

# 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 rubberneckers 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.

