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A Question of Whose Ox Is Being

By Sally Quinn

Mike Wallace and the crew of "60 Minutes" have been following Gore Vidal around for the past few weeks in order to do a film piece on him. They even filmed him in the rug department of Macy's hawking books with Dick Cavett. "I would say that was the deepest trough of my humiliation," says Vidal. Then, upon reflection, "but my dear, there are two things you always do. Sex and television. Any time you get the chance."

Vidal is here this week pushing "Myron," his latest novel, featuring the return of the transexual protagonist of "Myra Breckenridge," as well as the paperback version of "Burr." "About every 18 months I erupt," he said. "I go barnstorming across the country doing television and lectures, hawking my books. Then I go back to Rome, settle down to a nice quiet life and write."

Washington, of course, is Vidal's hometown. His mother, Nina Gore, was the daughter of Senator T. P. Gore. She divorced Vidal's father, Eugene Vidal, when Gore was 10 and married Hugh D. Auchincloss, a millionaire investment banker.

The family moved to Merrywood, the Virginia estate overlooking the Potomac, where they stayed until that marriage broke up six years later and Gore was replaced in his upstairs bedroom by Jacqueline Bouvier, whose mother Janet became Hugh Auchincloss's third wife.

Anyway, that's how Gore Vidal is related to Jackie Kennedy Onassis. They both had the same stepfather. But they didn't meet right away. Vidal, now 49, went into the Army, then began traveling and writing novels.

It wasn't really until Jackie Bouvier married Jack Kennedy that they really became friends. Jackie



"Myron," Vidal's latest book.

Gored

loved Gore Vidal. He is—and was—handsome, witty, sexy, bisexual, brilliant, talented, successful, charming, courtly, well mannered, and perhaps the most bitchy gossip of his time.

Vidal liked the Kennedys, their glittering circle of friends, their talked-about salons.

There was only one problem. Many of the men in the Kennedy administration weren't too crazy about Gore Vidal. He had, after all, written that book "The City and the Pillar," espousing bisexuality. It was considered a bit much. The late Robert Kennedy liked Vidal least of all. So one night at a White House party, Gore and Jackie were dancing very close together, so the story goes, when Bobby came over to them, pushed Gore away from Jackie, and told him never to dance with his sister-in-law that way again.

See VIDAL, B3, Col. 1



By Douglas Chevallier—The Washington Post

Gore Vidal: "I suppose I am combative."

Well, Vidal, not one to take this sort of thing lying down, wrote a devastating piece about Bobby in *Esquire*, which started the whole Ruthless Bobby image, and that was the end of Vidal's friendship with the Kennedys: Jackie stayed loyal to Bobby, and she and Vidal have not seen each other since. That was in 1962, recalls Vidal.

It didn't seem to bother Gore Vidal one bit. He just kept on writing his best-selling novels, being outrageous, and provocative, getting into vicious fights with people on television and in print, and living quietly in Rome.

But back in Washington, this time, he seemed, to some of his friends, a bit mellow. To others who had not known him before, though, he still had that famous tart tongue.

And he says he doesn't ever get bored talking about the same things. "I'm fascinated talking about

everything," he said. "Except myself. Sometimes I do get bored talking about myself."

He answers questions about his personal life in either a flip, detached way or with evasive one-liners. The impression he gives is one of a very professional, smooth, cynical, brilliant, world-weary, unemotional man. Which is, of course, the image he intends to project altogether.

Nevertheless, he insists, "I am what I seem."

He was not disappointing on this visit to Washington. He knows what people want to hear, what is commercial, what will titillate and what will sell. He glides through television interviews, his patter down to perfection. He carefully times his conversation to permit an interviewer to take copious notes. He understands the media and how to manipulate its members.

He knows what he says will outrage, annoy and provoke the people he says

things about. He does it humorously, purposefully, mischievously, inviting reaction. The insults he hurls are more detached than personal, more stylized than serious. "I suppose I am combative," he admits.

Here are a few of his observations for public consumption:

Jack Kennedy: "Jack was the most wonderful gossip. Much better than Jackie, probably because he had greater resources. But he was a marvelous repository. We would have long rambles about girls in Hollywood. He knew everything. He was such fun. But his was a continuing search for attractive women. That 'always came first with Jack.'"

Jackie: "I never really knew Jackie that well. I enjoyed her though. She was quite bright. She knows who she is."

"Very few people do. That's why she's done very well. She wanted a lot of money. She got it. But I never profited by my con-

nection with Jackie. In fact it was the reverse. When Jackie first started out as a reporter she went around claiming to be my sister and I hadn't even met her. She got all kinds of interviews with people by telling them that. She profited a lot more from our relationship than I did."

Lee Radziwill: "Deeply boring. But being from a famous family is a bore. And it doesn't help for long. Lee found that out. If you have no talent it shows."

"We all did have one thing in common. We had no money, contrary to what people think. Mr. Auchincloss was very rich and our step brothers and sisters were rather well looked after. But we were not, and we had to survive out there in the world. That's why I had to work and Jackie and Lee had to marry well. But Merriewood was so remote from the depression that the girls never knew what real life was like."

Ethel Kennedy: "Ethel invented tacky."

Arthur Schlesinger: "Arthur is the little boy always running after the crowd saying, 'Hey let me play too.' Arthur was thrilled to be part of the Kennedy crowd."

The Kennedy era: "The Kennedys were great corrupters. And I don't see anything wrong with that. They never had to buy anybody. One chic dinner at the White House and you could have any journalist in town."

Henry Kissinger: "I haven't the slightest interest in Henry at all. He's simply an apparatchik. He'll work for anybody. He's just brighter than most."

President Ford: "A right wing loon."

Norman Mailer: "Norman really has become total bad news. He never was much of a writer."

"That's why he had to go in for performances instead. Norman is the patron saint of bad journalism. We were

good friends for a long time particularly when he wanted some help from me. I remember him saying we were the two writers people disliked the most."

Washington: "They're such hicks here. And this is the most pompous boring society in the world. If you're interested in power this is the place to be. But you have to have a courtier mentality and I'm much too independent for that."

Vidal ran unsuccessfully for a New York Congressional seat in 1960.

Sex: "The sexual brainwashing in this country is so virulent that it is not taken into account that everyone is bisexual. This makes for a very sick society. Not to mention overpopulated. The average American male is soft and weak and passive. That's why he goes in for guns."

"I have a lot of sex but no love affairs. It's not my bag. Everybody is so intense about love I leave it up to them. You have to know

yourself very early on. I'm not capable of a long deep sustained relationship with another human being. It's important not to have sex with friends. You lose the friend in the end and you also lose the sex."

Women: "I prefer women. I have almost no men friends. Men are generally uneasy around me."

Pornography: "Of course, I have a great problem with pornography. Dirty words not only make me blush, they sicken me. That's why I have devised a new vocabulary. I've substituted for dirty words the names of the justices who concurred in the Supreme Court decision that each community has the right to decide what is pornography. . . ."

more than anything. I am only happiest writing. 'Myra Breckinridge' is my best work. Myra is one of the greatest masterpieces of the century."

Himself: "Under this cold exterior, once you break through the ice, you find

cold water. There is no warm wonderful person underneath. I am exactly what I seem. People sometimes fight with me. It usually starts out political and ends up personal. Mailer and Capote for instance are always attacking me. They want to be numero uno. But I'm number one."

"I am a highly moral person. Purely moralistic. That doesn't, however, apply to sex."

"I've never been envious of anyone in my life. But I do go into black despair if someone thinks Norman is a greater writer than I am."

"Everything I say is so obvious. I say absolutely plain things and it blows people's minds."

"When it was suggested to Gore Vidal that he might be portrayed in an interview as a warm, kind, gentle, decent human being, he looked just a bit thrown for the first time all day. Then, half earnestly, half in jest he said, 'Don't you dare'"