

VIA DI TORRE ARGENTINA, 21
ROMA

Dear Mr. Jones,

We read the stuff -
- I'm interested but a
bit at sea - D

Wish you would talk
to Jason Epstein at
Random House (Playa -
2600) - I will out
with him the sat

of approach you
think the material
requires - Also,
convince him of the
integrations that connect

Then let's meet -

Perhaps in April -
but would
the new Green
for it and

Poster

Imperialism,

Chicanery, '70s

Post 12/21/73

A COMMENTARY

By Nicholas von Hoffman

Historical novels have been around for a long time. With a few exceptions like Victor Hugo and Mary Renault their authors haven't distinguished themselves as either thorough or diligent researchers of the periods in which they set their stories. There is no great reason for them to be since, with most, their primary purpose is fiction, not history. And even when fiction has been coupled with competent scholarship the resulting tale has been meant to dramatize the past in its own terms, not those of contemporary readers.

Now two works have come along in which fiction is used to write history in such a way that it helps us understand our own times and problems. The first is Gore Vidal's "Burr" (Random House, 1973, \$8.95), which is described on the dust jacket as a novel, although there is so little pure fiction in it and the author is so anxious to make that point clear he includes a methodological appendix wherein he points out the few episodes in the book which have no foundation in fact.

"Why a historical novel and not a history?" asks Vidal. "To me, the attraction of the historical novel is that one can be as meticulous—or as careless!—as the

historian and yet reserve the right not only to rearrange events but, most important to attribute motive—something the conscientious historian or biographer ought never do.

Certainly it is something that the conscientious modern historian never does, although historians of the past did it as a matter of course. Pointing out the lesson was one of the reasons they wrote history, but they lived in the long centuries when their discipline was considered part of the humanities. History then was a branch of literature. A historian who couldn't write was close to contradiction in terms. Now history has shifted over to being part of the social sciences where what it has gained in rigor—that favorite academic term—it has lost in meaning. The professional historian of today can date his artifacts with the carbon test but the instructive value of the artifacts is lost.

But if the socially scientific historian has so restricted himself that most of what we care to know about interest except to his fellow professionals, the rest of us still have need of history.

See COMMENTARY, B7, Col. 4

*Greed,
Corruption,
Egotism,
Ambition,
Liberty,
Colony,
Empire:
Learning
From
Our Past*

COMMENTARY, From B1

believe the acts of our ancestors hold a meaning for us, and thus literature steps forward to reclaim her daughter Clio.

Vidal does it in a way that should be particularly informative for those of us who are stamping about cursing all politicians as followers of an intrinsically knavish calling. Here we see the great men of our Revolution—Washington, Hamilton, Jefferson and many others—as people as much enslaved to greed, corruption, egotism and ambition as the gang now in the Capitol City they built, but we also see them worming their way to the imperfect greatness which is the best we can hope to attain. Burr is a book about the morals of politics and politicians in which the past is used to instruct the present, and that's a form of history.

A book reflecting nearer fidelity to facts but nonetheless a work of art is "Year One of the Empire" by Elinor Fuchs and Joyce Antler (Houghton, Mifflin, 1973, \$5.95). Although "Empire" is a play, the lines in it are so close to what the historical figures actually said and wrote that the reader is provided with an extensive bibliography.

The play's topic is what we refer to in the few American history books that mention the subject at all as the Philippine Insurrection, a name we gave to the Filipinos' efforts to resist our military subjugation of their country. The title comes from an editorial in the Feb. 8, 1900, issue of *The Nation*, and it has the ring of many another that the same magazine would print 65 years later: ". . . This Philippine year has been one of illusion succeeding illusion, and hope deferred. The war has dragged on its misery beyond all computation . . . We have disabled ourselves from expressing sympathy with any oppressed people on earth. Our generous professions of love of liberty stick in our throats . . . as we think of what we have been doing in this Year One of our new Empire."

In the course of the Philippine war of colonization it is estimated the United States Army murdered several hundred thousand civilians. The strategy was the same as Vietnam: Deprive the enemy of a friendly population base. To do it the same tactics were used . . . concentration camps, population removal, shooting hostages and torture. One difference, however, is that, unlike ourselves, our great grandparents did not try to fix the blame on an unknown and unimportant second lieutenant. A number of officers were court-martialed, including Brig. Gen. Jacob H. Smith. And Teddy Roosevelt, unlike Nixon with Calley, neither delayed nor diminished the sentence. He made it stiffer.

The Czar was still ruling Russia during the Philippine war so there were no Reds around to blame our crimes on. The rationalization offered then show that our present justification have an ancient paternity.

Sen. Henry Cabot Lodge: "If we abandon those islands we leave them either to anarchy or to their seizure by some great Western power who will not uplift them and train them in the principles of freedom."

President William McKinley: "And now our flag waves in the Philippines. It waves not as the banner of imperialism; it waves not as the symbol of oppression. Wherever the flag goes, there go character, education, American intelligence, American civilization and American liberty."

We should have been told such things, and if the historians won't, the artists must.

Press Clips

by Alexander Cockburn

FOR SOME MONTHS the air has been thick with tales of newsferrets trying to weave some sort of connection between the Watergate gang and the attempted assassination of George Wallace. The Insight team from the London Sunday Times did their best and even summoned the Executive Features editor, Bruce Page, over from London to evaluate what they had. Page was not convinced. Reports that CBS had a photograph of Gordon Liddy with Bremer seem to boil down to a shadowly mustachioed figure in the background of the famous newsfilm of the Wallace shooting. The FBI is convinced this is not Liddy.

A POOR RECOMMENDATION!

But ebbing speculation is sure to be revived by an enormous article in the New York Review of Books, due on the New York newsstands on December 3. The article is, by Gore Vidal and analyzes in great detail much of E. Howard Hunt's copious literary output and also his operations as a CIA itinerant, and, more recently, plumber. (On the subject of the plumbers, incidentally, he digs up an old AP London dispatch quoting former CIA official Myles Copeland as saying that senior CIA men are convinced that Muskie's famous breakdown during the campaign was caused by Hunt or henchmen spiking the Senator's drink with "a sophisticated form of LSD." Copeland has subsequently confirmed this.) But readers of the NYRB preparing to embark on Vidal's essay will be chiefly surprised to note that among the Books Reviewed on the opening page of the piece is "An Assassin's Diary" by Arthur Bremer.

Near the end of the article, Vidal, after discussing Hunt's literary methods and political outlook, turns his attention to the strategic importance to Nixon of Wallace's wheelbound departure from the 1972 campaign. He then ponders closely the literary style of the Bremer diary. "For someone," he notes, "who is supposed to be nearly illiterate there are startling literary references and flourishes in the Bremer diary." And after further analysis he concludes, "If Bremer lives to be re-examined, one wonders if he will tell us what company he kept during the spring of 1972 and whether or not a nice man helped him write his diary. . . ." A somewhat off-handed paragraph by Vidal does add that he does not think Hunt had a hand in writing Bremer's diary on the ground that it is "beyond H. H.'s known literary competence."

Perhaps the computer analysis will edge us to the truth. Last autumn, it will be remembered, Woodward and Bernstein reported that Hunt told the Ervin committee investigators that Colson had told him, an hour after Wallace was shot, to fly to Milwaukee and burglarize Bremer's flat. Colson denied the story.