

The Road to Basra

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The Road to Basra  
*Kevin Magee*

ANTHOLOGIA GERMANICA

—for Robert Duncan

Throat of the whirlwind, what might have been.

This stern hymn.

And every pool a sea. And murder in the air.

Help was hoped for.

We speak of *Scots wha hae wi' Wallace bled*.

The war ode, composed on horseback, pounding  
over Galloway moor,

and to follow it  
as the one thing needful, through good or evil,

in the company of a Mr. Symmes, who, observing,  
forebore.

A poet has been appointed.

This blessing is not often given.

In the arena of his own remote glen,  
for want of a wider one.

In the Life his riding to Edinburgh  
as early as his thirty-third year.

*Kevin Magee*

A wish that to the last hour.  
Of his standing. Higher or lower.

Was it not wonderful that the Adjustments  
between them have been postponed?

Was not he too one of the Napoleons, material fate  
pitched against free will,

*Sae rantingly, sae wantonly,*  
*below the gallows-tree*

#### HOMERIC FRAGMENT

*“Shakespeare goes farther, and makes his Greeks  
and Romans Englishmen; otherwise his nation  
would not have understood him.” Goethe,  
Conversations with Eckermann.*

#### I.

The rage of Achilles  
destructive brought  
Hades souls heroes

crowding, countless  
prey for dogs, birds,  
fulfilling conceived

the destiny, when he  
and lord of men Agamemnon  
broke up and fought,

which one of the gods  
turned them against  
one another? Disease

killing off many honored  
that army, show respect for  
distant targets welcomed

*Kevin Magee*

here who inhabit allow  
you these hollow ships'  
ransom, bondage, staff

in his hand the wreath  
of Apollo, he begged alone  
his cause with a shout,

Don't make me still angrier  
out of fear I never offered  
far from her native land

the priests release my dear  
he brutally told loitering  
along the shores of the loud

sea who said hear me obey  
you who stand guard ruler  
beside me now I beg you

make you build you War,  
Helen, and strove forward  
struck, bleed, endlessly

the pyres for the dead lit up  
stopped first hit in the quiver  
noise peaks battling, ear-shot.

*[Enter one in sumptuous armor*

What's that? What's that?

What honey is expected?

What pretty abruption

What raging of the sea

*Kevin Magee*

would rend and deracinate  
the unity and married  
calm of states. To say the truth,  
true and not true.

Now play him me  
the defects, miscarrying  
lolling some Oration.

When degree is shak'd.

Here lies the Lord of Imbecilities  
and posts. Make paradoxes  
for those that with the finesse

of their souls, words,  
vows, gifts, guide  
love's full sacrifice.

*[Enter common Soldiers passing by*

*Is this Achilles?*

*Kingdom'd Achilles.*

*I am Achilles.*

*If not Achilles, nothing.*

*What's the matter man.*

*What lost in the labyrinth  
of thy fury?*

*You dog.  
[Strikes him]*

*Mars his Idiot,  
do rudeness, do*

Camel, do, do.  
Where's my wits?

See see your scylence  
conning in dumbness

at the author's drift.

Proclaim'd a fool, I think.

Bak'd with no date in the pie.

Poor wretch, you poor *chipochia*

Vassalage at unawares encountring  
scantling indexes  
to subsequent volumes.

The ill aspects of Planets.

Nor nothing monstrous neither.

Nothing but our undertakings.

Weaker than a woman's tear.

They call this bed-work,  
mappry, Closet warre,

the spice & salt that season  
a very land-fish languageless.

Power into will, will into appetite.

A monster, my Ambassador.

As red as *Mars* his heart.

How much in having  
or without or it cannot,  
though in and of him  
there is much contesting

to heere the wooden dialogue  
and sound, twixt  
this stretcht footing  
and the scaffollage.

That's my integrity and truth  
to you,

if we talk of reason,  
this cram'd reason,  
reason and respect.

Let's shut our gates.

I'll speak it in my spirit  
and honor no.

That proof is call'd  
impossibility.

What are you reading?

II.

Against forgetting,  
in place of knowledge, the palace of knowledge.  
Who can say they know how.  
I have read Genesis 22 five times

that tells the story of what is called the sacrifice  
or holocaust of Isaac. How does one  
who does not possess himself express it,  
unless he were to become his own Atrocity?

I'm also reading about the place-name,  
how it "pushes away" (Derrida) or "infects" (Lyotard)  
what it's called. The Gorge of Lost Souls,  
and it's going to be known. This thought takes hold.

Seized and held in the grip of another. Or held by the hand.  
I'm insisting on the act of seizure,  
wrong doing and the will to inflict harm, singing  
*I am on the road to Basra*

III.

$58,000 \times 70$

---

$140 \times 714$

"It's almost unimaginable,"  
said the National Secretary of the Socialist Workers Party  
in Cleveland, March 30, 1991, viz.  
"the large number of dead."

Jack Barnes quoted *Harper's* magazine:  
How many walls the size of the Vietnam Memorial,  
with the same type size per name,  
would it take to list the Vietnamese?

Answer: 70 walls.  
"Do the ratio," he said, "for the Iraqis."  
Using the number provided by the Pentagon,  
even with that low figure you'd arrive

at 714 walls. A large black slab of granite.  
"Just imagine, if you can," he said, "70 walls  
the size of each 'American' wall stretching in one direction  
and veering off at another angle, 714 more walls."



IV.

You do not know and you will never know.  
None of you bastards. We are in the same boat,  
the same book, mark it and mourn. What songs

will be there for the shock. The number: unknown.  
Who is equal to the scale. The cloud of tear gas  
an amulet, or banner. I walked alone with Mary

to the field beyond the gate. The spectacle of war  
stemmed, stemming out of any other of the many  
others. Jack Spicer calls us bastards. We are called

this name to become the name, not yet knowing  
what work this is that we are called to knowing  
only that the name is true. I will answer you.

It tastes bitter, my anger. It continues to grow.  
Jack Barnes' arm is missing at the elbow.  
He marks the time and he is losing time, postponed.

He is in the grip of it, repeating Malcolm X's  
*Free at last! Free at last!* The promise demands  
its undertaking. But if the band, the group,

the party, the disciples, their integral existence,  
were incarnated in a single being, the name  
for the incarnated one would still be Orpheus.

They will have made him into bread and wine.  
Do you hear the enigma of the wound  
I'm writing under the name of *wound!*

Their mothers will have hardly been at all.  
The woman every child has known, before knowing it.  
Viewed from above in a flood along the only road.

FEBRUARY 24, 1991

*The blow of this number of deaths.  
We may never know the actual numbers killed  
in the final forty-eight hours of the invasion,  
along the road to Basra.*

*That was the killing zone.  
You couldn't move down the road. You couldn't move up the road.  
You couldn't surrender, wave a white flag, or give yourself up.  
These were people targeted for wave after wave*

*of bombing, strafing and shelling,  
who were putting up no resistance,  
many with no weapons, others with rifles packed in bedclothes,  
leaving in cars, trucks, carts and on foot.*

*We bombed one end of the highway, sealing it off.  
We bombed the other end of the highway, and sealed it off.  
We positioned artillery units on the hills overlooking  
the traffic gridlocked, traffic jams backed up for as many as  
twenty miles.*

*From the air and from the land, we carpet bombed every living  
thing  
on the road, every person, jeep, truck, car and bicycle.  
The victims were refugees fleeing they were not military units  
they were not organized in retreat.*

*They were individual human beings trying to get away from the  
war.  
This slaughter ranks among the great atrocities.  
The Road to Basra is the Guernica, the Hiroshima, the Dresden,  
the My Lai of the U.S. War against Iraq.*

PACIFIC ARCHIVE

The books on the shelves around you.  
We were not able to get confirmations.  
The Waco incineration. The eyes of many.  
The glowing embers placed in the eyes.

We are told not to analyze.  
We are told to feel sorry for Janet Reno,  
who sent tanks and tear gas to free  
the children. I would like to read you

a couple more things from the Fact Sheet.  
A ramp worker at Delta Airlines.  
Against his will Ahmad was dragged.  
"Have you ever been to Oklahoma?"

"Do you know how to make a bomb?"  
"What do you do at the Bookstore?"  
"It's not an ordinary bookstore, is it?"  
"We are friendly, and not so bad."

(Japan gets 40% of its oil from Iran.)  
In the coming Ontario provincial elections.  
Who incinerated the Branch Davidians.  
The Omnibus Anti-terrorism Act of 1995.

The question of National Origin.  
Terrorist = Disruption of Commerce.  
The Palmer raids, the Red Scares.  
We've all heard about the Red Scares.

As soon as the bomb went off  
we hear some Arab did it like the guy  
who was trying to fly to Jordan.  
(Vincent Chin was murdered.)

1991: Rodney King. The Gulf War.  
Malcolm's sense of what a U.N.-sponsored war in the Congo  
was really like. They provided me  
with a summary copy of the Hatch Act.

In times of crisis like times of war  
or economic crisis, certain groups  
immigrant or women or whatever  
they will come and take your job away.

This is the conversation that happens.  
He's got something written out.  
When asked to define what "acting  
inimically" meant, I responded:

"Can the rule of law be suspended  
in the name of national security?"  
Too weak to fight back in 1948.  
The Smith Act was basically a law

that made any ideas other than  
those the government proposed  
a crime. In 1950, the McArran Act.  
The Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955.

As I mentioned before, in 1973  
the State lacked legislative authority.  
The attacks that we see coming down.  
Or go forth on your own path.

The demise of the Panthers and how  
that happened. Serious racist terror.  
They didn't have enough democracy.  
A new and important development.

The far rightists. If we think it  
and don't act, *we will get in trouble*.  
To act in the streets as best we can.  
The extra-legal side that gets unleashed.

The proviso was in their interpretation.  
The Harvey Milk Democratic Club.  
Look, an attack was made on a man.  
This is just something to think about.

Kevin Magee

When these moves they are making.  
This example that we had last year,  
how to defend your democratic rights.  
To defend them you must exercise them.

We have a basic right to hold our views  
and act on that, the solidest basis.  
It all fits into the structure we have.  
Part of the thrust of it was that.

Part of the trust in it was that.  
Nan Bailey: "It's time to go."  
Sunday. 3:00 p.m. Next week.  
"This part of the forum is yours."

## CINDERELLA

Tell them you fell down the basement.  
Tell them you fell down the basement steps.  
I tell them if you tell them to bring me my baby  
right now. I want my baby right now.

Tell them to bring her the baby now.  
Doctor saying no she don't need to see it.  
Sister outside in the hallway crying  
Momma, tell these people to let me go.

Nobody goes anywhere until she tells us.  
I fell down the basement just give me my baby.  
Doctor kept saying, in the state it's in.  
Doctor kept asking *what happened to you*.

Nurse brought the baby and it was big and healthy  
I'm crying and breathing hard I scream  
I FELL DOWN THE BASEMENT STEPS. Doctor  
says please, honey, you don't have to lie.

I had my baby that night, born dead.  
Take me to Emergency, told me not to talk.  
My baby was decapitated from the blows.  
Swinging on both of us with the broomstick.

*Kevin Magee*

THE LAST GERMAN IN ITALY

Your manner of speaking shows me the noble country.  
Then I traced my Fate back to the inferno of poetry.

Profiles of workers (warriors) glazed on the walls.  
They were other and licking at blood-flaked murals

ground down to powder, glossing imperial medallions  
spilled goldenly recording an alarmed Mediterranean

theater of war adored her disappearing down the road.  
Or if you were the smile or miles of an oblivious sorrow,

my error, or terror, a cadenced dream sprung Lucretius  
unconsciously wandering, startled by window crash

open to Eros, vault of a barbarous tomb or satin sky  
religiously looked to the lovely authority of her eyes

on my heresy of the Iron Cross, her Roman mythology  
savagely dragged to the evil hut of a ravaged family.