), left by the squashing of a centipede. In "French Letters," Vidal specifically cites the episode of the centipede's killing as a "visceral" failure of the author's declared method (99). Myra's firm resolution - to remain stylistically pure, eschewing simile and metaphor - is quickly abandoned. For she also owes a stylistic debt to Parker Tyler, whose *Magic and Myth of the Movies* (1947) she has wholeheartedly embraced and distorted.

Vidal met the surrealists André Breton, Charles Henri Ford, and Parker Tyler in 1945, through Anaïs Nin. Ford and Tyler were respectively the editor and associate editor of *View* magazine, which "charmed and intrigued" Vidal, introducing him to a literature different from anything he had encountered before (Ruas 68). Vidal pays the *avant-garde* magazine a mocking tribute in *Myron*, with Myra's lament that "not even *View*" would publish the article "Penny Singleton and Sally Eilers: The Orality of Florality," written by her "late husband" Myron (*Myra Breckinridge &*

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Myron, 257). In the belated first British edition of *Magic and Myth of the Movies* - the publication of which in 1971 the author described in the Preface as the book's "resuscitation" - Parker Tyler commented at length on Vidal's appropriation of his work as the focus of Myra's obsession. Tyler's agent, he averred, had "played with the idea of a lawsuit." However Tyler himself chose to hope that Vidal's prediction, expressed to Charles Henri Ford - "I've done for him what Edward Albee did for Virginia Woolf" - would prove to be accurate (Tyler, *Magic* 9-10).

In an earlier work, *The Hollywood Hallucination* (1944), Tyler had expressed the thesis that Hollywood manufactures hallucinations which reflect the aspirations, fixations, discontents and fears of its audiences. In *Magic and Myth of the Movies*, he proposed that myths reappear in different forms throughout human history and that psychic patterns persist, the cinema manifesting archetypes and types in its heroes and heroines:

The movie makers are virtually the gods of Hollywood, and the actors and actresses, the divine impersonations, are the contemporary vestiges of that Old Omnipotence of love, war, wisdom, and nature which was old Greece's (Tyler, *Magic* 169)

To the Breckinridge(s), Tyler is the central thinker of the modern age. Myra augments Tyler's themes with a belief in the progressive revelation of the arts, convinced that "the Hollywood films of the 1940s are superior to all the works of the so-called Renaissance, including Shakespeare and Michelangelo" (*Myra Breckinridge* 17-18). She fails to recognize the tongue-in-cheek tone of much of both of Tyler's books, or his *cri de coeur* expressed late in *The Hollywood Hallucination* - "It is for the admirable exceptions of Hollywood for which I implicitly speak." (Tyler, *Hallucination* 220). Vidal could not resist a last dig at Parker Tyler by resurrecting him for a cameo in *The Golden Age*. Tyler appears at a party hosted by John Latouche, where he speaks enthusiastically to Caroline Sanford's nephew Peter - in a voice that was "pansy-eager with an ironic intermittent base" - about Caroline's brief but prolific career in silent movies. "I regard *Mary Queen of Scots* as a touchstone for film criticism. A sort of high mark never to be reached again by any actress with such primitive lighting and dentistry" (*The Golden Age* 283-284).

Tyler's critiques of Hollywood stylistically combine his surrealist vision with the glutinous awe of high camp, and are rich with forced metaphor. The narrative lens focusses in dreamlike piecemeal fashion on a particular feature of an actor, or a garment. Veronica Lake's "cascade of luminous blond hair [is] as undulant as a long waterfall and suggesting a slit Ku Klux Klansman's hood" (Tyler, *Magic* 83). Charlie Chaplin's moustache becomes "that fat eel [...] frantically imprisoned in the fishbowl of his face." (Tyler, *Magic* 31) Like Tyler, Myra pushes her metaphors and similes to the limit, as in her description in *Myron* of Whittaker Kaiser's eye as "that tiny red oyster so like to an infected buttonhole" (*Myra Breckinridge* & *Myra* 276).¹² Even her respectful comments about members of the Pantheon serve to dissolve any mythic aura. "Like Carole Landis, William Eythe had no back to his head; each died young. He of a liver complaint; she a suicide" (322). The semi-colons signal solemnity, but Myra's words deflate the two idols, rendering them mere mortals with flawed physiques.

Myra quotes and imitates the most solemnly outlandish sentences in Tyler without inferring their implication, namely that "deification" precedes fetishism, or - in the extreme - is indistinguishable from it. Thus the paradox which Myra expounds but does not perceive: the actor or actress who is "unique" enough to become a member of the Pantheon is at the same time rendered inanimate and replaceable by the very worship of his or her adherents. Myra's self-image reflects this dissonance, as she asserts her uniqueness even whilst borrowing a different *persona* from the movies for every encounter. Myra's own hectically asserted "uniqueness" is paradoxically premised upon a *bricolage* of images; her self-construction from borrowings. Myra's journal is a cautionary tale, reminding the reader that the self as *bricoleur* is no self at all.

12 This particular metaphor would also appear to indicate an echoing, whether inadvertent or deliberate, of Robert Penn Warren's *All the King's Men*, a significant text in Vidal's reading history. At the end of Warren's novel *Jack Burden*, the narrator, writes the following hyperbolic sentence.

"It was as though in the midst of the scene Tiny Duffy had slowly and like a brother winked at me with his oyster eye and I had known the nightmare truth, which was that we were twins bound together more intimately and disastrously than the poor freaks of the midway who are bound by the common stitch of flesh and gristle and the seepage of blood" (Orlando, Florida: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1984, 417).

III

As Frank Kermode observed: “[H]owever you put it, the history of the novel is the history of forms rejected or modified, by parody, manifesto, neglect, as absurd” (129-130). In the sequel to *Myra Breckinridge*, Vidal continued his parody of novels and novelists within the context of a critique of Hollywood’s image-making. A genealogy of *Myron* must include Lewis Carroll’s sequel to *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) - *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871) - as the logistical schemata of the two texts demonstrate. In Carroll’s fantasy, Alice jumps through a looking glass and finds herself in an inverted world subject to the rules of an elaborate chess game. Thwarted at first by the neology and caprice of the creatures she meets, she nevertheless advances to the position of Queen. Then she awakens to find that her adventure was merely a Dream and little time has passed. In *Myron*, the emissions of television at their most fatuous have become the “looking glass” of the “average American.” The novel begins with Myron’s propulsion through his television screen, during a late night showing of “Siren of Babylon”, starring Maria Montez. His *alter ego*, Myra, has effected this calamity in order to resume control over their shared body. Myron finds himself on the studio lot where the movie is being made, on 14 June 1948. He discovers that he is one of approximately a hundred “colonists” who have entered the picture in the same way. These outsiders must abide by certain rules with regard to the “locals” and Myra’s transgression of those rules is about to destroy the colony when an unforeseen accident compels her to adopt a different strategy. The drag “queen” moves to movie star and becomes “Queen” of the “sword and sandals” genre. After having spent eight weeks in 1948 - the time taken to make the movie - Myron is abruptly returned to his own rumpus room. Like Alice, he has lost only a few minutes of his life, on 17 April 1973.

Prior to his fall into “Siren of Babylon,” Myra had sensed Myra’s attempts to return whenever he held a pen. While watching television, he had been working on the accounts of his Chinese Home Catering Service. During his imprisonment in the studio lot in 1948, both he and Myra use the account book to record their experiences and intentions, Myra employing codes so that Myron cannot forestall her schemes. They comprise a kind of internecine Scheherezade, frantically employing a pen in lieu of a voice.

“Siren of Babylon” is Vidal’s invention, a parodic compendium of the low budget adventure films in which Maria Montez featured. One of these was *Siren of Atlantis* (1948), in which Montez confirmed her status as “the object of an excessive fan cult brought on by nostalgia and a thirst for high camp” (Katz 822). *Myron* allows the fantasies of the most infatuated and voyeuristic of cinematophiles to become “reality” - not only can Myra see beloved actors at close quarters, and touch them, but she can also even assume for a time the life of one of her favorite goddesses. On entering “Siren of Babylon,” Myron is met by an ostentatiously effeminate hairdresser known as Maude, whose assigned task it is to aid the orientation of newcomers. As Kaplan notes, Maude is a rather unkind caricature of Vidal’s literary rival Truman Capote (699). Myron quickly learns that, on the set, the outsiders suffer literally the cinematic effects which appear merely as split-second changes to the television viewer. “Fade to Black” is experienced as a suffocating darkness from which one resurfaces in the next scene. A “Cut To” the next scene is “like being flung across a room by a giant hand” (228). The second colonist encountered by Myron is Whittaker Kaiser, a short-order cook and pugnacious Drunkard from Philadelphia. Maude threatens to report Kaiser for “trying to break frame,” meaning to move within camera range, which results in the intruder’s appearance in the movie as a microphone shadow.

Whittaker Kaiser is a merciless parody of Norman Mailer or, more specifically, of the Norman Mailer who had written *The Prisoner of Sex*. In July 1971, *The New York Review of Books* published Vidal’s comment on several recent feminist publications and some of the reactions they had received. “Women’s Liberation Meets Miller-Mailer-Manson Man” discussed Kate Millet’s *Sexual Politics* (1970), whose indictment of Mailer’s writings Mailer had countered in *The Prisoner of Sex*. Vidal’s essay remarked on the hostility manifested towards the advocates and aims of Women’s Liberation by a reactionary male population, a population which Vidal designated, by synecdoche, “the Miller-Mailer-Manson Man” or “M3”. Certain fundamental elements of Mailer doctrine, reiterated in *The Prisoner of Sex*, were noted, such as: the analogy between violence and sexual release; the idea of the homosexual urge as an evil which every man must suppress within himself; the rejection of homosexual practice as cowardice insofar as the participants do not enter into heterosexual competition for fecund females; the disapproval of onanism as a self-destructive activity; the

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responsibility of a woman to find the best mate possible so as to produce children who will improve the species; and the relation of the quality of the orgasm in a heterosexual act of intercourse to the quality of the embryo engendered (“good fucks make good babies.”) These doxies are translated into *Myron* as unambiguously misogynist and homophobic outpourings, their dangerous irrationality undermined only by their hyperbole:

“There’s still a few of us who’re fighting to be all-men. To be tough. To kill if we have to. Because that’s what it is to be a man, Breckinridge. It’s to kill [...] That’s what the orgasm is all about. Murder is sex, sex is murder” (*Myra Breckinridge* & *Myron*, 300).

“Women’s Liberation Meets Miller-Mailer-Manson Man” presents in rational form those of Vidal’s theories which are represented irrationally by Myra in her role as vigilante for population control. In the penultimate paragraph of the essay, Vidal offers a polemical analysis which reiterates the concerns he had earlier expressed in ‘Pornography’ and *Myra Breckinridge*:

It is very simple: we are breeding ourselves into extinction. We cannot feed the people now alive. In thirty-seven years the world’s population will double unless we have the “good luck” to experience on the grandest scale famine, plague, war. To survive we must stop making babies at the current rate, and this can only be accomplished by breaking the ancient stereotypes of man the warrior, woman the breeder (“Women’s Liberation Meets Miller-Mailer-Manson Man” 376).

In *Myron*, Myra’s drive to re-create the sexes has not diminished, but, following the unforeseen consequences of her experiment upon Rusty, she has devised a new scheme - the literal castration of a few exemplary young men. The young men would then be transformed into “sterile fun-loving Amazons,” role-models for the youth of America. Some men would be allowed to remain unchanged for whatever procreation was necessary, but eventually male-to-female transsexuality would be the norm. Revealing her identity, although not her mission, to the frothy Maude, Myra enlists

his help in keeping her wardrobe concealed from Myron, as well as the surgical equipment intended for her own reconstruction and that of her Amazons. She obtains a key to one of the insalubrious cabins at the Mannix Hotel for her secret purposes.

As was the case during her former reign over Myron's body, Myra has several agendas. She has broken into the movies - literally - in order to save MGM, which is fast declining financially, to oust Dore Schary, who briefly succeeded Louis B. Mayer as studio head, and to guide Mayer with her prescience as to the company's profits and losses. The expenses of the colonists are provided for by the first colonist, an African American man known as Mr. Williams, who had entered the lot of "Siren of Babylon" in 1950 and subsequently made a fortune on the stock exchange, exploiting his knowledge of the future. Apparently he is the only colonist ever to have been able to affect the future by means of his privileged information. If any other colonists attempt to discuss their situation, their words become gibberish to the locals. Myron divides his efforts between trying to discover the way home, to suppress Myra, and to minimize the damage she has wrought. He and Whittaker Kaiser plan to kidnap the elusive Mr. Williams and force him to show them the exit, but the opportunity is lost when Myra resurfaces, causing Myron to miss the rendezvous. Myron in turn finds himself at one point facing the bound and terrified figure of Myra's second potential Amazon, the red-haired Steve Dude, whom Myra had been on the brink of castrating. She has also begun to interfere with "Siren of Babylon" during the commercial and station breaks when the actors freeze, thus violating the taboo against breaking frame.

Myron is finally permitted to see Mr. Williams. He has entered "Siren of Babylon" with a mission concerning MGM which is directly adverse to Myra's, as both Myra and Myron discover. Only Mr. Williams and a few illuminati know that when the making of "Siren of Babylon" is finished, the eight-week period of filming begins again, and each of the unenlightened colonists reenters the picture at the exact point at which they first fell in. The movement of time and memory is not linear but circular. Mr. Williams' design is no less than the recuperation of literature. His plan is to undermine MGM by giving bad advice to Louis B. Mayer, so that books can return to their former primacy in American culture. "The golden bowel," as he puts it, is beginning to crack. Mr. Williams is thus revealed as an avatar of Henry James, who would later reappear as himself

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in cameo in *Empire*. In 1977 Vidal affirmed Henry James' influence upon his own work and that, in his opinion, James was the greatest novelist which the United States had hitherto produced (*Views From A Window*, 182, 191). Despite Vidal's well-known love of cinema, one might thus infer that his sympathies lie more with Mr. Williams than with Myra.

The cracked golden bowl in James' novel represents a marriage based on dishonesty. The "golden bowl" of Mr. Williams is the fraudulent marriage of the Word with celluloid. The American government is in collusion with Mr. Williams' scheme. However, in one of Vidal's more contemporary jokes for the book's first readers, Richard Nixon makes an attempt to enter "Siren of Babylon" in order to avoid the imminent Watergate inquiry. He is successfully impeded. Myra redoubles her attempts to save MGM. That she is able to reveal to an employee the future takings on films currently under consideration is evidence that Mr. Williams' power is weakening. During commercial breaks, when the actors are suspended in time, Myra works on the set to introduce nudity into "Siren of Babylon," removing breastplates and jockey shorts. Sufficient titillation of the viewer, she reasons, will make the film profitable, thus preventing its being sold to television, and pre-empting the arrival of Mr. Williams. Myra pauses in her work to perform a vasectomy on an extra, using dental floss for sutures, and then attempts her most daring act of interference in the movie. But just as she is about to remove the breastplates of Maria Montez, she is pushed against the star by the colonist assigned to guard duty. Myra takes possession of Maria Montez, whilst Montez is forced to inhabit the ten-year-old body of the Myron Breckinridge of 1948.

Myra takes advantage of the situation, giving an Academy Award winning performance in "Siren of Babylon" to ensure its success. She advises the authorities at MGM to obey Myra Breckinridge in all matters, warns an ungrateful Judy Garland to abstain from Drugs and alcohol, and worries about the impending death of her host's body in a hot paraffin bath in 1951. While appearing at a supermarket opening in Los Angeles, she is confronted by Myron and his mother, and this encounter catapults Myron back to 17 April 1973. He discovers that a young man in his neighborhood who, prior to Myron's journey back to 1948, had recently won a Nobel Prize for inventing a form of permanent contraception, had never existed. He realizes that - in this case at least - Myra must have managed to alter history, but never apprehends that it was her vigilante sterilization of the

MGM extra which had prevented the birth of the scientist, thus bizarrely sabotaging her own mission. Myron consoles himself with the certainty that the course of history otherwise remains unchanged. John F. Kennedy is still a candidate for the presidency, his campaign assisted by the fact that he is Marilyn Monroe's brother-in-law. Kennedy's Republican opponent is the red-haired governor of California, Stefanie Dude, Myron having no recollection of the governor's former existence as the MGM extra Steve Dude, Myra's intended *castrato*.¹³

Prior to Myra's inhabiting of the body of Maria Montez, the fearful Mr. Williams had ordered her to leave "Siren of Babylon". "How can what I have invented order me to do what I have no intention of doing?" Myra responds, eerily anticipating Vidal's William Randolph Hearst's similar claim to Theodore Roosevelt towards the end of *Empire (Myra Breckinridge & Myron, 384)*. As the savior of MGM, the "creatix" has inadvertently transformed the cultural and political future of the United States. The final chapter of *Myron* consists of the mirror-reversed words "Myra Lives!" However, as Jorg Behrendt insightfully suggests, ultimately, Myra fails because, although "she does threaten men, [...] she does not threaten the system as such. She knows the mechanisms of power in and out and is able to subtly use them to her advantage, but the system is not changed, only those in power are exchanged" (90). For Myra, the perpetuation of the Kennedys and Marilyn Monroe signifies triumph. As a Vidalian ending, it is an encoded indictment of the blurring of the distinction between politician and media star (President Bill Clinton's appearance at the Golden Globes on 13 January 2013, to introduce Steven Spielberg's film *Lincoln* (2012), is just one recent and illustrative instance of the long-standing inter-relationship between Hollywood and Washington, arguably denoting the increasingly indistinguishable roles of politician and performer). As Vidal asserted in his demythologizing essay on the Kennedys, "The Holy Family" in 1967: "today Kennedy dead has infinitely more force than Kennedy living", and the self-destroyed actress has been transformed into a tragic idol (810). Both the politician and the actress persist as potently in "pre-Myra" history as images as they do in "post-Myra" history as living entities. The riddling conclusion of *Myron* is effectively a lament - that celebrity at its most intrusive and superficial is a form of death-in-life, subjecting

13 The alternative spellings "Stephanie" and "Stefanie" are apparently randomly used in both editions of *Myron* consulted.

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the chosen to the ignoble historiography of the fetishizing vision, whose posterity is legend.

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