

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.