

## ***THE NAMELESS MOON, etc.***

By Michael Ventura

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Lots of scrawled or printed-out scraps in three bulging manilas: sentences without a home, sketched notions, occasional quotes, and bits cut from columns because I was short of space or because they distracted. Once in a while I save what's worth saving and empty the manilas onto this page.

\* As to understanding: Look for patterns. Be it a historical event or a family fight, once you find the pattern you're halfway home.

\* If you don't find a pattern you're not looking hard enough. There are always patterns.

\* We are each and every one of us terribly lonely by the age of five, no matter our circumstances, and nothing can change that – we carry that loneliness to our honored graves or to the ditch into which our unidentified corpses are kicked. Loneliness changes its tune and harmonics decade by decade, but its core at age 70 is not so different from its core at age five.

\* People are more than what happens to them, and more than what they do. People are about what didn't happen as much as what did. People are as much what they refused to do or failed to do as what they did. And people are their unobserved stillnesses – like a stillness in which a bad person was good, a good person bad, an indistinct person glorious, an honorable person dishonorably soiled, even if only in private and for mere moments. Moments count.

\* Human beings didn't invent music. We found it.

\* Virtuosos may unwittingly betray their art. You listen to the playing and not the music.

\* Paradox is the signature of God.

\* The, is, and – those words were concepts before they were words.

\* Here is the whole joke: We are infinite creatures housed in finite bodies and born into limiting circumstances.

\* You cannot educate people you underestimate. The lessons won't stick.

\* Cyrano de Bergerac, duelist and dramatist (1619-1655). Have you read the play about Cyrano or seen the films? Fearless, they say. Dueled anyone, and any number, at any time, and, as a writer, Cyrano defied authority in drama and verse. Had a stupendous nose. And he loved Roxanne – but he never told her so, because he believed himself ugly (that huge nose).

When sometimes I'm praised for being a brave writer (and that does happen), I speak of Cyrano – the coward. He'd pick a duel with five swordsmen in a dark alley because he wasn't afraid to do that. He spoke truth to power almost casually, because he wasn't afraid to do that. But he never confessed his love for Roxanne – because he was afraid of his nose and afraid of Roxanne. He never faced those fears down and that brands him a coward. Me – I'm not afraid to write what I write and I'm not afraid of any man. But I'm afraid of my nose – and afraid of Roxanne.

\* Fear creates nothing but reflections of itself.

\* The bourgeois world claims it values excellence because to admit otherwise is beyond its capacities. What the bourgeoisie actually value is an efficient and compliant

mediocrity. To be excellently mediocre! That is the bourgeois ideal. But we who are not of the bourgeoisie must thank them, sincerely and constantly. Do they keep the wheels of society turning? They are the wheels.

\* The home life of the bourgeoisie: parents who happily sell their children into slavery, so long as their children serve the same masters as the parents.

\* American liberals have been buried not by conservatives but by a fundamental contradiction in their own souls: American liberals want justice, but not at the price of affluence. American liberals perch on their affluence and call for justice – just so long as it costs them nothing.

\* One recognizes the nature of a thing by what it does. Not by how it feels. Not by what it thinks. Not by what it symbolizes. What it does.

\* I envy people who believe in a well-behaved capital-g God that can tell the difference between right and wrong. The god in charge of history cannot.

\* You see the corporations as something outside yourself, rather than as an expression of how you, with millions of others, have chosen to live.

\* A city that has driven out its poor has lost its soul. Nothing great can be expected of it ever again.

\* It's never too late to really fuck up.

\* Three things you cannot protect your children from:

You cannot protect them from who they really are.

You cannot protect them from you who really are.

And you cannot protect them from history.

\* Stories never end, they just turn into different stories.

\* Our words mirror us – for there is no act more communal than speech, a shared language. We speak not only to each other but for each other. We hold the meanings of words in each other's keeping. People who use sexual profanity are holding this society's cursed sense of sensuality. People who use racial epithets keep our damnable history alive and potent in their mouths. Leaders who spew an evasive vocabulary allow their listeners to evade the truth. People who use speech with clarity make a clear space for others as well as themselves. Any word or usage that finds a place in the language has found a place in the community. Every word is a container into which the entire community of language has put something. Merely by understanding a word we share actively in its meaning, for understanding is never passive. Understanding, like language, is an experience -- and there are no one-way experiences. All experiences are exchanges, however one-sided they may seem. When we understand something, we enter the community of that understanding.

\* Rocco LoBosco: "Paradox, incompleteness, difference, and illusion run through language like a vascular system."

\* People get stupid when they grasp for certainties.

\* It is undisciplined to fantasize about impossibilities. Necessary, perhaps, for adolescents, but corrosive to the adult psyche.

\* Therapeutic war! Only America's insatiable hubris could concoct such a concept. Before 1950, nobody went to war without a defined exit strategy: They conquered or they didn't, they won or they lost. Beginning in Korea in 1950, the U.S. invented what it called a "police action": a therapeutic war – we'll go there, fix it, and leave: 50,000 American and 2.5 million civilian lives later, nothing was settled. And that's what we've

done since. Vietnam, Central America, Iraq II, Afghanistan, etc. Our treasure and potential wasted. Democrats and Republicans equally guilty.

\* People enchanted with the abstract and intolerant of the concrete – that's the Tea Party and also the dreamers who elected and re-elected Barak Obama. Facts don't matter to either. Only imagery, rhetoric, and metaphor. Our so-called political discourse almost never discusses the nature of power.

\*Able-bodied people who want to work. and much work to be done. Inept governance: the inability to connect the two.

\* Nancy: "The U.S. sneezes, and everybody else catches the cold."

\* Our schools should be our most beautiful buildings.

\* James BigBoy Medlin: "An old fool is better than no fool at all."

\* So I typed the word "moon" with a capital M. The *Chronicle's* proofreaders demoted it to a lowercase m. My editor, Marjorie Baumgarten, whom I esteem to the skies, wrote: "AP [Associated Press] style is to lower case." I wrote back: "Ok, fine, but you know what that means, dontchya? It means that according to the Associated Press we have, a nameless moon."

Marj: "Sounds like a column topic."

\* Nancy's words: "I called my brother Jimmy. I asked him, '*Estas solo, hermanito?*' (Are you alone, little brother?)" 'Nooooo. *Aui estoy con mi alma.* (Oh, no. I am here with my soul.)'"

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