

New Poetry by Liam Corley

A VETERAN OBSERVES THE REPUBLIC AND REMEMBERS GINSBERG



Claes Moeyaert. *Sacrifice of Jeroboam*, 1641.

America, I've given you all, and now I'm less than one percent.

America, fourteen-point-six-seven-five years of service I can't characterize as other than honorable, three hundred ninety-one days pounding dirt in other people's countries, and one hundred seventeen sleepless nights per annum in

perpetuity,
September 11, 2017.

America, I'm willing to renegotiate our social contract. I won't complain about the clean bill of health charged against me by the V.A., and you can stop involuntarily mobilizing memes of my demise in support of indecent campaigns. America, believe me when I say I'm not dead broke, I ain't so straight, I'm not all white, and I don't love hate.

America, when will you realize we are peopled with two-and-a-half times more African Americans than veterans, discounting three million souls in both tribes? Here I incorporate them all, the ones *hunted and penned in an inglorious spot*, survivors whose lives matter, because we both know the wary grief of looking at a uniform we paid for and wondering whom the man beneath has sworn to protect and defend.

America, into this veteran poem I will take all the graduates of Columbine and Sandy Hook, the ones who lived after having no answers for the warm muzzle of a gun, and their teachers, especially the ones who ran toward shots. The hall of the American Legion will overflow with such heroes, streaming like the blessed dead of Fort Hood and Chattanooga across the Styx in Charon's commandeered craft, the open door of welcome forced, as always, by warriors still living.

America, let's rent a cherry picker to take down the F in the V.F.W. sign, let *what is removed drop horribly in the pail*. Police will

gather in their surplus riot gear
and nod in understanding fashion, their years of service
trailing them like a sentence,
arming them with arcane questions of whether civilians we
protected yesterday will kill us today.
America, out of the sands of Kandahar and Ramadi, I go with
them too.

Furthermore, America, in this election season, I go with
righteous immigrants and refugees,
fellow sufferers of long journeys in inhumane transports that
leave them in permanent pain.
O, my desperate ones, border-crossers of unwilling countries,
you who pay taxes of sweat and fear,
you are not alien to me, or my thirty-five thousand brother
and sister dreamers in green and khaki
fighting for something that isn't wholly ours in dangerous
places where we simply do our jobs.

America, when will you give Cyber Purple Hearts to all who
have had their lives taken
out of your senile, digital grip,
starting with the twenty-four million whose secrets you've let
slip into China's voracious panda pocket?
We shall update and tweet ourselves feverish with the chant,
"Uncle Sam is my Big Brother"
in protest of all those Xis and Putins and Snowdens and Kims
and Transnational Criminal Elements stealing our binary
essence.
I'm not joking, America: I foresee the day when every iPhone
will be issued with a trauma kit,
every laptop with a liability release for unauthorized remote
access.

O America, my love, my burial plot, all this I will put in a
phantom poem,
my own republic, for you to receive, a sea bag of sights
unseen

to tumble down the ramp of a decommissioned C-130,
this empty box,
this absent limb.

