CHAPTER VI

DETHEORIZATION

Researcher: In spite of your declared aversion to the Postmodern / Poststructuralist / Deconstructive practices is it not possible that you could have imbibed this spirit in what I would call your parodic reading / writing of a variety of subjects in your novels (say, Messiah, Kalki, Myra Breckinridge, etc.)?

Gore Vidal: My "aversions" are not to Postmodern, etc., (What else am I?) but to the replacement of literature by literary theory in America's English Departments—Calvino, Eco and I are taught at the University of Bologna under the rubric of "Neo-baroque literature". 

(See Appendix)

6.1.0 Vidal's strategies, 'demythification', 'dehistoricisation', and 'deprofanation' show that Vidal has imbibed the spirit of postmodernism rupturing traditional epistemes. But his reaction to postmodernism is not simple, it is double edged. Being a contemporary of the postmodern movement, Vidal inevitably emulates some of its characteristic features in his works. But at the same time he attacks its excessive critical / theoretical spirit. Imbibing the postmodern spirit of deconstruction, unmaking, demystifying and delegitimising in the manner of continental theorists, did not blind Vidal to, what can be called in terms of satire, the vices of the symbiosis between theory and literature. Vidal has reservations about theory overtaking literature, its scientism and its entombment in
ivory tower academic vaults. It is against these that he lets his ire flow, through his 'detheorization' in the novels Two Sisters, Myra Breckinridge, Myron and Duluth.

6.2.0 New criticism, the most important and influential literary movement of the early twentieth century, began the tendency towards the displacement of literature. Through a close reading of the text, its pretentious jargon and analytic rigor, it made criticism a "highly specialized technical area" far removed from the ordinary reader. Criticism in effect became an academic enterprise. In fact it sometimes displaced creation itself. David Daiches claims that the twentieth century is the greatest period of criticism known in either British or American literary history. Indeed, in the view of Richard Blackmur "...the most creative aspect of modern American literature is its criticism" (qtd. in Daiches n.p., 109, emphasis added).

6.2.1 Yet, much more followed. The few years of vacuum created after the New Criticism was quickly filled in by continental theories and philosophies -- Phenomenology, Hermeneutics, Revisionist Marxism, Structuralist Anthropology, Linguistics, Semiology, and Deconstruction. This importation of continental theories broke all assumptions of Les Sciences Humaines opened up new horizons for humanistic knowledge and established rich relations between various disciplines. But once again, the
proliferation of such a vast multitude of theories in the American Universities created an overpowering critical climate that cannibalized literature and established a criticism-power nexus over literature in the English departments.

6.2.2 The effects of this phenomenon were accentuated by the fact that many critics were also creative writers. Among the New Critics, Robert Penn Warren, Allen Tate, John Crowe Ransom, and T.S.Eliot were all creative writers and critics. And it has been argued justly that their writings in most part reflect their critical theory. Consequently, in the arena of fiction, the traditional realist novel perfected in the Victorian era gave way to the modernist fiction of Joyce, Faulkner and Woolf. These writers adopted experimental techniques to draw attention to its formal procedures and claimed to have attained a "higher realism" through the use of psychology. This enabled the readers to see through the text to its mimetic base (Butler 1986, 47). Continental theories carried the intrusion of theory in fiction to radical dimensions. Critical theory and creative writing entered into a collusion as never before. The New Fiction of the 1960s and 70s, a product of this tendency, completely cut off the umbilical cord between the text and the world, consolidating the immanence of language in the novel and suggesting that it was a "world of words". The prime features of such texts became their own physical
structure of words, sentences and paragraphs (Federman 1984, 93-106).

6.2.3 Across the continent, critical theory already had its manifestation in a new praxis of fiction. The Nouveau Roman heralded by Nathalie Sarraute in Tropisms was represented by many novelists like Robbe-Grillet, Michel Butor, Claude Simon, Robert Pinget, etc. In the States, on the other hand, such effusively theoretic writers as John Barth, Thomas Pynchon and Vonnegut emerged. But they were outdone by a younger group of writers — Donald Barthelme, Jerzy Kosinski, Steve Katz, Richard Brautigan and William Gass. All these writers are not only academicians, some of them (Federman and Sukenick) also "have published the most straight academic writing and offer the highest profile of theory behind such works" (Klinkowitz 1975, 119). Sukenick is so bland as to title one of his collections as The Death of the Novel and other Stories which, more or less is an equivalent of criticism in fiction. Klinkowitz notes that Sukenick's fictional ideas square with avant-garde thinking, with the theories of language, dominant in this century from Sausurre down through Derrida and Kristeva (Klinkowitz 1985, xviii). It is not surprising, therefore, that the New Literary History (Vol.12, No.1, Autumn 1989) devoted an entire volume to this collusion between Critic and Author, between critical theory and creative writing. Two years later, an author discussed in the journal published a book
Stories, Theories and Things (1991) in which she (Christine Hose-Brooke) discusses questions asked to her as critic and author. Indeed, the relationship between criticism and literature, and critical theory and fiction was completely blurred in a symbiosis of the two.

6.2.4 Along with this collusion, whose features were described as post-modern, there evolved an attendant culture that was also anti-traditional and anti-establishment. Its early manifestations were the Beat, Jazz, Hippie, feminist and gay movements which shook the very fabric of American society. Simultaneously industrial development and increased affluence (capitalism) resulted in a democratization of culture and a consumerism boom. Meanwhile the country witnessed generational strains, racial tensions, sexual freedom, all of which were mirrored and influenced by the increasing portrayal of violence and disorder in TV and celluloid, whose mixture of reality and fantasy bred an artificial culture and encouraged a "religion of stars", an imitation of habits, that undercut all traditional values (Harris 1987, 140-152).

6.3.0 A contemporary of this social and intellectual milieu, Vidal has had to reflect the image of this change in fiction as well as in society, postmodern and postindustrial, in his novels. Postmodern features gradually emerge as the novels evolve in and through time.
From *Williwaw* (1946) to *Dark Green, Bright Red* (1950) Vidal uses a modernist, neo-Hemingway style of writing, whereby the 'story' is told through the consciousness of a narrator. However, from *The Judgement of Paris* (1974) onwards, postmodern even metafictive techniques are clearly noticeable. Frame (making/breaking), authorial/narratorial intrusion, self-consciousness / self-reflexivity, use of popular motifs are notable postmodern features of Vidal's novels. Though Vidal's allegiance, Kiernan points out, is to an eighteenth century aesthetic of the novel (Kiernan 1982, 43), it is influenced by Vidal's postmodern zeitgeist and therefore, the praxis of his fiction presents a use and abuse of postmodern / metafictive techniques.

6.3.1 The use of postmodern/metafictive elements is simple yet effective in *The Judgement of Paris*. Here, Vidal's mode of conception of the novels is like that of Fielding, Sterne and Smolett, who themselves present metafictional techniques. Though Vidal does not abandon the classical beginning-middle-end plot-structure, he leaves the novel open-ended. The episodic plot-structure, moreover, draws attention to the novel as a construct instead of providing unity to the novel, for it does not cohere its separate strands into a totality. *The Judgement of Paris* also proliferates in authorial intrusions, making remarks on the protagonist's character, his actions and digressive philosophical musings on the subject, sex versus love. This
provides a ready commentary to the reader while breaking his commonsense perception of seeing through the text to its mimetic base. Authorial intrusion makes the point that the story is being written as it is in the process of being read.

6.3.1.1 Vidal's employment of paratextual elements, exposure of frames and self-reflexiveness in Julian, Burr, Lincoln, 1876, Empire, Hollywood and Washington DC has already been discussed in chapter IV. These elements draw attention to fiction as fiction, and propose that history, like fiction, is a linguistic construct. In novels other than the historical ones cited here, paratextuality and foregrounding of frames point to the contrivance of the construct of the novels as in The Judgement of Paris. Apart from Julian, Messiah and Kalki are also self-reflexive, and as Berryman points out they should be of "most interest to critics exploring the techniques of postmodernism" (Berryman 1980,89)

6.3.1.2 Self-consciousness or auto-textuality, in Vidal's novel, does not figure in a big way. In the discussion of the historical novels, Vidal's self-conscious theory of history stands out as pointer to problems of historiography as self-consciousness traverses the problems of writing in other metafictional novels. Kalki is such an example where Vidal not only presents problems of writing fiction but also
draws the reader into the role of an interpreter of the "meaning" of the text. Kalik starts with the question of origins, "where do I begin. A week has passed since I wrote that sentence" (K:7), expressing anxiety about the delay in a continuous flow of narrative. Later, the narrator heaves a sigh of relief and exclaims, "There! I've done it. I have found a place to begin" (K:8). After a few paragraphs she again quizzes, "Am I coming through on the page. Can the reader see and hear Teddy Ottinger. I hope so. Because I cannot for the life of me see the reader" (K:9), reminding the reader that he too is a role-player, a participant of textual production.

6.3.1.3 A very widely practised postmodern feature in Vidal is the inter-mixture of genres which Derrida describes with his characteristic mockery of traditional restrictions as "impurity, corruption, contamination, decomposition, perversion, deformation, even cancerization, generous proliferation, or degenerescene" (Derrida 1980, 53). In The Judgement of Paris, the discursive space of the text transposed is enriched by a conglomeration of genres, which elevates the novel to a square or a cube. These genres are Picaresque, Dialogue novel, Essay novel, and Bildungsroman. A bohemian picaresque hero, Philip travels from Italy to Egypt and then to Rome, encountering numerous adventures as he journeys through these countries. His adventures include love/sex escapades with paramours and the final choice of
Anna, a worthy parallel of Sophia Western of *Tom Jones*. As a pseudo-political courier, he tries to help Lord Glenellen and Clyde Norman in their attempt to restore the House of Savoy. His meeting with a prophet in Egypt and his close encounter with the death of Mrs Fay Peabody add to the adventures of the picaresque hero.

6.3.1.4 As a dialogue and essay novel, *The Judgement of Paris* presents the author with occasions for authorial intrusion, for example, when he remarks on Philip's tendency to drift off into abstract discussions into "the dangerous shallow waters of philosophy" (*JP*: 145). Essayistic digressions as much as two pages long also occur frequently in the novel breaking the continuity of the narration. Acting as intrusions, they defer the reader's comfortable assumptions of reading through the novel to a real world. The topical subjects of these Essayistic digressions also make it akin to the novel of ideas. Along with this is the dialogue of characters which renew the discussion of these topics and help the author to air different views so as to serve as a foil to his own assertive viewpoint.

6.3.1.5 As a Bildung hero, Philip is recognizably a guileless young man being initiated into the ways of the world -- "an American 'innocent' touring Europe to complete
his education and to be polished by the older culture" (White 1968, 84). The novel begins with a spoof on the Kunstleroman, as Philip announces his failure to be an artist: "...he gave up literature as he had given up painting and music the year before... 'I am not an artist he murmured to himself'..." (JP: 10). Having served in the second world war and acquired a degree after three years in the Harvard Law School, Philip had tried his hand at several vocations before leaving for Europe, in leisure, to decide upon his future (JP: 17). In his wandering through Europe, he is initiated into many new experiences in his encounters with Regina, Bella and May Washington, Sophia, Lord Gllenellen and his coterie, Zoe Helitous and Anna. But at the end of a year he has not been able to decide upon any useful vocation. Finally, he decides to live his life to the full, in the present, thus not resolving the concerns of a Bildungsroman.

6.3.2 Julian similarly witnesses to a mixing of genres, combining in itself, the autobiographical memoir, private journal, epistolary and Bildungsroman mode. Kiernan calls it "a tripartite Bildungsromane, the story of Julian the Christian becoming a pagan, Julian the philosopher becoming a soldier and the prince becoming an emperor (Kiernan 1982, 47). Julian purports to be an autobiographical memoir of
Julian himself, which in truth never existed. Yet the story presented is a spiritual, intellectual and political development in the first person. This is framed by the epistles of Priscus and Libanius which present Julian as a multi-faceted personality and make the novel a complex potpourri of truth, fiction and gossip.

6.3.2.1 The proliferation of popular genres is characteristic of many novels of Vidal. Among them are Messiah (Journal, Memoir), Kalki (science fiction, detective story), Two Sisters (Memoir, journal, film script), and A Search for the King (Adventure, Romance, Picaresque). The use of popular motifs is thus another obvious feature of Vidal's novels. Kalki, therefore, can be read in its use of popular motifs, to which is central the myth of Kalki. In the mode of the detective / spy thriller, it has a CIA agent Dr. Ashok, who is out to uncover the world drug syndicate headed by Kalki alias James Kelly, who is also purported to be a KGB spy. The extravaganza of science fiction enters the novel at several points. Kelly invents a drug called 'Yersinia Enterclotica' to carry out his judgement on mankind. In the same vein Two Sisters and Myra Breckinridge employ motifs from pornography to great effect. The fantastic sexual escapades, the themes of incest in the Eric/Erika, Herostratus/Helena relationship and the
extraordinarily promiscuous relationship of all other characters underlie the theme of Two Sisters. The rape of Rusty with a dildo in Myra Breckinridge gains appreciability as an artifice in the camp mode.

6.3.3 In the Two Sisters Vidal reaches the apex, he is more playful than ever in his use of metafictive techniques. But while earlier the techniques unhinged the text from reality, here it serves another purpose, that of satire. In the novel, Vidal, through metafictive techniques subjects to ridicule many of his favourite targets, personal as well as general. Harold Bloom rightly points out, "A frequent critic of post-modernist and metafictive techniques, Vidal nonetheless makes use of them for both straight and satirical purposes, particularly in the partially autobiographical Two Sisters (1970)" (Bloom 1988, Introduction).

6.3.3.1 Two Sisters starts the metafictional game with the title itself. Subtitled "A memoir in the form of a novel", it causes identificational problems. Since a memoir is generally taken to be true (a real account) and the novel is said to be 'false' (a fictional account of real things), where precisely does truth (memoir) end and fiction (novel) begin. Vidal implies a quarrel between 'truth' and
'fiction' but in writing the memoir in the form of a novel, he suggests a corollary axiom that his book is a real account of fictional things, thereby evoking a metafictional paradox. This is verified by the presentation of this truth as it were in concentric circles. It begins with the narrator V's memoir, crosses into the journal of Eric, which in turn contains a screen-play / film-script. Each of these narratives continually crosses and recrosses each other, simultaneously traversing the past and present which are signalled by sub-headings 'Now' and 'Then'. Again, all the narratives reflect / allegorize each other. The story of Herostratus and Helena has its parallel in the Eric-Erika relationship, which in turn parallels the narrator V and Marietta's relationship. Thus, through a series of self-reflexive mirrors, Vidal plays with illusion and reality in the Pirandellian fashion. The concentric rings of narratives says Bernard F.Dick, "[are] largely V's attempt to determine whether life is the orbit of fiction or fiction is the orbit of life" (Dick 1974, 177).

6.3.3.2 However, this elaborate metafictional game is also used to target the objects of ridicule. Vidal helps the reader identify his target through the roman a clef motif while mocking at it in his narratorial commentary. Thus Anias Nin, the diarist, one of Vidal's acquaintances, is
attacked in the Two Sisters. In the novel she is thinly disguised as Marietta Donegal. Vidal ridicules her while simultaneously parodying realistic / naturalistic description in the very first few lines of the novel which begins thus: "Despite my protests Marietta revealed her breasts. You would never know, ...that I shall be fifty-two years old this November" (TS: 7). Marietta reveals her breasts only to prove her increasing age and diminishing youth. Through this discrepancy between the stylistic character of the passage and its alien subject matter Vidal undermines realistic / naturalistic discourse. But he also hits at the personality of Marietta alias Anias Nin who is depicted as a woman with an insatiable appetite for sex and whose fame largely rested on being mistress to the famous -- "was she not the mistress of D.H.Lawrence" (TS: 8). Vidal also ridicules Marietta's creativity. He sarcastically asks her: "'You never invent, do you? ... you make up everything, don't you?', to which Marietta replies, 'oh yes. Everything. Even you' " (TS: 13).

6.3.3.3 Apart from the roman a clef, Vidal makes a criticism of other events of his life and art directly. He comments on Myra Breckinridge, "It was so out of character" (TS:8), and "if I told you what art was you would turn into a pillar of salt" (TS: 15), an oblique reference to the bad
reception of *The City and The Pillar*. Frye and Fiedler also come in for direct criticism: "unlike so many intellectuals Fryer [sic] has not succumbed to the pop arts. For him rock is something the cradle endlessly does while the cinema is a pleasantly thrashy complement to the popular novel" (TS: 110). As for Fiedler, (V)idal credits Marietta for having discovered that all American men were homosexuals: "Long before Leslie Fiedler began to monitor Huck Finn's raft, Marietta was confident that all American men were basically homosexual and so incapable of appreciating women, the first principle of the universe" (TS: 35).

6.3.3.4 The essayistic digressions of the narrator provide another moot point of satire on many subjects. Vidal hits at the academic critic who like some "devoted Interpol academic, will unravel any Xanadu", so much so that "Even the most devoted young reader is not apt ever to want to look at another novel after 'studying' the subject at any American University" (TS: 101). His commentary on sex in literature not only ridicules the non-acceptance of *The City and Pillar* but also justifies the novel by examples from ancient literature, which used sex as a means and not as an end in itself (TS: 112-114).

6.3.3.5 In allegorizing stories within stories and simultaneously unravelling the *roman a clef*, Vidal undercuts
the self-reflexiveness of the novel by hooking it onto real events. But the roman a clef provides him with the targets of his satire, central to which are the two sisters. Vidal hints at the identity of the two sisters: "For years the press has enjoyed relating me to the ci-devant tragic empress of the West (Yes, Eric's screenplay provides analogies) because my one-time step-father is currently Jackie's stepfather, a fragile connexion" (TS: 110). The two sisters are, then, the Bouvier sisters, Jacqueline Onassis and Lee Radzwill with whom Vidal shares a stepfather. The equation that Vidal evokes is Achoris = Aristotle Onassis and Helena = Jacqueline Kennedy. This equation however breaks down with Artemisa's marriage to Achoris. But the point of the satire is not lost. Vidal deflates the myth of Kennedy as a martyr. In the novel, Eric who represents Kennedy, does not become a martyr even though he tries to imitate Nerostratus. Moreover, in relating Artemisa and Helena to the Bouvier sisters, Vidal uncovers and implies a relationship that is not so holy and sacred as it has been represented in history.

6.3.3.6 Vidal's straight and satirical use of postmodern / metafictive techniques through all their various modes deconstructs the traditional expressive-realistic theory of representation. Though none of the metafictive techniques
are used in the extreme so as to actually theorize on the workings of the novel in the novel, they incorporate substantial changes to ensure their being bracketed into postmodernity. Unlike other metafictional novels, Vidal does not elaborate upon form to make it the content, rather, he uses metafictive techniques to act on the content and thereby to project different perspectives involving a play of meanings. Thus, more than his use, Vidal's abuse of metafictive techniques stands apart in the novel and constitutes his satiric attack of postmodernism.

6.4.0 Myra Breckinridge is a sublime parody of postmodern literature. Boyette rightly identifies it as a Mennipean satire and warns that Vidal's novel should be read with critical attention to its language, symbol, and formal structure which "imitates (or figures) precisely the objects of his satire, a technique for ridicule and abuse that has been well established in the best tradition of English satire" (Boyette 1971, 229). Once again, Vidal is involved in a paradoxical use and abuse of postmodern techniques. His method is parody, the translation of the mimesis of the diegetic to a mimicry of it.

6.4.1 The very beginning of the novel tells us that it is not a novel in the conventional sense of the term. The
opening chapter has only a paragraph with five-hundred words; the second chapter, one page, the third, one and quarter; the fourth, only half, while the forty-first presents just two sentences: "Where are my breasts? Where are my breasts?" (MB: 216). Vidal parodies thus the so-called exploitation of typographical space. Postmodern writers employ such devices to suggest the discontinuity of the narrative and call upon the reader to make sense out of it. As the authorial voice in Ronald Sukenick's 98.6 says: "Interruption, Discontinuity, Imperfection. It can't be helped" (qtd. in Lodge 1980, 231-22). Sukenick composes in short sections often only a paragraph in length, Brautigan (In Watermelon Sugar [1968]) breaks sections, using capitalized headings, and Vonnegut (Breakfast of Champions [1973]) uses arrows. Gore Vidal mocks at this tendency in the postmodern novel. By having Myra narrate the novel, he suggests that discontinuity and imperfection can only be signs of lunacy of the narrator, a schizophrenic person like Myra. Myra's personality fits her narrative tenor. The narrator is at one with the narration.

6.4.1.1 Vidal's subtle play with the discontinuity of narrative is further evidenced by the Buck Loner reports that occur in between some chapters. How Vidal/Myra gets hold of these reports is not explained. However, along with
the first person narration Vidal juxtaposes the omniscient narration of the recording disc which represents the thoughts of Buck Loner. Moreover, the recording disc is posed as a textuality in which the periods and paragraphs are indicated not by typographical signs but by the words "period paragraph" themselves. The words are also italicized to signal its difference from the journal written by Myra. The imitation of a recording disc with disc no, date and precise verbal formula, "period paragraph", "parenthesis" and "capital i, capital c capital h", is Vidal's way of mocking at the purported textuality of all discourses and the laying bare of the truth that the electronic media has overcome the oral and verbal. The significance of the text / writing is undermined by the interpolation of a recording medium, which undercuts the privileged language of fiction and suggests the dominance of electronics - televisions, computers, tape-recorders, etc., which are prominent in the postmodern culture.

6.4.1.2 Myra's hypothesis of fiction is also satiric. She says, "the novel being dead, there is no point in writing made-up stories" (MB: 8). The traditional novel is almost extinct in Myra's view, yet there is no point in creating a postmodern artefact. Myra with characteristic mockery continues, "I intend to create a literary masterpiece [an
impossibility] in much the same way that I created myself [through a surgery], and for much the same reason: because it is not there" (MB:8). The creation of Myra provides an appropriate metaphor to the way a postmodern novel, in Myra's opinion, is made. Myra is the creation of a fantastic medical exploitation of a natural human physiology in scientific precision, having undergone a sex-change through an operation. She is given new life through this technical operation, that converts her from the natural to the artificial. Similarly, implies Vidal, the postmodern novel in its formation, in its technical virtuosity, is an aberration, like Myra. This mockery of the postmodern is clear when read in conjunction with Vidal's essay on the French New Novelist (Vidal 1972a, 268-94). Moreover, what Myra says doubles round into a cul de sac. She is a creation of words existing only in fiction and she is also the creatrix of this fiction. The logic is therefore that when she does not exist, the novel does not exist and vice-versa. Finally, as Myra points out, there is no use in writing made-up stories because a literary masterpiece is an anomaly. Even with all technical virtuosity at hand, the postmodernist cannot create a literary masterpiece.

6.4.1.3 The beginning and ending of metafictional novels become another target. Myra writes that she will not begin
at the beginning because there are no beginnings, only a "middle into which you fortunate reader, have just strayed" (MB: 9). Poser that she is, Myra keeps the beginning (her sexual change) in abeyance. Otherwise the total game of the novel would collapse. The in medias res, therefore, provides her the opportunity to flaunt the epic heroine's 'great' picaresque adventures. The end, too, mimics postmodern / metafictional novels, glossing over the traditional "happily ever after" ending. The contrast at the end between the Myra "whom no man will ever possess" (MB: 7) and Myron, the husband of Mary Ann, who has become a Christian scientist believing that "what happens in life is best" (MB: 218) is absurd. And of course, the 'moral' of the whole book is the "proven fact [that] happiness, like the proverbial blue bird, is to be found in your own background if you just know where to look" (MB: 219). Vidal, as it were, has solved the dilemma of the beginning and ending by telling the story of an epic heroine in medias res and ending it by normalizing it into the affair of a family settling down happily for ever. The grotesqueness of this mimicry and its inconsistency with the narration as a whole puts 'the nail on the wall' of the postmodernist question of the beginning and ending.

6.4.1.4 Vidal specially targets the Nouveau Roman in Myra Breckinridge. Having already written an essay on the French
New Novelist (Vidal 1972a, 268-94), Vidal now illustrates his thesis in the novel. He first parodies their concern for physical detail. Myra writes:

But my immediate task is to impress upon you how disturbingly beautiful I am with large breasts hanging free, for I am wearing nothing but black mesh panties in this overheated room, whose window I have shut because it is rush hour (6.07 pm, Thursday, Jan 10) and beneath my window the strip (sunset Boulevard in Hollywood, California) is filled with noisy cars... (MB: 9).

The stylistic imitation of the *nouveau roman* along with the interpolation of soft core pornographic material conveys the parodic reduction to absurdity. This parody is made explicit as Myra continues her narration. Describing the window as an "upside down two-leaf clover or heart, male scrotum as viewed from behind", Myra stops and warns herself: "But no metaphors. Nothing is like anything else. Things are themselves entirely and do not need an interpretation only a minimal respect for / their precise integrity" (MB: 11). The point that Vidal underscores is two-fold. He points to the preoccupation of the *nouveau roman* with physical detail and their presumption that "things are signs of nothing but themselves" (Vidal 1972a, 285). That is why Myra does not want to use metaphors. Vidal jokes about this in his essay on the new novel. Carrying Robbe Grillet's theory to its logical extreme, he
writes that the only sort of book which "might be said to be not a collection of signs of absent things but the actual things themselves would be a collection of ink, paper, cardboard, glue and type-face to be assembled or not by the reader-spectator" (Vidal 1972a, 289).

6.4.1.5 A final critique of postmodern / metafictional theory via the nouveau roman centred on their premise that nothing can be described, that the world cannot be represented (Waugh 1984, 3). There are two purple passages which epitomize the parody of this concept. The first:

Of course a true naming of things is impossible. Our minds are too feeble and our sensory equipment is too mysterious and complex for us ever to do more than make approximate definitions. we must continue to make the effort how inadequate the result (MB: 39).

The second:

Is it possible to describe anything accurately? That is the problem set us by the French New Novelists. The answer is, like so many answers to important questions, neither yes nor no. The treachery of words is notorious. I write I care for Mary-Ann. But what does that mean? Nothing at all because I do not care for her at all times or at any time in all ways (MB: 116).

Both the passages are a dramatization of what Vidal calls "the most naive aspect of Robbe-Grillet's theory of fiction, ...his assumption that words can ever describe with
absolute precision anything" (Vidal 1972a, 289). It is possible to gloss over the passages easily as manifestos of the New novel if the point to the parody were not made right there. "of course a true naming of things is impossible" sounds out the impossibility of expressing in language the real. The emphasis is on the inability of human mind to grasp human experience in human expression, that is speech and writing. Both are shadows of reality. This commonsensical stance is further asserted with the suggestion that one must however try hard to do so and with an admonition that everything must be subject to an analysis (MB: 39). Moreover, Myra's play with the meaning of the sentence, "I care for Mary Ann" (with the offer of, as it were, a Derridean notion of the deferred nature of sign), accompanied by a proliferation of meaning, through the permutation and combination of "I do not care for her at all times" and "at any time in all ways", seems to be a deconstructive mine.

6.4.1.6 The ridiculousness of the comment is however evident from the fact that this kind of ontological anxiety is applied to Myra's concern for Mary Ann and the impossible suggestion that she has to care for her at all times in all ways. Moreover, as Boyette points out, it sounds true enough to the readers to say that one is unable to express
what one feels for another but to say that it denies the "validity and honesty of genuine emotion is patently absurd" and Myra's talk about the new novelist is "the proverbial red herring that keeps Myra from confessing her inability to love" (Boyette 1971, 238). Myra thus writes that she likes Mary Ann's eyes and voice but not her mouth, that she cannot describe how she feels at that particular moment because it is impossible to sort out one's feeling at a moment. Therefore, she prefers to write on no other subject than her "own protean but manageable self" (MB: 116).

6.5.0 Myron continues the critique of postmodernism though not in as detailed a manner as Myra Breckinridge. While Myra Breckinridge dealt with French literary theory and its manifestations in the nouveau roman, Myron targets French film theory, as represented by the nouvelle vague movement and its organ Cahiers du cinema. He ridicules auteurism and remotivation theory which made much of commercially successful films through a re-reading of them as in the case of Sirk (Kay 1991, 133).

6.5.1 Ridiculing the ingenuity of the French new wave theorists, Vidal has Myron present his criticism of cinema as in the form of essays, which are never published. Myron's theoretical essays range from "The Banality of
Anality or Thirty seconds over Tokyo: The Gunner's View" and "Penny Singleton and Sally Eilers": The orality of Florality", none of which were published by either the Cahiers du Cinema or View. But Myron is not disappointed. In fact, not being published in these journals would mean that Myron's writings are original, that his work, "seminal -- in every sense -- had hit, slightly to derange a metaphor, the nail on the head" (MY: 46). Myron's ridiculous essays reveal Vidal's contempt of the rarely useful but highly ingenious theories of the French new wave in its organ Cahiers.

6.5.1.1 The parody of remotivation is, however, much more mocking in its tone. Significantly having situated his scene in 1948 when Alexander Astruc published his essay, "The Birth of a New Avantgarde", Vidal seems to attack the very root of the new wave theorist. As the nouveau vague theorist exploited the semantic volatility of signs in the films of, for example, Hitchcock and Fuller, thereby giving a new meaning and status to these films, Myron also exploits what she calls intervention in Siren of Babylon: "The possibilities, however of intervention are fascinating. But are they limitless? Presumably the editor of the film will catch any important changes that I make" (MY: 108). But as an experienced "film critic", Myron deftly intervenes in the
Siren of Babylon. She tampers with it and introduces subliminal touches of nudity to give the film an appeal at the box office that it never had before. Myra exclaims: "Triumph! I have now altered Siren of Babylon as well as world history by introducing near nudity of the top-less variety in a 1948 film" (MY: 156). Myra is all cheers for herself as she realizes that in three days' work she had with extraordinary cunning suggested male and female nudity in such a way that no censor could catch it.

6.5.1.2 Thus through Myra's interventions into the 1948 movie, Vidal suggests that the only kind of "remotivation" that the director of the movie sought is one that would ensure box office. In the industrialized studio system which worked like an entertainment factory whose organising principle was the division of labourer -- separate departments for writers, performers, technicians, film cutters and publicity men -- there was no place for individual artistic production, for auteurism. The film was the product of a whole year output. Indeed most of the films of the studio were competent conventional pieces of unimaginative entertainment far more interesting as sociology than as works of art. It is to this system that Vidal refers and through Myron ridicules the Sirkian phenomenon, so much insisted upon and adulated by the French film theorists.
Duluth is as much postmodern as it is against it. In this novel Vidal reaches the pinnacle of his parody/satire/deconstruction of all things postmodern—culture, politics, literature and theory. He digs into the Achilles heel of postmodernism and uncovers its vices. His satirical veneer does not spare anything that smacks of the postmodern. As Bell puts it, "Vidal has a huge catch of satirical fish to fry: television, soap opera, the jet set, Harlequin-romances, aliens from outer space, Jewish noses, word processors, deconstructionist literary criticism, and radical chic" (Bell 1983, 481).

The satire is so pervasive as to prevent its explanation and description. Writing on Duluth itself involves one in a self-imposed contradiction. Vidal successfully keeps commentary at abeyance through the multitudinous "Duluths", which in Derrida's terms would be an always deferring sign. "Duluth" disseminates into Duluth, the city, Duluth, the television series and Duluth, the novel. The signifiers, like the novel, are only verbal constructions and so exist by themselves. All the "Duluths" thus exist in a "World of words" as texts and Duluth is the 'true fiction'.

Vidal has created the so-called metafictional self-consuming artifact in the vocabulary of those who
admire the text and who describe the world as a text. But the self-consuming artifact is being created in his own terms in a new interpolation to the Heisenbergian principle. Deriving from the Heisenberg's uncertainty principle theorists of metafiction justify the impossibility of describing the world (Waugh 1984,3). Vidal plays on this penchant for giving a scientific justification to this literary farce and mockingly adds a new theory to the principle. In imitation of a metafictional novelist who explores a theory of fiction through the practice of writing fiction (ibid., 2), Vidal forms a theory to which he appends a praxis, engendering the novel Duluth. Thus his theory is called "the fictive law of absolute uniqueness" which reads: ...each character in any fiction -- as in life or non-fiction is absolutely unique... When a fictive character dies or drops out of a narrative he will then -- promptly -- reappear in a new narrative as there are just so many characters -- and plots -- available at any give time (D: 20).

6.6.1.2 The law has its constants and variables. The characters are eternal constants while they can appear in as many narrative variables as they can. Adding to the Heisenbergian uncertainty principle, Vidal forms another law, which he calls the "simultaneity effect". According to Vidal, the law is as central to fiction as Miriam
Heisenberg's law is to physics. Vidal explains:

It means that any character can appear, simultaneously, in as many fictions, as the random may require. This corollary is unsettling and need not concern us other than to note, in passing, that each reader, like each writer is from different angles and different times, in a finite number of different narratives where he is always the same yet always different. We call this *apres* poststructuralism (D: 20).

Having formed the theory, Vidal, however, does not pose as the writer of *Duluth*. He puts forth Rosemary Klien Kantor as its creatrix who applies the principle/theory by her ready accessibility to an intertextual gold mine -- a word processor which contains the plots of not less than 10,000 previously published novels. Her novels are therefore bereft of the touch of the creator and would beg the approval of "death of the author" post-structuralists. Produced on the basis of assembly line production, Kantor's enterprise would commonly be labelled 'plagiarism', but she calls it "creation by other means" (D: 22). Perhaps Raymond Federman's sophisticated play on the word would be a better epithet, "for plagiarism read also plagiarism" (Federman 1976, 565).

6.6.1.3 By applying the fictive law of absolute uniqueness, Kantor is successful at many creative enterprises. She is not only the accomplished "queen of
romance Harlequin style", she is also the acknowledged, "heiress -- as well as plagiarist of the late Georgette Heyer" (D: 34). Kantor also has been awarded the "Wurlitzer" prize for "creative journalism", ironically for her first hand account of the bombing of Hiroshima which she never witnessed. With such experience and with the technical help of the fictive law as well as the word processor, Rosemary creates simultaneously the novel, 'Duluth', 'Duluth', the television series, another novel titled "Countess Mara" and a serialized romance, "Rogue Duke".

6.6.2 Vidal carries metafictional elements to the excess and beats metafictionalists in their own metaphor of play and game. As in metafictional novels characters die and reappear but in Duluth the resurrected characters play roles in various stories in the novel. Beryl Hoover appears in "Countess Mara" after having died in a snowdrift in the novel "Duluth". She is also a character in "Rogue Duke", where she plays the role of a lover to Napoleon. It is not surprising in this game of fictions that she can convey a message to her son who is part of the novel "Duluth", even though she no longer exists in that fiction, having died in it. This kind of fantastic and fabulistic extravaganza wipes out all traces of reference to reality as fiction
blurs with fiction, in the interaction / intermingling and intertextuality of "Duluth", "Rogue Duke" and "Countess Mara".

6.6.2.1 Not only do characters die and resurrect in the fictions within the novel, readers imitate characters and help in continuing the narrative of the fictions in the novel, as they day dream in and out of their reading. Thus Darlene Ecks, on her way to the Lunar Bar, withdraws suddenly into romance and dreams that she is Lady Darlene in "Rogue Duke", at present in the ballroom. When she reaches the bar, she steps out of "Rogue Duke" but unwittingly she sets in motion the plot of the serial. Her encounter with Big John in the pantry of lunar bar is replicated at that instant of time in the "Rogue Duke". Beryl discovers them in the "Rogue Duke" at the Blenheim palace making love behind an oaken door marked "pantry" -- "Lady Darlene's white shapely legs are wrapped in a full nelson about the twany lithe back of the link-boy alias Big John in Duluth..." (D: 66). Vidal indulges in a frame-breaking not between reality and fiction but between fiction and fiction. The reader (in fiction) of "Rogue Duke" in Duluth is translated into a character in "Rogue Duke", the fiction in fiction. The erasure of reality implies that all life is fiction and all fiction a\textit{propos} Darlene Ecks is creative
fictional day-dreaming. The continuous shuffling of fictions in the novel and the chaotic discontinuity of the narrative lead to the creation of parodic heterocosms.

6.6.3 In a final showdown on postmodern theory, Vidal closes the novel with a play on the status of all verbal artifacts including Duluth itself. Addressing the pen person club of Duluth, Rosemary Kantor pontificates on the verbosity of matter, of existence. She says:

We are simply a formulation of words we do not live. We are interchangeable. We go on and we go on from narrative to narrative, whether in the serial forms or in those abstract verbal constructions so admired by the French boola boola Yale (D: 267).

Vidal strikes at the very heart of French literary theory carrying it to its ultimate logical extreme. Klein Kantor, herself a formulation of words, addresses persons no less fictitious, thus literally implying that they too only exist in words. Simultaneously the reader is faced with the absurd proposition that he too exists only as far as he is captured in words. The sermon does not end in mere rhetoric. As creatrix of fictions, Rosemary has the power to erase them too. This she does, writing off / erasing Duluth, Big John, Darlene and all the members of the club. She stops at that and the narrator has it that Rosemary has
removed only "one Duluth, the fictional one, that she knows, a mere drop in the bucket" (D: 268). Other Duluths still exist. Vidal thus brings the curtain down by making his novel a self-consuming artifact,

6.6.4 The influence of television in the postmodern milieu of Duluth is as permeating as it is in Myron. Acting in the television serial "Duluth," Edna Herridge speaks directly to her brother, the Mayor, from the screen. Such a conception is fantastic but to the point. The distance between real life and its television counterpart has gradually closed its gap. But at the same time if there is any aberration on the television like Edna's slipping off into another script, it is never noticed, for "although television is often heard it is never listened to" (D: 71). Ray's understanding of such a phenomenon with regard to the television is interesting. He thinks of a pun. In French poste means "television set", therefore "postmodemism is really postmodernism, what happened when modernism met television" (Ray 1991, 137). He also posits the problem of its influence seriously -- "the real question as posed by the electronic paradigm is whether thinking, as we have defined it, is possible at all without the distance which television obliterates" (ibid., 138). Having shown in Myra Breckinridge a generation dull, passive, and illiterate,
"stupider than the average", Vidal in *Duluth*, suggests that the distance is completely obliterated so as to nullify a person's power of comprehension.

6.7.0 In his use and abuse of postmodern / metafictional techniques, Vidal is at once postmodernist and antipostmodernist. He uses postmodernist techniques successfully to undermine truth or reality, especially the status of history and sometimes its equivalent in the traditional realist fiction. The techniques also become useful in satirizing specific targets which Vidal derides, especially the excessive intrusion of and practice of theory in fiction as in the *nouveau roman* or in the metafictional novels which engage many a postmodernist novelist. These he parodies with vehemence so as to uncover the increasingly cannibalizing tendency of theory in fiction. This involves him in a paradox. For as he undercuts / deconstructs the discourses of deconstruction in the novel, he is inevitably involved in a self-deconstructive mire. Vidal's tendency of 'detheorization' in fiction, the unmaking of theory in fiction, is thus his attempt to give primacy to literature against theory, a reaction against postmodernism, which is only another facet of postmodernisms' deconstruction of itself. Thus Calvino rightly calls Vidal an "*après* poststructuralist".