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Aeneas' Journey in Contemporary Literature

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AENEAS' JOURNEY IN CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE

BUTRINT

By Filomena Giannotti

University of Siena
Department of Philology and Criticism of Ancient and Modern Literatures

Translated from Italian by Gavin Williams

March 2021

VALERIO MAGRELLI, *BUTHROTUM. BAUDELAIRE AND THE THIRD BOOK OF THE AENEID* (2010)

Aeneas understands that salvation rests in the future alone. Which is why he decides to abandon Buthrotum, refusing a purely mimetic, imitative past. [...] While Helenus believes he's saved Troy by replicating it, Aeneas reincarnates it by founding Rome. [...] What is Buthrotum after all, but a clone cast from the same mold? [...] And yet, despite all, Aeneas needed Buthrotum in order to fully understand the principle of the law of transformation: the only way to repeat an experience is to alter it. The only true Troy will be Rome, the same as his lost homeland insofar as it is finally different.

Translated by Todd Portnowitz



This chapter, taken from the play *Frankenstein's Violin. Writings for and about Music* by Valerio Magrelli (b. 1957), an acclaimed scholar of French, as well as a well-known contemporary poet, was inspired by the Andromache in Baudelaire's poem *The Swan*: a symbol, together with the pure white animal, of all those who have suffered a loss, insofar as she was uprooted from her homeland and taken off to Buthrotum by the terrible Pyrrhus, like the swan, which, having lost its natural habitat, ended up in the streets of Paris. But this aforementioned reflection centres rather on the *Aeneid* and the “little Troy” that forms the background to Aeneas' meeting with Andromache, and with her new husband Helenus:

<p><i>Procedo et parvam Troiam simulataque magnis Pergama et arentem Xanthi cognomine rivom adgnosco Scaeaque amplector limina portae; nec non et Teucri socia simul urbe fruuntur.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Aeneid</i> III 349-352</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">[...] As I advance, I see a little Troy, a Pergamus that mimes the great one, and a dried-up stream that takes its name from Xanthus. I embrace the portals of the Scaean gates. My Trojans also enjoy the kindly city where the king has welcomed them to spacious porches.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Translated by Allen Mandelbaum</p>
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This reflection is especially relevant today, in an era of *fakes*: Although devised – in the case of Helenus and Andromache – with the best of intentions, a bogus story is destined to remain shadowy and disappointing, because it is illusory and, as such, deeply insufficient and substantially dead.

Further reading:

- V. Magrelli, *Il violino di Frankenstein. Scritti per e sulla musica*, Firenze, Le Lettere, 2010.
- F. Giannotti, *Et haec olim meminisse iuvabit. Contemporary Italian Writers Remembering the Aeneid*, in *Our Modern Aeneid*, Arizona University State, in press.