

DIDO'S GLOW - HELENA NEAIRA'S SONG

THE ONE CHANNEL DIGITAL OPERATIC SHORT AS A SUBMISSION FOR LIF 2024 FESTIVAL

My musical video 'Helena Neaira's song' - an operatic video short - is a spin-off of the last part of 'Et in Arcadia - Elyssa's glow', concept and fantasy for a musical theatre play. There are two versions of the spin-off work: a two channel video installation/sculpture and an one channel video work. My entry for LIF 2024 is the one channel version.

The fantasy 'Et in Arcadia - Elyssa's glow' itself is part of a greater project: 'The C of Scylla', a fantasy for a 'grand' musical theatre play, based on Virgil's Palinurus story in book 5 and 6 of the 'The Aeneid'.

PREMISES IN RELATION TO THE MAIN ISSUES OF THE LIF 2024 OPEN CALL

(1) Regarding the theme 'Homo Narrans'.

The Italian writer Roberto Calasso once said: 'The myth is a story. The only way to penetrate deeper into the world of myth is to retell the stories from beginning to end.'

And in my (*ndk*) opinion, *interpretation as 'conjuring, transcending and meaning-giving powers of narratives'* of a story turns the story into a myth.

(2) Regarding the aspect of mythical stories as pollinator of a collective drive (generally autocratic drive, [*ndk*]) for breakthroughs in human society.

It is certainly true that the epic from the time of the Roman emperor Augustus represents to some extent a political ideology, and so does Virgil's *Aeneid* on which the story of my fantasy *Elyssa's glow* is based. See more about this:

[http://www.noldekonig.nl/08n_Elyssa's_box/08_00_01_TOC\(tableofcontent\).html](http://www.noldekonig.nl/08n_Elyssa's_box/08_00_01_TOC(tableofcontent).html)

(3) Regarding the aspect of narration as one of the great archetypal activities of man, despite its unreliability and mystification.

Myths are ideally suited to explore what I would call in Cyril Connolly's terms *the unknown shores* of our subconscious and to bring them into harmony with ourselves, with the outside world and with our longing for 'the good and the beautiful' (these two: 'the good and the beautiful' and not for 'the true'). The myth as an 'arcadia' of the aesthetic reality of a parallel, trans-modernist world order, which, let it be clear, is not based on any form of escapism, but – even though, according to Calasso, myths are essentially pessimistic – serves as a reflection on our relationship into a world that is constantly evolving. For this necessary reflection, let us follow the encouragement to what Roberto Calasso once said about the myth as a story. (See the aforementioned quote.) And in my case, I would like to add, to bring these stories into the spotlight again and again as a book, video work or tableau.

(4) Regarding the mythical landscape of Aegean Sea as inspiration.

The Palinurus story takes place during the final leg of a years-long wandering that once started in Troy and ends via Cumae near present-day Naples at Scilla. The voyage took us across the Aegean, Ionian and Tyrrhenian Sea, which means the area of classical Magna Graecia. There are many similarities of the Palinurus story (both my story and Vergil's story) and aspects of the 'Aegean' world. I'll mention only three.

(a) In terms of narration. My Palinurus story takes place in Troy (Kassandra), Erice/Eryx in Sicily (Helena Neaira), the Gulf of Naples (Hekate), Cumae (the sibyl Deiphobe), Velia/Elea (Hekalene) and Scilla (Skylla and Nemesis). There are three fortune-tellers/oracles in Magna Graecia: the Sibyl of Troy, the Sibyl of Delphi and the Sibyl of Cumae; in my story *Aegean* Kassandra (Troy), *Ionian* Helenus (fortune-teller in Kerkura, close to the west part of Greece and so too to Delphi) and *Tyrrhenian* Deiphobe (the sibyl of Cumae).

(b) In terms of mythology. In classical mythology – both Greek and Roman – the lake near Cumae with the name *Avernus* (lake 'a-ornis', which means 'without birds' and invoked by Helena Neaira in the last part of her song) provided entrance to underworld, the realm of the Shades. And both mythologies have the sea monster Scilla (Skylla), in my story the monster that devoured Helena Neaira's protector Palinurus.

(c) In terms of culture and classical philosophy. Already in Minoan times there were intensive contacts between the Aegean world and Cuma, the central location of my Palinurus story. Velia (in Greek called 'Elea'), the city where Palinurus is buried, was also the city where the Eleatic philosophers lived.

VIRGIL'S PALINURUS STORY, INTERPRETATION AND MYTH

MAIN POINTS OF THE STORY

(1) Dido's curse

Aeneas set course resolutely. As he sailed the Trojans looked back to walled Carthage, now aglow with tragic Dido's flames. They knew how bitter are the agonies when intense love is outraged and the knowledge started a train of thought sombre with presentiment.

after Virgil, The Aeneid V 1-7, translated by W.F. Jackson Knight

(2) Atoning sacrifice

Neptunus' promise to Venus (Aeneas' mother): 'Dispel your fear. Aeneas shall reach the harbour by Avernus which you have chosen as his destination, and you will mourn one Trojan only lost at sea, one life given to the depths for many.'

Virgil, The Aeneid V 812-815, translated by W.F. Jackson Knight

(3) The scape goat

Palinurus, a skilful pilot of the ship of Aeneas fell into the sea in his sleep, was three days exposed to the tempests and waves of the sea and at last came safe to the seashore near Velia, where the cruel inhabitants of the place murdered him to obtain his clothes: his body was left unburied on the seashore.

*LEMPRIÈRE, Classical dictionary of proper names mentioned in ancient authors (1788)
(probably the shortest version of the Palinurus story)*

MAIN POINTS OF THE INTERPRETATION OF THE STORY

(1) Cyril Connolly's speculative approach of the story

The account is full of difficulties. *Looking for you, Palinurus, bringing you sad visions, guiltless though you are.* But was Palinurus guiltless? (Cyril Connolly - *The Unquiet Grave* (p.132))

(2) Jackson Knight's speculative approach of the story

'Virgil knew the cost of Empire; the cost in suffering, and the cost to conscience and to so many graceful things. That he knew the cost his poem shows so clearly that it has *lately* been thought to be a savage attack on Augustus and autocracy.' - *W. F. Jackson Knight, Cumaean Gates* (p. 168)

The second to last note by Connolly in *The Unquiet Grave*. And after that – Connolly himself in the same note: *The Palinurus passages are so charged with haunting images and golden cadences as to suggest that Virgil has identified himself with his pilot (...)* And so do I (*ndk*), do we.

(3) My (*ndk*) speculative approach of the story

Making my video installation *Palinuro* in 1989 I followed Connolly's speculation about Palinurus' planned act of escape as desertion because of 'the cost of Empire' mentioned by Jackson Knight.

During my research ten years later for my project *The c of Scilla* I realized that Palinurus' death was not only the result of Neptune's promise to Venus, but also of his own hubris and overconfidence.

HELENA NEAIRA's SONG (SPIN-OFF OF 'DIDO's GLOW', PART OF MY OWN PALINOUIROS MYTH)

What happened before

When the Trojans had secretly left Karchedon (Carthage) and set sail for Italia, they looked back and saw the glow of Queen Dido's funeral pyre above the city, which gave everyone a gloomy foreboding about the further course of their mission. This feeling was reinforced when a violent storm suddenly arose and they had to flee to a shelter in Trinakria (Sicily) at the orders of Aineias' helmsman Palinouros. The helmsman understood that the storm was a consequence of Aineias' betrayal of Dido and therefore could not be resisted. And that from now on there was a curse on his captain's mission.

When Aineias continues the journey, his mother Aphrodite is not confident about a happy ending. She begs Poseidon for safe passage for her son and his fleet. The god agrees, but on one condition. It will be at the cost of one human life: one will be redemption for many.

Many Trojans remain behind in Trinakria because they no longer believe in the purpose of Aineias' mission: the founding of a new Troia in Italia, which, mirroring the Arcadia of the Golden Age, will serve for the salvation of the world and humanity. Palinouros goes along, but only because of his professional code. He intends to return to Trinakria when he has landed his captain safely at Kumai (Cumae) in Italia.

The fact that Palinouros wants to return to Trinakria is also because he had promised that to Helena Neaira, daughter of Helen of Sparta and of Troia. She had been taken from Troia by Aineias and when it turned out she was left in Trinakria to be appointed as priestess (which means temple whore) of Aphrodite for the temple that was to be built there. When Helena Neaira sees in a vision during her initiation that her protector must pay for his return with death, she manages to escape her attackers. She is brought to the Helikon by divine intervention. There she decides - and we follow in her footsteps - to seek for Palinouros' dead body and his ghost in the underworld.

She wanders from the Helikon to Kumai, the site where Palinouros started his retreat, then to Velia, the site to which Palinouros' dead body was brought by dolphins and where he had been buried near the cape, and finally to Skylla, the site where the helmsman actually was killed. In Kumai she had tried in vain to get permission from the sibyl Deiphobe to visit the underworld and look for the shadow of Palinouros. (Lake Averno, located near Kumai, was for both the Greeks - Aornis - and the Romans - Avernus - the entrance to the Underworld.) In Velia she had visited Palinouros' grave and honored him.



Synopsis of the Song

We follow Helena Neaira on her last trail on the way to Skylla's cave, where the sea monster (*LHOOQ*) had devoured her protector. After the crime Skylla was turned by Palinouros' patron goddess Hekate and her sister Nemesis into a rock. In the sea cave she finds the petrified fruit of Skylla's lustful overpowering of Palinouros. Helena Neaira only has one wish: to die so her shade can descent to the Underworld and join the shade of Palinouros.

The song is preceded by a recitative with Dido's curse.