

# Two Poems

J. S. Alexander

## A Conversation Heard Somewhere Over Paktika Province

From the drone of the infil helo's rotors  
I heard two voices, pulling me from my  
mind's hyper-focus on our target, the  
mountain passes we would have  
to fly through, the choices that would  
keep some men alive, but not all,  
in the midst of everything that was  
born to kill them, waiting below.

Two voices, dull in my headset,  
indistinct in the ubiquity  
of their distinctive pilots' accents.  
Maybe midwestern, maybe southern.  
But all pilot, glib to a fault.

One started:

*You know, my daughter has that paper  
due in English Lit. She doesn't want to  
do it, just wants to be a nurse, but I told*

*her, tough shit, English lit is the price of*

*admission. But I know what she means.*

*English lit is a waste of time. I mean*

*Poetry is just horse shit. It's obscure*

*and subjective and well, stupid.*

*English lit is a huge scam.*

*We're going to take that pass to the west...*

Then the other:

*Roger, good copy. Pass to the west.*

*English Lit. Fuck. I had to take in college.*

*What a waste.*

*My teacher was a lib tard, made us read*

*Emerson and Eliot and what's his name*

*Yeats. That's it. All of them dumb.*

*Hemingway was ok, but a socialist.*

*Suicidal...what a weakling...*

*But Animal Farm, Orwell, right?*

*That was something. He was right.*

*We're all pigs.*

*But it was all such bullshit.  
Especially the poetry. But  
Philosophy was important, I guess  
because It introduces logic.  
Reason. But poetry, man.  
Poetry teaches you nothing  
just a bunch of useless  
navel-gazing shit.*

Then back again, to the first:

*Six minutes out.  
You're right, Philosophy is there  
to give you structure, hope maybe.  
With religion it shows  
we have a fallen nature  
but we still have free will  
and can choose our path to forgiveness.  
That, that is worth learning about.  
Poetry, English and all that, it's just  
worthless. A judgey load of  
shit.*

*Two minutes out.*

*Roger, two minutes out*

## A Coke and a Smile

The smell of water running over sun-baked  
concrete conjured up images of summer sun

sizzling on pool decks, reflecting over  
girls, basking by the clear water, thinking

about what they'll wear that night, who they'll  
call, or maybe how far they'll let a boy go.

Out of this olfactory reverie he realizes the water  
won't cut it, won't get the blood out no matter

how much they scrub. He knows it's bad for morale to leave  
the blood in the truck, and they have to go back out,

offload their casualties and jock back up, back into the fight.

So they scrub, frantically, pseudo-Lady Macbeths

in tigerstripe cammies. Then CC remembers his childhood  
dentist keeping teeth in a baby food jar filled

with Coca-Cola, how he warned him, saying see, see here?

Coke can eat through anything.

So they reach in the cooler and each grab a can,

spraying the gore away, cleaning the

side of the vehicle with rivulets of sugarwater

liquid coolness that once held the promise of smiles.

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