Popular writers have always earned the sneering denigration of academicians. But the advent of postmodern theory and criticism has brought about a renaissance of studies on popular literature and culture. In spite of this, Gore Vidal (1925- ), a popular writer by reputation, has, however, been scarcely studied. With the entire corpus of his works, he deserves much more attention than he has received. To date only three academic monographs and a few journal articles devoted to the study of his works have been published. Moreover, these academic monographs are only introductory in nature as the eponymous titles (Gore Vidal) of two of them testify. Vidal's oeuvre, therefore, provides enough leeway for productive research. This thesis attempts to analyse the deconstructive satire in his novels and thereby brings to light an hitherto unexplored aspect of his work.

Chapter I: Introduction: Deconstructive satire places satire in the context of postmodern fiction. Delineating the differences between the traditional, modern and postmodern views of the world, the chapter points out the postmodern's acceptance of the chaotic and disordered nature of his universe resulting in two tendencies, namely, indeterminacy and immanence, which are expressed in two
modes within postmodern fiction -- referential and reflexive. It, then, posits that satire belongs to the referential mode and that this type of satire, central to which is the vision of a decentered world, is in a sense deconstructive, since the concept of decenterment derives from Derridean deconstruction. This leads to a definition of deconstructive satire which is defined as a spirit of questioning the veracity of assumptions or ideological beliefs through a method of textual play of conflictive discourses with an open-ended implication of value. After a brief review of literature on Gore Vidal, which draws attention to the fact that he has not been subject to serious study, it is proposed to analyse the operation of deconstructive satire in Vidal's novels.

Chapter II: Intertextuality. Reading qua Writing discusses the poetics of deconstructive satire and the methodology on which the novels are examined.

'Deconstruction' and 'deconstructive satire' are intertextual processes, which involve a reading / writing dialectic. Both of them, in other words, convert their reading material into criticism and fiction respectively. Derrida's deconstruction is in fact the reading of pre-existing texts whose contradictory discourses he uncovers and thereby ruptures their wholeness, their claims to an
unequivocal mode of signifying. Vidal also deconstructs what he reads in the manner of Derrida. But in his novels, he follows an indirect method of deconstruction. He produces a deconstructive text by introducing opposing significations while retaining the original significance of the text he reads into his writing. This indirect deconstruction is signalled by the irony / parody in his novels producing contradictory discourses which question, undermine and relativize each other. Irony and parody while being deconstructive in nature also serve as weapons of satire in their 'pragmatic' function, and are perceived not as elements of authorial intent but as encoded messages.

It is this process of deconstructive satire that the thesis unravels in the novels of Gore Vidal. Towards this end, intertextual and deconstructive approaches are applied in the analysis of the novels. Again, since satire inevitably concerns the extratextual, historical and sociological references are also brought in to yield better insight into his deconstructive satire.

Chapter III: Demythification deals with Vidal's satire on the myths perpetuated by religious ideologies as seen in the novels, Messiah, Julian and Kalki. A discussion of the novels shows how Vidal uncovers the fraudulency of the
religions, Christianity and Hinduism and the various cults that emanate from them. He also deconstructs Christ and Kalki, by exploiting the volatility of these signifiers which do not have any objective signified, and by a reversal of the Christ / Antichrist opposition in John Cave and God / Man opposition in Kalki. The deconstruction of these figures also effects the subversion of the doctrines of Christianity and Hinduism and mocks at those who believe in them. The affectation, hypocrisy and superstition found in historical Christianity and bred by the religions and cults are also delineated.

The chapter also elucidates the effects of the commercialization of religion, its power and hegemony over the masses that could result in a totalitarian religious order as in Messiah or unleash a potent destructive force that can destroy the world, through the machinizations of a crazy cult leader as in Kalki. Vidal's uncovering of the evils within the ideology of the system of organised religions ruptures any blind adherence to them.

Chapter IV: Dehistoricisation examines Vidal's historical novels, namely, Julian, Creation, Burr, Lincoln, 1876, Empire, Hollywood and Washington D.C., to delineate his satire on historiography and history, which shatters the
relationship of seeming equality between history and truth and shows that history is as pseudo as literature itself.

The subversion of historiography by the detotalisation of narrative through such elements as the self-conscious theory of history, self-reflexiveness, framing, frame-breaking and paratextuality which uncover historiographical methods and equates history-writing to fiction-writing is illustrated by examples from the novels.

The re-writing / re-presentation of the past which brings about an ironic difference between the re-written version and the already textualised past is dealt with in detail. Such re-writing undermines the ideological content of history by revising the powerful players of history viz., Washington, Burr, Jefferson and Lincoln thus engendering a deconstructive satire of history.

Finally, Vidal's undoing of the notions of a glorified past through his symbolic and metaphoric satire of it in 1876, Empire, Hollywood and Washington D.C. is expounded. Vidal's deconstruction of history and revision of the past, it is stated, results in a new perspective on the past and elevates history to literature.

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Chapter V: **Deprofanation** considers Vidal's reversal of the sexual ideology of the United States an offshoot of its Christian / Puritanic heritage. The triune sexual ideology which Vidal repudiates is identified as the puritanic marital, the permissive heterosexual and the 'sacrilegious' homosexual. The chapter continues the study of the debasement of this ideology through a series of novels from *In a Yellow Wood* to *Myra Breckinridge*. It explains how the deprofanation is accomplished by the gradual displacement of the center (marital ideology) depicted in *In a Yellow Wood*, with the marginal (sacrilegious homosexual) in *Myra Breckinridge/Myron*, where all sexual categories are abandoned altogether and sex is seen as a signifier with many signifieds corresponding to a semantic volatility.

The deft deconstructive satire of the novels, which vehemently ridicules the hypocrisy produced by the stifling ideologies of sex and the wide gulf between the ideal (marital ideology) and practice and which completes the desecration of the center and the deprofanation of the marginal, is also discussed.

Chapter VI: **Detheorization** details Vidal's attack on theories of novels which he does by translating the mimesis of their deigetic to a mimicry of them in the novels *Myra Breckinridge*, *Myron*, *Two Sisters* and *Duluth*. Targeting the
reduction of the novel to a quasi-theoretical enterprise, Vidal ridicules the style and formal structure of the *nouveau roman*, its eschewal of the description-representation of reality, the death of the novel concept, self-reflexiveness, self-consciousness and other techniques of metafictional novels.

He also mocks at the elaborate and ingenious film theories of auteurism and remotivation which adulated commercially successful films as aesthetic and artistic ones. But his use of postmodern techniques in both straight and satirical manner undermines his attack of them, resulting in a critique of his own deconstruction.

Chapter VII: Conclusion -- after a brief summary of the earlier chapters delineates the decentered world of Vidal's novels and their radical indeterminacy, which are the outcome of his deconstructive tendency, viz. 'demythification', 'dehistoricisation', 'deprofanation' and 'detheorization'. Through 'demythification', Vidal depicts a world at whose center is a radical epistemological and ontological doubt which puts to nought man's seeking after illusory salvation in religions and myths and questions the absurdity of man's beliefs. Through 'dehistoricisation', Vidal questions the epistemology of history, placing man in
an ahistorical world where history and truth are impossible to link. The result of such an areligious and ahistorical world is Vidal's 'deprofanation', whereby he undercuts all categories of gender and sexual acts. Through 'detheorization' he attacks the expression of the decentred world, and the intrusion of theory into literature thereby deconstructing himself since he is part of it. Vidal's method of 'demythification', 'dehistoricisation', 'deprofanation' and 'detheorization' reverses, decenters and undoes the primacy of conflictive oppositions like religion/science, faith/reason, Christ/Antichrist, God/Man, fact/fiction, history/novel, male/female, heterosexual/homosexual, and theory/literature thereby rendering his texts problematic and plural. Like Derrida, Vidal does not accept any view of the world prima facie (whether it be traditional or postmodern), but puts it to a close scrutiny, not only to undo the primacy of this view but to break its hegemony, while at the same time subjecting it to mockery and ridicule. This spirit of questioning traditional edifices in the manner of Derrida, with a combination of, and more than, a Horatian 'jest' (ridiculum) and Juvenalian indignatio making an emergent Nietzschean tone of 'jest in earnest' binds together all his writings and makes him a deconstructive satirist.