



Hollywood

Gore Vidal

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Hollywood marks the 5th episode in Gore Vidal's "Narratives of Empire," his celebrated series of six historical novels that form his extended biography of the USA.

It's 1917. President Woodrow Wilson is about to lead the country into the Great War in Europe. In California, a new industry is born that will irreversibly transform America. Caroline Sanford, the alluring heroine of Empire, discovers the power of moving pictures to manipulate reality as she vaults to screen stardom under the name of Emma Traxler. Just as Caroline must balance her two lives -- West Coast movie star & East Coast newspaper publisher & senator's mistress -- so too must America balance its two power centers: Hollywood & Washington.

Here's history as only Gore Vidal can recreate it: brimming with intrigue & scandal, peopled by the greats of the silver screen & American politics.

With a new Introduction by the author.

Hollywood Details

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Author : Gore Vidal

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From Reader Review Hollywood for online ebook

Marley says

I was sure I'd read Hollywood many years ago, but now I'm not sure. If I did, I didn't finish it. I'm tempted to give the book 5 stars, but will stick with 4 since it's a little unfocused in some places, and talky; though talky from GV is hardly tiresome.

Hollywood expands Caroline Sanford (and Hearst's) practice of news creation as Caroline takes the idea into film, first as the unlikely actress Emma Traxler and at the end, as a film mogul who sees film as the ultimate creation of a new society. On the very last page of the book we read a discussion between Caroline and Blaise, who opts to stay with print:

Caroline nodded,. " After all, that's the only world there is now, what we invent."

"Invent or reflect?"

"What we invent other reflect, if we're ingenious enough, of course,. Hearst showed us how to invent news, which we do, some of the time for the best of reasons. But nothing we do ever goes very deep. We don't get into people's dreams, the way the movies do--or can do."

Along the road to Hollywood we get a lot of history: Wilson and his war, the McLeans, Alice Roosevelt, William Desmond Morris (whose murder is handled very well towards the end of the book), Mabel Normand, Warren G Harding, the Ohio Gang and numerous pols, hacks and otherwise, the Red Scare and the rise of rightwng hysterics, of which her daughter Emma partakes with gusto. Blaise and Burden Day are stalwarts. and with the addition of Fredericka and Kitty make for a sophisticated family situation.

I was happy to see Harding portrayed as I pretty much how see him. He was hardly the worst president we ever had, and importatly he understoodo how to wield power and let others take the credit for it. Harding, unfortunately, surrounded himself with cronies (and some good guys, too) whom he didn't keep a close eye on, believing that if they were doing a good job they were doing it right. At the end he points out, though that the way things are run crudely in Columbus or Washington Courthouse, aren't the way they are done in WDC, though the motives may be the same. I'd have liked to see Harding's wife , "the Dutchess" played a little softer since she was actually a strong independent woman very involved with social issues, but she's also an easy target. Carl S Anthony's bio of her really changes perceptions. And WG himself hardly shied away from social issues.

Some of my favorite small parts of Hollywood: the manner in which the reader learns that Henry Adams has passed. It was so funny that after I read it the first time, I re-read it out loud a couple more times. And, of course, the idea that Caroline who once sat at the feet of Henry Adams and Henry James becomes the creator of vulgar pop culture is puzzling on one level, but also makes sense on another. I also was quite taken with the dialogue between Caroline and Mabel Normand in Caroline's dressing room after Taylor's murder.

GV leaves us with some important, but forgotten questions 100 years later: who killed Taylor (I'm on a Taylor FB llst and this is a big topic of discussion), did Eddie Sands and Jess Smith commit suicide? What would have happened with Harding's second term? Personally, I'd like to see Burden Day as president. Oh, wait a minute, he's not real.

But, What is real? What is created? Is there a difference? No in politics and media, I think.

On to Vol 6: Washington DC and I assume the young second (or is it third) Emma Sanford, the scourge of liberals. What did Caroline and Burden do to deserve her? Even the sordidness of 1920s Washington looks mild by today's standards.

Jonathan says

This one took a while to get through. Strange that as it was set from just before the American entry into WW1 (a favourite period) to the early twenties, it did not grab me. There were a lot of characters from the previous novel in the series, which was good, but I didn't believe a few of the plot lines (notably one in Hollywood itself). Anyway, the political detail was great as usual, although some of it was a bit in depth, covering Presidents Wilson, Harding and Coolidge, with a bit of Teddy Roosevelt and FDR thrown in. Vidal deals with elections very well, especially when you know the outcome, as it is very funny to listen to the character's predictions of what will happen when you do in fact know that the results are going to differ. He also loves to play with idioms and phrases, which I find amusing and keeps the sentences fresh and clever.

Although I read them completely out of order, I can recommend the Narratives of Empire series as a whole, although individually some are better than others (least favourite ones being this and Washington DC). Maybe I'll go back and read them chronologically some time.

Dennis says

The title is "Hollywood" - Set mostly in Washington DC.

"A novel of America in the 1920's" - Story is from 1917 to 1923.

Although I feel it's misrepresented on the cover, not a bad read. Found it hard to keep track as to who was who though.

Lysergius says

Gore Vidal combines his two interests, the cinema and politics in this interesting and entertaining look at the period around America's entry into WWI and the subsequent failure of the League of Nations, contrasted with the rise of the film industry in Hollywood.

Peopled with a cast of thousands "Hollywood" provides an interesting take on the politics, history and mores of the time. Quite compelling.

Jill Mackin says

Loved the Narratives of Empire series.

Jon says

So far so good. I haven't gotten far enough to tell what is going as far as where Vidal is taking this whole novel which seems, at least so far, epic in scope. This is one of those historical fictions where real historical personages are turned into fictional characters, but so far it has been completely believable. I think Gore Vidal is probably a pretty good student of American history, both political and cultural, though he undoubtedly has a polemic it hasn't shown itself yet. The novel opens on the eve of the American entry into the First World War and I think Vidal is trying to emphasize America on the brink of becoming a world military power. It's odd now to imagine a time when America wasn't a world superpower and what's even stranger are the parallels between the Democrats of 1917 wanting to get us into the war on the side of England and France at any cost - even manipulating public opinion through faking documents - and the Republican desire of 1917 to avoid war at any cost. A strange and somewhat unsettling reality given the recent experience of the Iraq invasion when the parties took essentially opposite stances.

You begin to see that "morality" like "patriotism" are often used as smoke screens for the real reasons political events occur.

Beth Cato says

I read this for research, and while I did find some relevant material, this was not a particularly enjoyable read. First of all, very little of the book is actually in or about Hollywood; it's centered in Washington, D.C. on political shenanigans. The cover quote also says it's a novel about the 1920s, while in fact 3/4 of the book takes places in the late teens, depicting America entering the Great War and the developments around that.

This is very much a literary fiction novel with lots and lots of talking, virtually no action, and sexual escapades all around, though nothing graphic. The cast is wide and I found it difficult to track who was who because there was a constant barrage of new names. The actual depictions of history is fantastic, though. Vidal captures the sense of the time with fine details and everything is well-paced. Characters are well-done, too, and quite strong through dialogue alone. While this was definitely not my sort of book, I can see why Gore Vidal was such a big name in the field.

Nae says

I am slowly making my way through all the books Gore Vidal wrote. I have to admit I started reading him only in the last few years. What a marvelous writer this man was. Usually anything politically-oriented leaves me cold, but I am now 5 books into his "Narratives of Empire" series revolving around the Washington political atmosphere over the span of the revolutionary war to J.F.K., and I find these books utterly enthralling. If even half of what he has written in this series actually happened our politicians have, indeed, always been a mighty slippery bunch, and I don't mean just the men. I am fascinated with just how well he seems to have understood and portrayed the women behind the "movers and shakers" as well. That is

not to say these are easy reads, unlike some of what I read after a long day of listening to doctors yammer on, I find myself needing to go back, rereading sentences and even paragraphs over and over ... it is almost a machiavellian atmosphere he has created and it needs total brain concentration to follow along ... still, now that I have finished "Hollywood" I find myself eagerly anticipating the last 2 volumes in this series, "Washington, D.C." and "Empire."

India Gray says

I like his books, but this is the worst I've read of his. The characters are difficult to keep straight, it is repetitive (he needed an editor), the timeline is askew, and it takes forever to get somewhere. Shame because it could be interesting topics.

Nancy says

Interesting history but I find his style hard to read. Is it just me?

Brian says

This is an incredible book. The paragraph structure can take some getting used to - Vidal likes to interrupt quotes in odd places - and I had to create a little cheat sheet to keep track of all the characters and their entangling relationships. But if you like political history, the book is a must. It's also something of a conceit. It's the sexy side of American history: of our beautiful people and our smoke-filled back rooms of power. (Don't go looking for a more comprehensive social history.) You feel privy to amazing (embellished) historical exchanges: Wilson and TR debating WWI; Hearst talking politics and movies; Harding as he begins to suffocate in scandal. There's a ton of great trivia too. I hadn't realized the extent to which Wilson trampled on civil liberties during the war. One producer, Robert Goldstein, who made an acclaimed revolutionary war movie - The Spirit of '76 - was imprisoned when the U.S. entered WWI; what had been patriotic the year before was now considered a dangerous British-bashing film that would undermine the war effort.

Cindy says

I found this book slow and the characters empty. The political background was interesting but made for slow reading as it was just not what I had expected. Lots of history.....just presented in a very droning type way.

Lucas says

Much better than the previous entry in the series, it gives one a feel for how large a role the media begins to play in the formation of American ideals circa World War I. As a former comic-book collector, I would have

liked to see more evidence in Vidal's writing of just how important they became in the American imagination. Perhaps the next book in the series would be a more appropriate time to introduce that element, but I fear that he may pass over the genre as he does with pulp novels in this one. It reminds one that however elegant the narrative sweep of his historical fiction may be, it is still only a slice of the story.

Jill Hutchinson says

Gore Vidal was quite an author.....he could write the controversial *Myra Breckendridge* and then turn his talent to a book like *Burr*. This book is somewhere in between; a historical fiction full of real people and some thinly disguised fictional ones. The title is a bit misleading since the scenario is set more in Washington, DC during the administrations of Wilson and Harding. Hollywood enters the picture when a politico discovers that the movies could be used for propaganda purposes and the image of the "hateful Hun" could be seen by the general public. But the political public face of the Senate and House were as fictional as those seen on the screen so the book title is probably more appropriate than it first appears.

The story is based on actual history.....so I won't repeat it here since we are familiar with the League of Nations, the scandal and fall of the Harding administration, and the power of motion pictures during the early part of the 20th century. The fictional approach is really only a supplement to the overall tenor of those turbulent times. Beautifully written, it weaves a fascinating tale of wealth and politics which will hold your interest throughout.

Frank McAdam says

The title is misleading. This is one of Vidal's "American Chronicle" novels (the best of the series were "Burr" and "Lincoln") and most of the action takes place in Washington, not Hollywood. This particular entry in the series is not the best. The main historical figure, Woodrow Wilson, is too dry and humorless a pedant to be interesting while his presidential successor, Harding, is a total non-entity, though for some reason Vidal gives him a much more positive character than that which history has assigned him. The fictional protagonist, Caroline Sanford, is too obviously Vidal's alter ego ever to come alive. Through her, Vidal gives the reader his own idiosyncratic view of American history, patrician and laced with mordant wit.
