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**Aeneas' Journey in Contemporary Literature**

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# AENEAS' JOURNEY IN CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE

**CUMA**

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## 1 MICHELE SOVENTE, *OVER THERE* (1998)

Over there, wrapped tightly in its skin, like the  
ancient stone and the hourglass that obstinately  
measures the ruinous passage

of the winds, of thoughts, in the milk-white  
silence, in the immense frost, over there  
lies Cuma, the Sibyl that rants and raves.



Cuma, near to which stands Lake Averno, traditionally regarded as the entrance to Hades, finds an appealing presentation in this and in another poem (*Tu, Cuma...*) in the collection *Cumae* by the poet and literary critic Michele Sovente (1948-2011), who hailed from the Campi Flegrei (another interesting text, *Immobilismo e bradisismo*, harks back to other Virgilian places, such as Cape Miseno, and Lakes Fusaro, Lucrino and Averno, as well as Baia, with its Imperial Palace, and to the Temple of Serapis in Pozzuoli). The distinguishing feature of the collection *Cumae* – which in 1998, published by Marsilio in Venice, won the prestigious Viareggio-Rèpaci Prize – is the fact that it is trilingual. Some poems appear written in Latin or in Campanian dialect, with a translation in Italian, but this aspect does not emerge from the poem *Over There*, which however constitutes a good example both of that arcane profile, and of that tinge of pessimism that places and characters (here, “the Sibyl that rants and raves”) take on as they go through time.

Further reading:

- M. Sovente, *Cumae*, edizione critica e commentata a cura di G. A. Liberti, Macerata, Quodlibet, 2019.

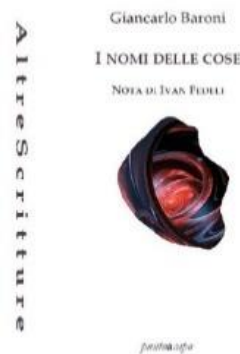
## 2 GIANCARLO BARONI, *THE HYPOTHESIS OF A DREAM* (2020)

It was strange  
to find in the midst of this pitch black darkness  
inside the fog and the smoke  
among these annoying rents  
of half-shadow, the idea of a dream.

A man somebody  
made of flesh and bone they whispered  
more with docile  
curiosity than with fright.  
Orpheus, I imagined,  
the rash lover who returns again  
and again to defy death.

Instead Aeneas they murmured  
Aeneas recognized.  
It truly was him,  
how much I did love him  
if, for love of him,  
without any love for me, I did kill myself.

Too slow in the end was  
his going, and long  
the gaze: he  
seeking elsewhere  
and I my peace.



The Underworld, with its “pitch black darkness/ inside the fog and the smoke”, is the setting for these lines taken from the collection *The Names of the Things* by the poet and writer from Parma Giancarlo Baroni (b. 1953). We see a reappearance by Dido, this time in her place beyond time. And with her again – unusually – not indignation, but nostalgia, together with the regret for that which could not be, namely – even in Hades – “the hypothesis of a dream”. A twist in the story, and suddenly we see the materialization, preceded by curious whispers and by self-satisfied murmurs, not of Orpheus, for a new descent into the Underworld, but of Aeneas – here raised up to the level almost of a modern celebrity, made the stuff of legends by his vast popularity. But even amid this surprise what predominates is the point of view of a Dido who is still in love, whose suffering is prolonged by the gaze, presented as in slow-motion, of Aeneas, who (unlike the events in Virgil’s poem) passes by and goes away, searching elsewhere.

Further reading:

- G. Baroni, *I nomi delle cose*, Pasturana, Puntoacapo, 2020.
- A. Fo, *Per Giancarlo Baroni*, “L’immaginazione” 322, marzo-aprile 2021, in corso di stampa.