

New Poetry from Liam Corley

In Which I Serve as Outside Reader on General Petraeus's Dissertation

[The current version of the Army's Field Manual on Counterinsurgency, FM 3-24, originated as a doctoral dissertation written by David Petraeus at Princeton.]



Premise flows from premise like water over the edge of a waterfall, entrancing those not caught in the turbid spray, those not lingering in the limestone chutes that channel the first descent. *Dulce et decorum*, those molecules in free fall, powerless to reverse dictates of gravity, whether they be composed of dollars or bodies. A theorist must maintain sense of scale, must view war at an appropriate distance, so that its beauty

may emerge like a cold, perfect moon that draws the restless
from their beds with dreams of space flight. The best way to
lie

is to get one big whopper on the table and move on quick
to crystalline truth after truth in a train of plausibility
so compelling we don't see how down becomes
up, so convinced are we by the quality of our reasoning
that he leads to see and eventually to eff and tee, and the
best

first lie aligns with ones we've already bought, like how we
cheer

Frost's traveler in the yellow woods longing for the road
not taken, nodding along with his glib boast that non-
conformity explains contingency because we can accept
failures chosen on noble grounds more than unforeseen
leaf-covered ways that erupt when footfalls complete
the circuit of pressure plate IEDs. Mr. Petraeus, your
counterinsurgency

tools could only work in countries we didn't create, republics
not birthed

by death from above, and so I regretfully conclude
this dissertation presents the naked assertion of imperial
power

as the contribution of a helpful guest, final proof that
intelligence and gulled innocence, in general, betray us.

Double Rainbow at Dawn, 15 North at the 10

The rubbernecks slow down
as they do for other hazards,
brake lights merging into
the penumbra of a double rainbow
due west of the traffic lanes,
while in the East the rising sun
irradiates vapor-soaked air.

We are all late, looking askance
at the fireworks of nature,

wondering how our priorities
match up with this display.

Double, not just one: two arcs
of vibrant color proclaiming
peace on earth if we
don't kill each other
trying to take it in.

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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.

