

# New Poetry by Randy Brown



PHOTO:

Marie-Lan  
Nguyen. Bust  
of Homer

## Toward an understanding of war and poetry, told (mostly) in aphorisms

Poetry is the long war of narrative.

Poetry, like history, is subjective.

If journalism is the first draft of history, poetry is the last scrap.

Poets set the stage of victory. Just ask Homer: Who won the ball game?

Do not make fun of war poets. A war poet will cut you.

War is hell. Poetry is easier to read. But each takes time.

Any war poem is a final message home.

Poetry can survive fragmentation. Irradiation. Ignorance.

Poetry can cheat death. Poetry has all the time in the world. Poetry will outlast us all.

Poetry is a cockroach.

“History does not repeat itself, but it does rhyme.”—Mark

Twain

“Twain didn’t actually say that.”—John Robert Colombo

John Robert Colombo is a poet.

---

*Notes: While John Robert Colombo incorporated the popular “history rhymes” quotation—which he then attributed to Mark Twain—into his 1970 work, “A Said Poem,” he later privately reported he was uncertain of its origins. And, despite the poetic construction here, Colombo himself never said, “Twain didn’t actually say that.”*

*In an 1874 introduction to “The Gilded Age: A Tale of To-Day,” co-written with Charles Dudley Warner, Twain apparently did say, “History never repeats itself, but the Kaleidoscopic combinations of the pictured present often seem to be constructed out of the broken fragments of antique legends.”*

*History prefers Colombo’s version. So do I.*



PHOTO: Spc. Leslie Goble, U.S. Army. A soldier peeks out of the “Death Star.” The outpost overlooks Combat Outpost Najil and is manned by soldiers 24 hours a day.

## **the bottlefall at COP Najil**

in summer sun, a plastic waterfall cascades,

the emptied residue of our Afghan brothers  
encamped along the ridge just across from the fortress  
we call the Death Star.

above and below, a Scout Weapons Team buzzes up  
and down the valley, TIE fighters searching for a truck  
full of fertilizer, a bomb waiting for us  
to happen.

we have taught the Afghans well: That water  
comes only in bottles. That cowboys don't  
care for the desert. That our brand of war  
is sustainable.

---

*Notes: The acronym "COP," pronounced "kahp," stands for "Combat Outpost." A "TIE fighter" is a fictional spacecraft—one that is powered by "Twin Ion Engines"—that first appeared in the 1977 movie "Star Wars."*

---

**the homecoming game, a war**

# sonnet



PHOTO: Jessica Blanton. Navy Petty Officer Jeff Howard surprises his mother and grandmother at a Falcons Preseason Game at the Georgia Dome. Petty Officer Howard's mother, Tina, thought he was still in Afghanistan. DVIDS worked with the Falcons to coordinate the emotional homecoming.

Friends and countrymen, lend us your eyes  
–the half-time tribute our G.I.s deserve!  
For patriots' love, a gladiatorial surprise:  
one family's tears on your behalf observe!  
Our man behind curtains will soon appear  
to his kids and young hot wife transported  
from Afghanistan to home so dear,  
their kiss upon a Jumbotron distorted!  
Then, attend these soapful sponsored messages:  
Your focus on this spectacle so pure  
will wash your laundries and your sins in stages  
gentle, scent-free, and all-temperature!

For we, about to cry, salute our troops—  
their sacrifice played in commercial loops.

---

# three tanka from Des Moines, Iowa

## Spring 2016

1.



PHOTO: Spc. Emily Walter, U.S. Army. Cadets file into a Chinook helicopter to begin the Ranger Challenge, Nov. 3 at Camp Dodge, Iowa. The challenge consists of several tactical training events that test the soldiers' physical and mental capabilities.

A flock of Black Hawks

thudding through our barren trees

announces March drill.

In springtime, comes the fighting,

but we wait for the Chinook.

2.

With ceremony,

Old Man assembles his troops.

It is Mother's Day;

sons and daughters are leaving

in order to sustain war.

3.

Conex boxes stacked

in the Starbucks parking lot

bring back memories

of making war and coffee.

I miss the old neighborhood.

**Randy "Sherpa" Brown** embedded with his former Iowa Army National Guard unit as a civilian journalist in Afghanistan, May-June 2011. He authored the poetry collection *Welcome to FOB Haiku: War Poems from Inside the Wire* (Middle West Press, 2015). His work has appeared widely in literary print and online publications. As "Charlie Sherpa," he blogs about military culture at: [www.redbullrising.com](http://www.redbullrising.com).