CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: DECONSTRUCTIVE SATIRE

Researcher: To me it seems that satire in the line of Aristophanes, Petronius, Lucian, Rabelais, Swift, etc., is your forte. Would you acknowledge that their satiric spirit has influenced you?

Gore Vidal: Of course I am satirist to a point and the line you refer is the one I know -- Oddly, I find Swift, to whom I am regularly compared, unreadable.

(See Appendix )

1.1.0 In an era of postmodernism with its technical virtousity, semantic volatility and amorphous textualities / intertextualities, where even the world is considered a text, to speak of satire seems to be an anomaly. However, not all postmodern writers and critics subscribe to and practise an exclusively non-referential mode of postmodernism. Some of them are referential and even try to establish provisional truths through their works. Though satire appears to be at cross-purposes with a postmodern view, many postmodern novelists actually inculcate a strain of satire in their works imbuing the spirit of deconstruction, decenterment, displacement, difference, discontinuity etc., that permeates through their work to the
extratextual world which it questions and ridicules. Contemporary writers like John Barth, Thomas Pynchon, William Gaddis, Ken Kesey, Kurt Vonnegut and others generally known as postmodern novelists are also eminent social satirists. Imbibing the postmodern spirit these writers use satire not so much as an instrument of correction but as a mode of questioning and problematizing, deconstructing and unmaking in consonance with their decentered view of the world, evolving a kind of satire which is going to be named here as 'deconstructive satire' for want of a better label as distinguished from traditional satire, for it stems from or resembles Derrida's deconstruction. Gore Vidal (1925– ) who belongs to this group of novelists also exhibits such a trend of deconstructive satire in his works. But critics are either indifferent or reluctant to study him without prejudice. And even if some have identified the satirical strain in his novels, they are content with it alone, not bothering to trace the operation of this satire (i.e. deconstructive satire), or the strategies employed by him. So he is very often lumped with traditional satirists. The uniqueness of his satire will hence be evident only when he is studied against the backdrop of postmodernism even though he subjects it also to ridicule, in a postmodern way. The present study, therefore, undertakes the task of analysing

1.2.0 Postmodernism indicates a new episteme that grew out of socio-cultural changes in society and radically departs from traditional and modernist assumptions of the world. Till the late nineteenth century, traditionalists perceived the world as ordered, coherent and designed -- one that was easily grasped by the rational mind. This was "the world-view of liberal bourgeois individualism with its optimistic belief in progress and the rational intelligibility of experience" (Graff 1975, 306). Creationists, Humanists and Deists thus approved of a world that gave them a unified concept of reality. The most common expression of such a simple perception of things was perhaps Browning's happy acceptance of the fact that God was in heaven and all was well with the world. This complacent and simple acceptance of things was, however, grossly
shattered by certain symbolic and cataclysmic events that took place in the latter half of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. Darwin's theory of evolution, Nietzsche's declaration of the "death of God", Freudian theory of divided psyche followed by the two world wars not only subverted all traditional centers of authority but also set in a sense of futility, of the meaningless and absurdity of life, indeed of existence itself that is so dramatically expressed in Albert Camus' *Myth of Sisyphus*. The anguish caused by such events is best expressed by Yeats: "Things fall apart / The centre cannot hold / Mere Anarchy is loosed upon the world".

1.2.1 It is out of this background that postmodernism evolved. Hans Bertens in his survey of the postmodernist *Weltanschauung* points out that some critics consider postmodernism to be the result of the "erosion of traditional centers of authority, a neglect or debasement of traditional ceremonies, a widely shared passivity, a loss of strong beliefs, of 'causes'" (Bertens 1986, 13). This includes Fiedler and Sontag who identify postmodernism with the American counterculture and as part of the rebellion against the intellectual, social, and sexual constraints of society in the 1950s (*ibid.*, 7). Graff too claims that "the social context of postmodern fiction is an amorphous mass
society that has lost contact with ... earlier traditions and beliefs" (Graff 1975, 308). In spite of this similarity of social context, postmodernism radically differs from modernism in its view of the world. Graff himself makes such a distinction:

Whereas modernists turned to art, defined as the imposition of human order upon inhuman chaos ... postmodernists conclude that, under such conceptions of art and history, art provides no more consolation than any other discredited cultural institution. Postmodernism signifies that the nightmare of history, as modernist esthetic and philosophical traditions have defined history, has overtaken modernism itself (Graff 1979, 5).

1.2.1.1 Alan Wilde makes the same kind of distinction. Positing that irony is a way of perceiving the world, he defines the ironic vision of modernism as one of "disconnection and disjunction", and that of postmodernism as one of "randomness, multiplicity and contingency"(Wilde 1981,131). The difference between the two is then obvious. Modernism tries to recuperate the lost wholeness of the world by "self-sustaining orders of art in the unself-conscious depths of the self" but postmodernism "confronted with the world's randomness and diversity ... enacts an attitude (urbi et orbi) of what can most accurately be called suspensiveness: the tolerance, that is to say, of a fundamental uncertainty about the meanings and relations of things in the world and in the universe" (ibid.).
1.2.1.2 Ihab Hassan describes this radical difference between modernism and postmodernism in the most succinct terms. Drawing from writers and thinkers such as Levi-Strauss, Robbe-Grillet, Lacan, Foucault, Derrida, Barthes, Paul de Man, Deleuze, Steiner, Marcuse, Brown among others, Hassan perceives a postmodern world that is governed by a radical epistemological and ontological doubt. He says: "Whereas Modernism -- excepting Dada and Surrealism created its own forms of artistic Authority precisely because the center no longer held, postmodernism has tended toward artistic Anarchy in deeper complicity with things falling apart -- or has tended toward Pop" (Hassan 1975, 59). Modernism saw the center fall yet refused to accept its implication but postmodernism accepts and is involved in the implication of an absent center. It is related, as Hassan rightly sees it, with "Deconstructionisms' concept of a decentered world" (Bertens 1986, 28). It is this "matter of ontological uncertainty", the awareness of the absence of the center, which is the central concept of postmodernism.

1.2.2 The differences between traditionalism, modernism and postmodernism is well illustrated in their praxis of fiction. Following the traditional bourgeoisie concept of realism, the traditional / realistic novel evolved into what Zavarzadeh called the "totalizing tendency" (Zavarzadeh 1976, 5). Such a novel ordered the chaos of experience and
shaped it into a comprehensive whole by means of such laws and a purpose that was easily perceivable by the rational mind. Thus the novel, Zavarzadeh states, "imposes necessity and certainty on life and, to the comfort of its bourgeoisie reader, removes the anguish of the contingent" (ibid., 6). But, as a consequence of socio-cultural changes in the latter half of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, belief in this kind of unified reality was shattered. Eliot (the modernist), in his essay on _Ulysses_ in 1923, contended that realistic narrative was now useless as a means of giving order to the chaotic, fragmented reality of the twentieth century. He, therefore, proposed a mythical method which he described as "a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history". The adoption of the mythical method thus undercuts the "naive and pretentious epistemological sobriety of bourgeoisie rationality" (Graff 1975, 306), but it still imposed an artistic order and authority, as a solution, on the chaotic and fragmented reality.

1.2.3 Recognizing the nature of the chaotic and fragmented universe, however, postmodern fiction exhibits two main tendencies -- "indeterminacy" and "immanence". Indeterminacy signifies decentering -- "the total
disappearance of ontology", while immanence is "the tendency of the human mind to appropriate all of reality to itself" (Bertens 1986, 28). This tendency allows the proliferation of postmodern modes and breaks down traditional barriers in Western culture. The tendency leads to a total pluralism which Hassan qualifies as "...openness, heterodoxy, pluralism, eclecticism, randomness, revolt, deformation. The latter alone subsumes a dozen current terms of unmaking: decreation, disintegration, deconstruction, decenterment, displacement, difference, discontinuity ..." (Hassan 1983, 27-28). Immanence, on the other hand, signifies "the emergence of man as a language animal ... a creature constituting himself, and increasing his universe, by symbols of his own making" (ibid., 29). The result of immanence is the creation of self-reflexive worlds of words, of language, that is separate from the real world.

1.2.3.1 The two main tendencies thus represent two major modes within postmodern literature: "one mode that has given up referentiality and meaning, another one that still seeks to be referential and sometimes even tries to establish local, temporary, and provisional truths" (Bertens 1986, 47). Hans Bertens establishes this contention in his review of critics like Graff, Mellard, Federman, Russell, Butler and Wilde. All these critics accept the concept of
ontological uncertainty as central to postmodern fiction and also that it responds to this uncertainty in two ways. Graff holds that in spite of being self-reflexive, postmodern fiction, say that of Borges, still clings onto reality and offers a "realistic comment" on the reasons for its own existence. But there are other more celebratory forms of postmodernism which have no connection with "an objective order of values". Mellard sees postmodern fiction as a kind of artistic performance that is expressed either as process or product, play or game, act or artifact, event or icon, etc. In Mellard's terms, the process method of performance, via play, act, event, context, is pragmatic. It has a relation to reality. But the second type of postmodern performance offers only self-contained and self-reflexive fictions. Raymond Federman too sees postmodernism expressing itself in two ways: one that is self-reflexive, "inner-directed toward the work of art" and the other "that is outer-directed and engages the world". Wilde is perhaps the only one who suggests a fusion of these two modes in what he calls "midfiction" as a "narrative form that negotiates the oppositional extremes of realism and reflexivity" (Bertens 1986, 37-44).

1.3.0 It is in this context that satire in postmodern fiction must be placed. Firmly entrenched in reality and
with an obvious extratextual leaning, satire naturally belongs to the referential or indeterminate mode within postmodern fiction. Considering the referential mode within postmodern fiction in spite of the ontological uncertainty central to it, the contradictory nature of viewing self-conscious and self-reflexive writings as social satire disappears. The possibilities of satire in postmodern fiction are open in the referential mode. Thus Graff sees such self-conscious novelists like Barth and Bartheleme as social satirists. He describes Barth's *Giles Goat Boy* as "simultaneously self-conscious anti-realism in method and social satire in effect" and Bartheleme's *Snow White*, often called a "book of language" as "a more successful example of this new mode, which illustrates this fusion of self-reflexive structure with satiric statement" (Graff 1975, 323). John Tilton sees Barth, Vonnegut and Burgess as social satirists who probe deeply into the nature of the predicament of man who is placed between illusion and reality (Tilton 1977, 16). Elaine B. Safer considers the novels of Barth, Pynchon, Gaddis and Kesey as comic epics which unlike traditional epics "use exaggeration to satirize all institutions and systems of knowledge - instead of celebrating a nationalistic or religious vision (Safer 1988, 14). He draws parallels between these postmodern writers and the great satirists of the 18th century viz., Rabelais,
Cervantes and Fielding. Indeed this relation between contemporary fiction and the 18th century masters is worth noting. The satirical strain of the early masters and the self-conscious / self-reflexive nature of their fiction parallels the characteristics of postmodern / metafictional novels. Patricia Waugh therefore rightly considers Don Quixote and Tristram Shandy as the prototypes of contemporary metafiction. Hutcheon too points out that Tristram Shandy and Don Quixote are the major forerunners of postmodern metafiction (Hutcheon 1980, 8). This dichotomous fusion in postmodern fiction of the self-reflexive and satiric strain seems to be a carry over from 18th century satirists.

1.3.1 But postmodern satire radically differs from traditional satire. Described as the "amendment of vices by correction", traditional satire occurs occasionally in postmodern fiction. Safer delineates the postmodern epic's exposition of the follies and vices of society, that range from hypocrisy and vanity to cold-heartedness and materialism (Safer 1988, 17). But this apart, postmodern satire, emerging out of an era of deep epistemological and ontological doubt, vehemently questions and problematizes an individual's beliefs, his faith in traditional ideologies and institutions thereby exposing the futility of man's
attempt to make meaning in a decentered world. Melvyn New points to this kind of questioning in his reading of Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*. Retelling the story of Elijah and the widow, Sterne has the widow Zarephath ask: "If this man ... is able to procure so preternatural a supply for me, whence comes it to pass, that he now stands in want himself" (qtd. in New 1991, 514). New explains that by positing such a question the widow demythologizes the Word and establishes the priority of the world. The question problematizes the acceptance of the Word as well as the creator, it questions religious faith itself. But the question unravels a process which never ends -- "the question, not its answer, constitutes the problem" (New 1991, 514). Similarly, postmodern satire questions traditional / rational beliefs and thereby exposes the falsity of their assumptions. The result is an indeterminacy that ruptures all belief in absolute values and promotes the acceptance of the decentered world.

1.3.2 The acceptance of a chaotic, disordered and fragmented universe and of a society which lacks all absolute moral values by the satirists results in a wide-ranging manifestation of contemporary satire that dispenses with the chastening and corrective purpose but increases the vigour of its exposure. Tilton, therefore, characterizes
cosmic satire as that which has "no corrective or utilitarian function ... for it finds man's ailment incurable. Each of the cosmic satirists conveys his conviction that man will always find fantasy or illusion preferable to reality" (Tilton 1977, 19). Similarly, Safer points to the nature of postmodern satire as that which accepts the absurdity of human predicament. He says that the reader's affirmation in Barth, Pynchon, Gaddis and Kesey is done in three steps. First, the exposure of the false ordering system. Second, the reader's disorientation at not finding meaning and, finally the comic awakening and acceptance of absurdity of the human predicament which has to be met with humour and strength (Safer 1988, 24). Robert Scholes describes the satire in the mode of black humour in postmodern fiction as that which is less certain ethically but more certain aesthetically. He differentiates traditional satire as one which has a faith in satire as a reforming instrument from its postmodern forebearer as that which has "a more subtle faith in the humanizing value of laughter" (Scholes 1979, 145). Postmodern satire thus lacks a corrective purpose but vigourously questions and exposes the illusory nature of man's beliefs while proposing an acceptance of a decentered world where all absolute values are effaced. The central factor, therefore, of both postmodernism and postmodern satire is the vision of a
decentered world which stems from Derrida's concept of deconstruction.

1.3.3 The satire of postmodern novelists like John Barth, Kurt Vonnegut, Thomas Pynchon, among others with a vision of a decentered world is, therefore, in a sense deconstructive. But the methods of such a satire are many and varied and differ from writer to writer. Tilton writes that the cosmic satirists (Burgess, Barth and Vonnegut) "employ and depart from conventional techniques and create new forms in order to convey a distinctive satiric perspective" (Tilton 1977, 16). In them he notes the fusion of conventional satiric techniques with innovative novelistic techniques which are used to convey the complexity and ambiguity of contemporary issues. But he is quick enough to warn that no theory of conventional or traditional satire can grasp the distinctive satirical character of a contemporary novel. Therefore, to adequately describe a contemporary novelist's actual practice, "the reader must respond sensitively to what the satirist is doing and saying in the specific work at hand. Satire is and ought to be what the creative satirist makes it become" (Tilton 1977, 14).

1.3.3.1 It is futile, therefore, to speculate upon the method of satire of such a large number of postmodern novelists. The use of innovative techniques to engender a
deconstructive view of the world is, however, not new to postmodern fiction. Klinkowitz points out that writers like Ronald Sukenick, Donald Barthelme and Steve Katz attack social realism and instead hold out in its place a fiction whose prime features would be its own physical structure of words, sentences and paragraphs. He adds that for this "A great deal of deconstruction was necessary, including devices which would strip away the illusion of reality and substitute the self-conscious honesty of the writer writing his or her story" (Klinkowitz 1980a, 8). These devices which are used to deconstruct reality are generally known in metafictional theory as 'play' or 'games'. As Waugh points out: The metacommentary provided by self-conscious fiction carries the more or less explicit message: "this is 'make-believe', 'this is play' " (Waugh 1984, 35). Thus apart from drawing attention to itself by using language aesthetically, metafiction also uses crossword puzzles, acrostics, continuous shifts in contexts, elements of fantasy and absurdity to deconstruct social realism and pose the novel as a separate world by itself. Such a tendency belongs to the self-reflexive/immanence pole of postmodern fiction.

1.3.3.2 Satire, which however, belongs to the referential mode of postmodern fiction, indulges in another kind of
textual play to engender a deconstructive vision of an indeterminate world. It questions and problematizes traditional ideologies through a textual play that results in a plurality of alternative equivocal values. Positing a world of epistemological and ontological doubt, Max F. Schulz finds such a dimension of satire in "Vonnegut, Black humour and contemporary art" (1971). He opines that contemporary pluralistic society has no principles like those of the logical world of Judeo-Greco-Christian values available in the Pre McLuhan era "where the underpinning of non-sequitor and post hoc, ergo propter hoc provided support for the intellectual structure of Aristotle, St. Thomas, Freud and Marx" (Schulz 1971, 5). In such a world the Black humorist holds "a limited number of viewpoints in equipoise, as literary counterparts of a world devoid of a discursive value system. We have a radical vision of such a procedure when the narrative and surface details refuse to verify the plot, undercutting its thematic statement with a contrary set of statements (ibid., 5-6; emphasis added). The disjunction thus produced by a set of opposing statements in the novel engenders a plurality of viewpoints. Schulz's examples of such novels are The Sot-Weed Factor, Giles Goat-Boy and Lost in the Funhouse. Without calling it so he points to the deconstructive / indeterminate / plural nature of these texts. The postmodern satirist uses this method of
textual play to question the traditional bourgeoisie ideology, exposes its illusory nature while leaving an open-ended implication of value. This 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 is here termed as deconstructive satire.

1.4.0 A contemporary of American novelists like Sontag, Barth, Pynchon, Mailer, Vonnegut and continental writers like D.M.Thomas, Calvino, Rushdie and Eco; Gore Vidal exhibits such a strain of deconstructive satire in his fiction.

1.4.1 In fact satire is a special concern of Vidal's writings and his preoccupation with satire is much more than many of his contemporaries. He, therefore, confidently claims: "My best work I think is satire and perhaps someday I may become a humourous writer" (Vidal 1950c, 14). Vidal's prognosis is right as indeed the tale more than the teller is to be believed. All the best that are singled out for praise among Vidal's works are satirical novels. Berryman notes that Julian, Messiah and Kalki are satires of religious superstition and discusses the third in detail (Berryman 1980, 88-96). Boyette calls Myra Breckinridge a
prose satire of the Mennipean type like *Gulliver's Travels* and *Animal Farm* and analyses the novel in this light (Boyette 1971, 229-238). Harold Bloom is one of the very few critics to have recognized the moral purpose of *Myra Breckinridge* often dismissed as sheer pornography (Bloom 1984, 5). Mitchell S. Ross claims that *Messiah* is Vidal's most powerful novel which surprisingly has met with critical stupidity (Ross 1978, 261). Of Vidal's satirical spirit he says: "Vidal is the closest thing to a pure skeptic in contemporary America ... Cashing in on the national predilection for preachers who combine entertainment with instruction" (*ibid.*, 289-99). *Duluth* is described as a satire on, American politics and the academy (Beatley 1983, 37-38). Even Vidal's historical novels with their radical revisionism of American history and astute commentary on political chicanery constitute the most avid historical / political satire. His six volumes of essays and plays like *Visit to a Small Planet*, *The Best Man* and *Romulus* are preeminently satirical. In fact as Amis puts it: "No issue is serious enough for him [Vidal] to resist its satirical possibilities" (Amis 1987, 104). No wonder then that Gerald Clarke calls him the "Petronius of America", an appellation that is appropriate for one whose comic sense and protean art forms are much like those of Petronius in *Satyricon* (Clarke 1972, 45-51).
1.4.2 Vidal himself disclosed his concern for satire in an essay called the "Satire in the 1950s" (1958), an essayistic manifesto of his satiric aims. In this essay he is of the view that satire flourishes only in times of confusion in the religious and moral assumptions of a people. As example, he cites the Roman state from Sulla to Constantine when satirists like Aristophanes, Cicero and Catullus flourished. But soon after this, Christianity put the leash on satire. It did not allow its beneficiaries "the license of laughter at its own expense" (Vidal 1972a,43) The United States, on the other hand, lacked in satire because it was extremely busy exploring and pioneering, building, inventing and consuming to give time to something that was not utile. Yet at present, America offered itself as a satiric target since it had settled down into a well-established conformity. Thus taking upon himself the mantle of the satirist, Vidal proposes to ridicule the components of the present civilization such as Christianity, Psychiatry, Marxism, Romantic love, Xenophobia, and Science. In this context he defines satire as a method of learning how to laugh at oneself by laughing at others, to recognize the absurdity of one's belief by questioning the absurd beliefs of others. For, he says, "is not satire, simply, truth grinning in a solemn canting world? " (Vidal 1972a, 46).
1.5.0 Like other postmodern novelists, Gore Vidal is also influenced by the zeitgeist of his time and presents a satirical vision of a decentered world. In spite of his being a powerful critic of bourgeois religious, mythical, historical, sexual and literary values, Vidal has not been the subject of much critical study. This is because of his reputation as a popular novelist. Despite the renaissance in the studies of popular culture and literature brought in by postmodern theory and criticism, Vidal has received little attention from the academicians. Moreover, whatever attention he has received has been more often than not by way of censure rather than of praise. Vidal's anti-establishment, anti-Christian, anti-semitic and anti-academic stand has proved his undoing. Reviewers like Stefan Kanfer (1981,22-24), John Simon (1977,2) Joseph Epstein (1977, 72-5) and many others have always been provoked to an ad hominem in their articles on him. Indeed, so overpoweringly tempting is Vidal's myriad personality that every essay on his works has invariably turned to his person. Perhaps Harold Bloom and Stephen Spender are the only exceptions. Bloom praises Myra Breckinridge and acknowledges that Vidal's strength is "superb invention" (Bloom 1984, 5). To place Vidal along with Matthew Arnold and Edmund Wilson, as Stephen Spender does, would be to beg the question, yet point to the much agreed upon fact that
Vidal is indeed an essayist of talent (Spender 1973, 6-8). On the whole, less of critical insight and more of animadversions have marked the reviews of Vidal.

1.5.1 Among the academicians, too, Vidal has gained no standing whatsoever. He hardly figures in academic journals nor has he been singled out for monographs. Charles Berryman's perception of Vidal's status among the academicians is interesting and pertinent. He opines that academicians look down upon Vidal's works since he is popular and therefore cannot be of any good. This apart, Vidal himself, says Berryman, has done much to maintain an adversary relationship with critics whom he calls "the hacks of academe". But Berryman's enthusiastic declaration that he can now see "the signs of truce" is rather premature even today (Berryman 1980, 88-96). Of course, as he points out, academic monographs on Vidal have been published and graduate students have studied Vidal's works, but these are meagre in comparison with the entire gamut of Vidal's work that include twenty-one novels, a collection of short stories, six volumes of essays and five plays.

1.5.2 Among the first critical works which refer to Vidal is Alridge's After the Lost Generation (1952). Alridge makes a perceptive prognosis of Vidal's development as a
novelist. Conceding that Vidal, like Mailer, Burne, Shaw and Paul Bowles, was successfully exploring new ideas and subjects, Alridge points out that what Vidal lacked was a center for his art, a value or a morality for himself and his creation (Alridge 1952, 183). Similarly, Ziolkowski in *Fictional Transfiguration of Jesus* (1972) compares Vidal's transfiguration of Jesus in the * Messiah* with other fictional transfigurations in novels such as Barth's *Giles Goat-Boy*, Gunter Grass's *Cat and Mouse* and Nikos Kazantzaki's *The Greek Passion*. His analysis of * Messiah* is very illuminating, while his remark that it is "a fictional exercise in form criticism" indicates the fusion of self-reflexiveness and satire in Vidal's works (Ziolkowski 1972, 251). Mitchell S. Ross's *The Literary Politician*, as the title indicates, embarks upon an evaluation of the writer turned politician, yet he does not lose sight of the literary merits of the artist in question. Expressing the highest admiration for * Messiah*, he is surprised that it has met with critical stupidity. On the artistry of Vidal, he remarks that Vidal is at heart an ironist (Ross 1978, 257). Ross values highly Vidal's talent as an essayist, in which area, he reiterates, Vidal has no rivals except Buckley and Galbraith. His final evaluation is that Vidal is the closest thing to a pure skeptic in contemporary America ..." *(ibid.*, 298-99). Despite its tangential point of view,
implied in the title, Ross's analysis of Vidal is very close and much accurate in assessment.

1.5.3 Apart from these three books very few academic monographs are entirely devoted to the study of Vidal's work. Of date only three full-length studies on Vidal have been published. Moreover all the three of them are introductory in nature and spread their critical light over the very broad canvas of Vidal's work. Ray Lewis White's *Gore Vidal* (1968) is the maiden work. In his own words, White attempts to answer questions like "who is Gore Vidal?" "What does he believe?" "What has he written?" and "How valuable are his books?" The book's content is consistent with its purposes and serves as an introduction to Vidal. White's summary assessment of Vidal is that he should be recognised as a writer "speaking to his age in several voices" (White 1968, 131).

1.5.3.1 Bernard F.Dick's *The Apostle Angel* (1974), the next full-length study of Vidal, is much compassionate and perceptive in its analysis. Dick not only points to the fact that Vidal has produced something of value in each field he enters but also vindicates Vidal as a popular novelist by calling him a successful "popular art novelist" (Dick 1974, 6, 193). He views Vidal as a classicist who
still goes about his business of writing fiction with the proverbial beginning-middle-end. He also opines that Vidal has successfully perfected an original brand of fiction -- "the literary novel, with echoes from Crane, Melville, Twain, Cooper, the eighteenth century, Bildungsroman, futuristic fiction, the satyricon, Nausea, the new novel and even films of the forties ... (ibid., 195). This, as Dick rightly points out, sets apart Vidal from his contemporaries. Finally Dick's book is to be valued for its scholarly comparison of Vidal's work with other writers.

1.5.3.2 Kiernan's Gore Vidal (1982), the most recent book, however, again takes on a very large canvas of Vidal's work and so its critical light is diffuse. He characterizes Vidal as a writer with many voices and as one who owes allegiance to an "eighteenth century aesthetic of the novel" (Kiernan 1982, 142-43). In summing up Kiernan is bold enough to say that "Vidal is an artist of middle rank primarily because his talent is for the small scale" and adds, "pointing out this limitation in Vidal's art does not constitute an attack" (ibid., 143). Yet Kiernan's punch line is something different. He finally says, "The Vidalian persona conbrio is the ultimate achievement of Vidal's art (ibid., 144).
The paucity of studies on Vidal is surprising considering the popularity of the man. Vidal's works have met with critical cowardice. Vidal's scourge of the Judeo-Christian combine and the criticism of the academy has endeared him to none, thus completely marginalising him from the mainstream. Moreover, for a self-declared homosexual, the price to be paid in terms of recognition and adulation has been pretty high. It has destroyed the critical climate necessary for a healthy and unprejudiced analysis of his works. White's survey of the critical scene in 1968 is as pertinent today as it was then. Assuredly, he tells, Vidal deserves a better hearing from literary critics but certain factors have influenced the course of his reputation. Among such factors, he names, are, youth (anachronistic today), frequent publication, financial success, being a public man and using traditionally forbidden subject matter. He accepts that none of these factors should affect critical judgement of a literary work, but in Vidal's case, "critics stand strongly condemned for cowardice" (White 1968, 125).

It is to this critical scene that the present study addresses itself. As the review of literature shows, Vidal's works have been grossly neglected by critics. Moreover, none of the studies "focus upon specific areas / characteristics / features of Vidal's works. Neither has
Vidal received much attention as a satirist. There have been a few stray articles on satire in Vidal's novels but none of them has identified nor analysed the peculiar nature of Vidal's satire. Incorporating the spirit of deconstructive satire in his novels, Vidal ridicules and exposes bourgeois ideology through a textual play of conflictive discourses with a resultant open-ended implication of value. This satirical strain thus offers itself as a fertile ground for research and analysis. It is, therefore, proposed in the present study to analyse the operation of deconstructive satire in the novels of Gore Vidal.

1.7.0 The poetics of such a satire is delineated in Chapter II: Intertextuality: Reading qua Writing. The chapter posits that deconstruction and deconstructive satire are intertextual processes which involve a 'reading qua writing method' of production of text. In other words, the writer's writing is a product of his reading. Derrida's deconstruction is therefore the result of an act of reading a pre-existing text and uncovering its contradictory discourses so as to rupture the domination of one mode of signifying over other and thereby loosen a play of meaning that is beyond the writer's (of the pre-existing text's) conscious intention. Gore Vidal's writings, the chapter
states, are also products of his readings and he also deconstructs in the manner of Derrida. But in his novels he follows an indirect method of deconstruction. In reading a pre-existing text which becomes his material for writing his novel, Vidal (un)consciously introduces an opposing signification(s) while retaining the original significance(s) of the intertext. This ruptures the text's singular mode of signifying and renders it deconstructive. Such a method of deconstruction is to be discovered in the ironic / parodic discourses of the text, which constitute its conflictive discourses and render the text plural. The satire, it is noted, occurs in the process of deconstruction, the process of undermining and subverting through the pragmatic functions of irony and parody whose satiric veneer is culled out as the encoded intent of the text. The chapter concludes by defining ideology and stating that intertextual, deconstructive, historical and sociological approaches are applied in the analysis of the deconstructive satire in the novels of Gore Vidal.

1.7.1 Chapter III: Demythification describes how Vidal deconstructs and ridicules the religious ideology of the States. Through the novels Messiah, Julian and Kalki he illustrates the fraudulencly of religion, Christianity and Hinduism in particular and the numerous religious cults that
have emanated from it. He deconstructs both the Christ and Kalki figures by an exploitation of the volatility of these signifiers which do not have any objective signified, and by a reversal of the Christ / anti-Christ opposition in John Cave and the God / Man opposition in Kalki alias James J.Kelly. In these two protagonists he exposes a knavery that far surpasses its predecessors through their exploitation of technology which they use to the detriment of the religious ideology and to prosper upon the gullibility of the masses. Further, by deconstructing the deityship of Christ and Kalki, Vidal puts in jeopardy the doctrines of Christianity and Hinduism and ridicules any blind adherence to them. His powerful satire in Messiah, Julian and Kalki cuts at the core of the superstition, affectation and hypocrisy that are bred by these religions and cults. Vidal also elucidates the commercialization of religion, its power and hegemony over the masses, that can result in a totalitarian religious order as in Messiah or unleash a potent destructive force that can destroy the whole world through the machinization of a cranky cult leader as in Kalki. As a re-examination of religious values through 'demythification' Vidal uncovers the evil within the system of organized religion, its ideology and thereby ruptures any blind adherence to it.
1.7.2 Vidal's satire of historiography and history is discussed in Chapter IV: Dehistoricisation. He shatters the relationship of seeming equality between history and truth and shows that history-writing is as pseudo as literature itself. He elaborates upon this by destroying those casual notions of the American past that have sieved down through generations and believed upon. Thus through a detotalization of narrative in his novels, Vidal uncovers historiographical methods and equates history-writing with fiction writing. Simultaneously, Vidal rewrites the past and subverts the ideological content of history by revising those powerful players of history, viz., Julian, Burr, Lincoln, etc.. He also undercuts the assumed ideals of the American republic by showing how through the centuries, America has fallen short of the ideals laid down in its constitution. Finally, Vidal undoes the notions of a glorified past in his symbolic and metaphoric satire of it in the novels, 1876, Empire, Hollywood and Washington D.C. Thus through the deconstruction of historiography and the revision of the past, Vidal elevates history to literature and makes a shift in the perspective of the past.

1.7.3 Chapter V: Deprofanation evaluates how Vidal contests the sexual ideology of the States. The triune sexual ideology, that is, its firm belief in a puritanic
marital ideal, its deviance in the permissive heterosexual and its hatred of the homosexual, always connoted as sacrilegious and cursed is severely challenged by Vidal. He debases marital ideology by displacing its privileged signified position of the center and replacing it by the marginal, homosexual ideology. By doing thus he not only confirms the dominance of a hitherto so-called peripheral element, but also adds to it, the connotations of divinity and sacredness, which signified marital ideology. With this changed configuration, Vidal destroys what he calls "the heterosexual dictatorship of the United States" and shows the normality albeit commonness of homosexual relationships. This debasement is accompanied by the mockery of the stifling, encumbering and dead-cold laws imposed upon the human by a puritanic marital ideal and its consequential permissiveness which shows the wide gulf between the ideal and practice. Neither the puritanic marital nor the permissive heterosexual allows the human the full exploitation of his sexual potential without guilt and fear. Thus in his exaltation of homosexuality, Vidal desecrates the center (marital ideology) and deprofanes the marginal (homosexuality).

1.7.4 · Chapter VI: Detheorization delineates Vidal's attack on the theory of the novels including postmodern
novels which he does by translating the mimesis of its deigetic to a mimicry of it. His target is the reduction of the novel to a quasi-theoretical enterprise, most often with a physical science bias, that is only to be taught and read by academics and critics. Thus he ridicules the style and formal structure of the *nouveau roman*, its eschewal of the description representation of reality as also the self-reflexiveness, self-consciousness, and other techniques of the metafictional novel, including the novel as a self-consuming artifact. 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 it—a deconstruction of his own critical enterprise.

1.7.5 After a brief summary of the earlier chapters, Chapter VII: Conclusion delineates the decentered world of Vidal's novels and the radical indeterminacy of his texts. Vidal's deconstructive method evidenced in his 'demythification', 'dehistoricisation', 'deprofanation' and 'detheorization' breaks all conflictive oppositions like religion/science, faith/reason, fact/fiction, history/novel, male/female, heterosexual/homosexual, literature/criticism and renders the text plural. Finally, it is concluded that
in spite of its difference from traditional satire, Vidal's deconstructive satire is a combination of and more than Horatian *ridiculum* and Juvenalian *indignatio*. It is this spirit of questioning with Juvenalian vigour and ridiculing with Horatian jest -- the Neitzschean tone of "jest in earnest" -- that binds together all his writings and makes him a deconstructive satirist.