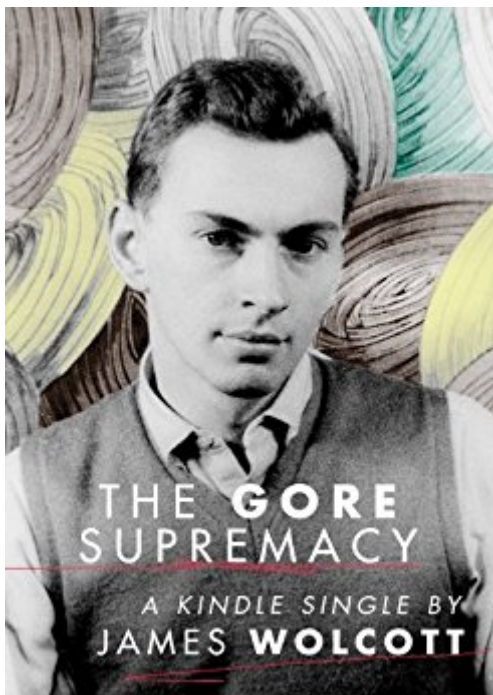


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The Gore Supremacy (Kindle Single)



Synopsis

Novelist, essayist, memoirist, playwright, screenwriter, actor, sexual liberationist, traitor to his class, balloon-popper of the pious and pretentious, the country's last true man of letters (they should now retire the title), Gore Vidal belonged to the Greatest Generation of American authors, and was the last great one to go. (He died on July 31st, 2012 at the age of 86.) The triumphant arc of Vidal's literary career wasn't solely a mastery of language, though that never hurts. Handsome, poised, slim, charismatic, able to hold his own in verbal fisticuffs without losing his imperious cool, Vidal was the premiere star author of his generation, the one who elevated the role of talk-show guest to a command performance--a theatrical event. He brought the electronic crackle of the TV screen to his prose and the tactical precision of his prose to combat debate on TV. His near-violent altercations on camera with William F. Buckley, Jr. and Norman Mailer are the stuff of YouTube legend and the secret to The Gore Supremacy. A contributing writer to Vanity Fair, a partisan observer of pop culture, and the author of the New York-in-the-70s memoir Lucking Out (which comes out in paperback this fall), James Wolcott has been a closeup observer of Vidal on-camera and off for more years than seems respectable. This, his first Kindle Single, is his way of paying homage--and saying goodbye.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

So much has been written about Vidal through the years, and especially after he passed on this July. This essay is a true standout, though, and its engaging prose will edify Vidalophiles and newcomers to Vidal alike. Wolcott, naturally, refers to the oft-told stories of Vidal's public scrapes with the likes of Mailer and Buckley, but he does not dwell on them. Wolcott places Vidal in context, and makes the reader yearn for the days when David Susskind sat in a cloud of cigarette smoke on his show with the likes of Susan Sontag, and when Dick Cavett engaged his guests in discussions worth listening to. What I especially appreciate, in a goosebumpy kind of way, is Wolcott's deliberate refusal to immerse us in the products of Vidal's unfortunate mental decline toward the end of his life. This is not a fawning tribute; it is a fair one and one which Vidal himself would have appreciated.

I claim that I was a '68' er. This impresses my younger son who spent some time in France as an adolescent. In truth, I did not run with the velvet revolutionaries but I did watch Gore Vidal and William F Buckley in debate. And then the threatened fisticuffs between Mailer and Gore. I vaguely recall Mailer snarling, staggering toward Vidal and falling off the set. It was wonderful stuff. No polite conversations with film stars who had just had their last breathless event recorded on Instagram. James Wolcott is clearly of my vintage and relishes the glories of writers before Creative Writing courses took their toll. I was working at the University of Chicago, c 1968-70 and the excitement of reading the brashness of Updike, Roth and Vidal was part of the period. Can I ever forget Myra Breckenridge? I think I still have the dog-eared paperback that falls open at given pages of the text. Or perhaps that younger son has pinched it. Read this lovely slim history of a writer-educated, arch and gusty. Personally, I think Vidal declined after he ascended to Ravello. He should never have retreated to garden on the Amalfi coast but stayed to slog it out on the East coast.

This is a nice tribute to Gore Vidal, and I take note of two things in particular. First, the Buckley/Vidal blow-up at the 1968 Presidential Convention was filmed live, and I saw it as it happened. Such emotion was exciting to watch, especially from the oh-so-cool William F., but when things escalated, the TV station cut off the feed, and moved to a commercial. That incident sparked a media frenzy for days, and it's my understanding that now any "live" shows have at least a ten second delay, to avoid such a fiasco. But the author is right on when he takes note of Vidal's "dry smile when he is booed

or hissed." I remember seeing that very thing when Buckley called him a queer. By the way, Buckley's son Chris wrote a terrific book about his Dad, exposing his weaknesses and quirks. It's called *Losing Mum and Pup: A Memoir*, and it's hilarious. Second, I regret I never saw the hostilities with Norman Mailer on the Dick Cavett Show, but enjoyed reading about the follow-up years later, in which Mailer publicly slugged Vidal in the face, and Vidal remained cool, and "tending his bloody lip, delivered the perfect impromptu comeback: "Words fail Norman Mailer once again." Alas, poor Gore, I hardly knew ye, but you were a class act.

James Wolcott, who writes a regular column in *Vanity Fair* has written a lovely tribute to Gore Vidal, who passed away last year. There are multiple interesting and stirring moments in Vidal's life, and many of these are mentioned- the famous stouch with Mailer on the Dick Cavett show- though I did not know [SPOILER ALERT] that Mailer had head-butted Vidal in the Green Room before going on stage. Having read a number of Vidal books and articles, I was delighted and intrigued by the background stories. What hit home the most for me, was the observation that Vidal's superb writing skills arose from an extensive reading habit. There are observations about aging and celebrity and the inner voice vs the outer voice. I thoroughly enjoyed the musings and the memories of a true American and his contribution to our times.

As the title of this review indicates, caveat lector: I was Gore Vidal's last book editor and am James Wolcott's current one. Fair warning! But I want to tell prospective readers that this is a lovely, eloquent and touchingly elegaic piece of writing, one that not only captures Vidal in all his singularity (while not shining off his flaws) , but that mourns the passing of the literary culture in which such a figure could flourish. It is the best such piece produced since Gore Vidal left the building.

James Wolcott has written a delightful, long magazine piece, the sort of thing I remember from the *Atlantic Monthly* or *Harper's* of my teenage years, a tribute to one of America's finest -- and most deliberately controversial -- contemporary writers. I enjoyed every minute I spent with this piece and my only regret is that it wasn't a bit longer. Highly recommended.

Seems a balanced a count of the artist, fairly placed in his era, facing societal obstacles to describing the world as he experienced it. However, much of what he viewed was disclosed with great confidence, courage and admirable eloquence in a greatly dignified manner which no one else in his place could have pulled off so well and elegantly. We will miss his contributions to the literary

conversations he inspired.

Gore Vidal was a fascinating man. I wanted to know how his life made him that way. I didn't. Two more words

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