

DEAR READER,

WHAT OBITUARIES DO REVEAL

One naïvely might assume that obituaries are about the deceased. In fact they reflect others' perceptions of the deceased person in question instead of an in-depth knowledge of their personality and œuvre.

Gore Vidal passed away on the 31st of July this year. During his relatively long life he produced a very rich and versatile artistic output. He was also the *enfant terrible* of the American political establishment, a key figure of civic life in the US, both in writing and in live media appearances. Next to this, his countless essays and his two excellent memoirs provide an unparalleled insight into his thinking and character. Based on this one would assume that those who wrote an obituary on this occasion had plenty of time to prepare such a writing and provide a full picture.

Browsing through the obituaries published in the mainstream media, those who know his *complete* œuvre get a very strange feeling: while some obituary writers emphasize his public life in politics and arts, others his groundbreaking novels tackling homosexuality, his screenplays or his great essayist talent, his literary historian work is just mentioned *en passant* and out of context. As I mentioned previously, Gore Vidal was a formidably versatile person, hence it is really difficult to mention every facet of his life and work. Therefore an obituary should focus on the *core* of a person's œuvre. While his public life was of great importance, likewise his essays, screenplays and literary novels, these alone would not, in my view, guarantee him a place in mankind's intellectual Walhalla.

The literary historic novels constitute the core of Gore Vidal's œuvre. He was a literary historian *par excellence*. His seven volumes series on American history is insurmountable. His other works like *Julian* are also of the greatest quality. But the crown jewel of his whole life is *Creation*, a fictional travel story of an Achaemenid Persian diplomat in the 5th century BCE, who over the course of his travels meets the main sages of this very important period, including Zoroaster, Socrates, the Buddha, Mahavira, Lao Tsu, and Confucius, and discusses with them the deepest philosophical questions. *A real tour de force*; if one were allowed to take only one book of Gore Vidal to an uninhabited island, this should be the one. Needless to say, none of the obituaries I looked at even mentioned this book. And this is quite a pity, because such an event provides a unique opportunity to draw the attention of the general public to the real jewels of mankind's intellectual treasury.

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