

LET'S GET DRUNK AND READ POETRY

By Michael Ventura

December 22, 2000

It falls to me to write this on the night of Gore's concession speech ("Our disappointment must be overcome by our love of country"), the night of George W. Bush's victory address ("I believe things happen for a reason") ... a night the world watches in bafflement and begrudged admiration, wondering what it means that the Superpower is a country where a man can win the election but lose the presidency, legally, with no tanks in the streets ... and no crowds scream with celebration or damnation, millions merely mutter at their televisions ... while the conservative Supreme Court majority shamelessly reverses its stand on state's rights to select the candidate who will preserve their power ... and have you noticed the change in Nader's face, how his eyes and his mouth can't seem to agree on their expression ... 35 or -6 or -7 days later (I forget which, and I'm in no mood to count) the Election of 2000 is over, we teetered, we tottered, we dropped or discarded or simply lost another fragment of the dream ... as Steve Erickson wrote a little while back, "Wave goodbye to your country with the hand that isn't throwing it away" ... but if you look up at the light through that ballot with the hanging chad, I mean if you really look, you may see way, way, way up there something the world has all but ignored, which is that during this very same time, since around Election Day, humanity has built what is intended to be a permanent space station the size of a football field, our first colony in space, our firmest step yet off the planet, an act that could one day dwarf in importance the confused, silly, vicious, yet sometimes oddly endearing political spectacle that cavorted far below it and ... oh ... oh ... oh let's get drunk and read poetry.

Allen Ginsberg: "America this is quite serious./America this is the impression I get from looking at the television set./America is this correct?"

Walt Whitman: "To elaborate is no avail ... Learned and unlearned feel that it is so .../I and this mystery here we stand .../Encompass worlds but never try to encompass me .../Do I contradict myself?/Very well then ... I contradict myself .../I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world ..."

Emily Dickinson: "Before I got my eye put out/I liked as well to see -- "

Robert Bly: "I know that books are tired of us,/I know they are chaining the Bible to chairs./Books don't want to be in the same room with us anymore./New Testaments are escaping ... dressed as women ... they go off after dark."

Emily Dickinson: "I did resign the prig,/And ten of my once stately toes/Are marshaled for a jig!"

Robert Creeley: "drive, he sd, for/Christ' sake, look/out where yr going."

Langston Hughes: "Let America be America again./Let it be the dream it used to be
.../(America was never America to me.) .../O, let America be America again --/The land
that never has been yet ..."

Pablo Neruda: "America, I do not call your name without hope ... I am and I stand in the
light that produces me./I live in the darkness which makes me what I am."

Walt Whitman: "... scum floating atop of the waters,/Who are they as bats and night-dogs
askant in the capital?/What a filthy Presidentiad!"

Bob Dylan: "Even the president of the United States must sometimes have to stand naked
... but it's alright, Ma, if I can't please them."

Emily Dickinson: "But since we got a Bomb --/And held it in our Bosom --/Nay -- Hold
it -- it is calm --"

Sharon Doubiago: "the Apocalypse happened/a long time ago/a slow motion explosion
.../a searing so blinding/we don't know it happened ..."

Robinson Jeffers: "I would burn my right hand in a slow fire/To change the future .../The
beauty of modern/Man is not in the persons but in the/Disastrous rhythm, the heavy and
mobile masses, the dance of the/Dream-led masses down the dark mountain."

Hart Crane: "There is the world dimensional for those untwisted by the love of things
irreconcilable ..."

Theodore Roethke: "When I was a lark, I sang;/When I was a worm, I devoured."

James Wright: "In the Shreve High football stadium .../All the proud fathers are ashamed
to go home./Their women cluck like starved pullets,/Dying for love./Therefore,/Their
sons grow suicidally beautiful/At the beginning of October,/And gallop terribly against
each other's bodies."

Kenneth Patchen: "There are so many little dyings that it doesn't matter which of them is
death."

Anne Sexton: "The standup comic/on *The Tonight Show*/who imitates the Vice
President/and cracks up Johnny Carson/and delays sleep for millions/of bedfellows
watching between their feet/slits his wrist the next morning .../as simple as opening a
letter ..."

William Carlos Williams: "It is difficult/to get the news from poems/yet men die
miserably every day/for lack/of what is found there."

David Ignatow: "Someone approaches to say his life is ruined/and to fall down at your
feet/and pound his head upon the sidewalk."

Sharon Doubiago: "... and now we are standing on a street/of a thinking toward something that cannot/be thought ..."

William Stafford: "One's duty: to find a place/that grows from his part of the world --/it means leaving/certain good people."

Carolyn Forché: "Even the sign warning us away implied an obligation to go on."

Kenneth Patchen: "Then, not that man do more, or stop pity; but that he be/Wider in living; that all his cities fly a clean flag .../We have been alone too long, love; it is terribly late/For the pierced feet on the water and we must not die now./Have you wondered why all the windows in heaven were broken?"

Carolyn Forché: "Surely all art is the result of one's having been in danger, of having gone through an experience all the way to the end."

Pablo Neruda: "Life is like the sky, Miguel, when we put/loving and fighting in it, words that are bread and wine,/words they have not been able to degrade even now,/because we walk out in the street with poems and guns./They don't know what to do with us, Miguel./What can they do but kill us; and even that/wouldn't be a good bargain -- nothing they can do/but rent a room across the street, and tail us/so they can learn to laugh and cry like us."

Allen Ginsberg: "and rose reincarnate in the ghostly clothes of jazz in the goldhorn shadow of the band and blew the suffering of America's naked mind for love into an eli eli lamma lamma sabacthani saxophone cry that shivered the cities down to the last radio ..."

Robert Lowell: "... and the oxen near/The worn foundations of their resting-place,/The holy manger where their bed is corn/And holly torn for Christmas. If they die,/As Jesus, in the harness, who will mourn?/Lamb of the shepherds, Child, how still you lie."

Anne Sexton: "Beauty is a simple passion,/but, oh my friends, in the end/you will dance the fire dance in iron shoes."

William Carlos Williams: "I have eyes/that are made to see and if/they see ruin for myself/and all that I hold/dear, they see/also/through the eyes/and through the lips/and tongue the power/to free myself/and speak of it ..."

Robert Frost: "Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,/And knowing I could not travel both,/And be one traveler, long I stood ..."

Robert Bly: "A few friendships, a few dawns, a few glimpses of grass,/A few oars weathered by the snow and the heat,/So we drift toward shore, over cold waters,/No longer caring if we drift or go straight."

Hart Crane: "And so it was I entered the broken world/To trace the visionary company of love, its voice/An instant on the wind (I know not whither hurled)/But not for long to hold each desperate choice."

Robert Creeley: "If it is dark/when this is given to you,/have care for its content/when the moon shines."

Cid Corman: "Dont tell me/who I am/let me guess."

Allen Ginsberg: "It occurs to me that I am America./I am talking to myself again."

Kenneth Rexroth: "When I look in the mirror/My face frightens me. I am/Afraid of myself."

Ezra Pound: "What thou lovest well remains,/the rest is dross/What thou lovest well shall not be reft from thee/What thou lovest well is thy true heritage ..."

Emily Dickinson: "Some say goodnight -- at night --/I say goodnight by day --/Good-bye -- the Going utter me --/Goodnight, I still reply --"

Thomas McGrath: "May you fare well, companero; let us journey together joyfully,/Living on catastrophe, eating the pure light."

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