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AENEAS' JOURNEY IN CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE

GAETA

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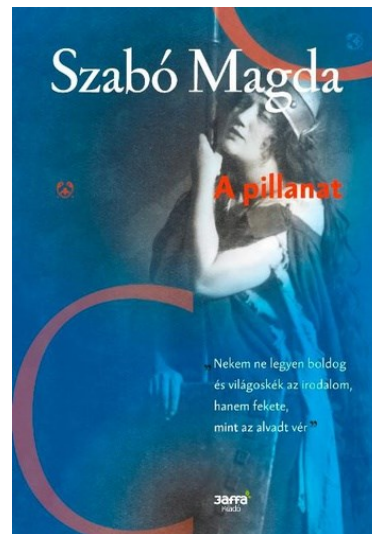
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MAGDA SZABÓ, *THE MOMENT (CREUSAID)* (1990)

[...] Caieta isn't here, oh, Caieta isn't here, [...]. On Caieta's cold bed [...] there is what is left of her, and that still represents the wet-nurse: in her place there is the beautiful mask that covered her face, and it is a wonder to look at, there is also her hair with its thick locks, tied up in a pretty bun; she has even left her smile, her teeth set in the coral of deep waters: she laughs, she who is not here, with a great, secret laugh. [...] Her smile from the depths of the sea [...] is guarded by the darkness, a rock bears her name together with the countless songs of the rhapsodes. [...]



In this bizarre, feminine rewriting of the *Aeneid*, Magda Szabó (1917-2007), a classically educated Hungarian writer, imagines that Creusa rebels against her fate as a secondary character, destined to disappear during the flight from Troy, to allow Aeneas' destiny to be accomplished. Creusa revolutionizes the whole Virgilian story, taking on the role of the protagonist (as well as first person narrator), turning the poem into a *Creusaid*. But, in the plot of the novel, all this is made possible by Caieta: “when I began to work on her as a character, I still didn't imagine how important her role would be in the strange amalgam invented by me [...]. Without Caieta's decision, it would not have been possible to write the novel” (from the author's introduction, *Story of the Origin of a Novel: the Creusaid*). The “decision” that Szabó alludes to is the one that means that, in changing the order of the fugitives, Caieta ensures that Creusa leads their number, instead of being at the back, and once they arrive at the Main Gate of the Dardanians, it is again Caieta who instigates Creusa to kill the cowardly Aeneas in a duel, and to take on his role. From that moment, she will be the *pious Aeneas*, an Aeneas in female form hidden in armour, until the arrival in Lazio and the intermingling of Italic peoples and Trojan survivors. Creusa seized “the moment” referred to in the novel's title, but the highest price is paid by Caieta. In order to achieve all this, the wet-nurse, who was very fond of Princess Creusa, had to call upon the goddess And-Who-Is-She, Venus' twin sister, who brings ruination upon those on

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whom she bestows a favour. Thus Caieta is allowed to survive, but in the form of a skeleton (later covered by a mask), continuing until the end, in this non-form, to shield Creusa in all her adventures. It is to this 'horror story' that the detail cited above, of "the beautiful mask that covered her face", refers.

Further reading:

- Magda Szabó, *Il momento (Creusaide)*, traduzione it. di V. Gheno, Milano, Edizioni Anfora (20081, 20162)
- <https://www.edizionianfora.net/il-momento-di-magda-szabo> (with a list of the reviews of the Italian edition).