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**Aeneas' Journey in Contemporary Literature**

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# AENEAS' JOURNEY IN CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE

## ETNA – ROCKS OF THE CYCLOPS

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**ANNA CASCELLA LUCIANI, *ETNA TRINACRIUS GLIMPSED AMONG THE WAVES* (2021)**

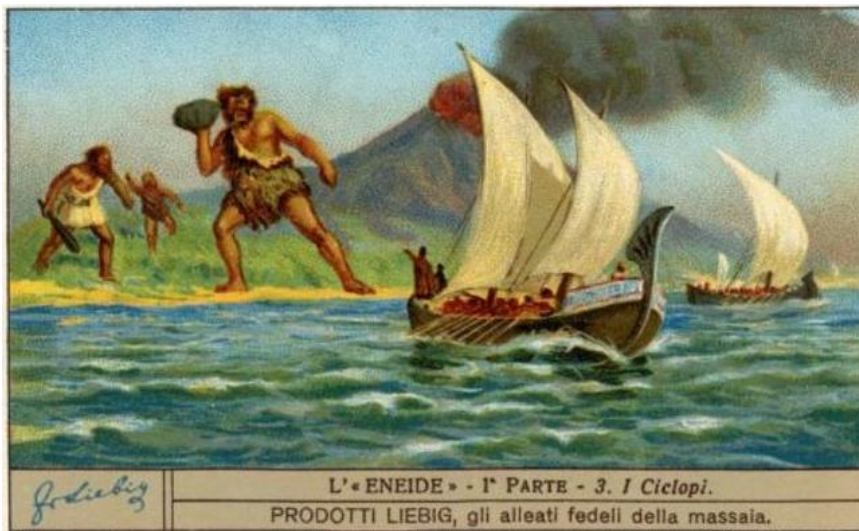
my heart is heavy with all  
the melted ice - Aeneas -  
I read today of African names  
of high mountains  
that are losing their *white*  
*texture* - names to you  
unknown in the days of your long  
voyage - hidden pitfalls - discoveries,  
knowledge - when being lords of all  
the Greek flames in Troy  
- by fate and by destiny  
you plied the great sea,  
your sails putting in  
at ports and lands - and the world  
of the Cyclops at an uncertain  
point of your sea journey  
with your comrades - while  
the white hair of your  
father Anchises raised  
in gift a high cup  
of wine wreathed -  
to the gods so that they might smile on  
the voyage - that you had  
to make to another coast  
giving rise - as they have said  
of you - and Virgil states -  
to another part  
of destiny, for you. On the shores  
of Latium - the final land  
of Italy after so many waters -  
welcomed by a king, you received  
his daughter as your bride - you no longer  
found your first wife

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- Creusa - at your side, lost  
in Troy in the mists  
of the city taken by storm  
but so it was written, and the gods  
knew that you would  
have to leave without  
your wife - nor the African  
love of Dido - the luckless  
queen - were you  
able to return  
for long - since fate  
had decided your choice.  
As you travelled by sea  
following a route  
such as to bring a finite  
sign - a port appeared  
revealing itself to be welcoming  
and hospitable - you moored  
- you disembarked - walking  
through the dark woods - it was  
the land of the Cyclopes  
unknown to you all  
monstrous beings - in that place where  
mount Etna smokes  
and quakes. Stepping forward  
is a man in rags - at first  
terrified that, in another  
time had fought against you  
- he being Achemenides - a Greek -  
forgotten in misadventure  
by his companions who took a different  
route - while they - free  
from hateful death by the cunning  
of Ulysses - ran  
to their ships - and his home -  
an awful cave - joined

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bleeding remains  
to the bleeding eye  
of the Cyclops -  
having heard the tale - while  
Anchises, moved with pity,  
before the man in shreds,  
had already held an outstretched hand  
to Achemenides - you hastily  
returned to untie  
your moorings - away with sail  
from the horrid cave  
but the Cyclop - an immense figure –  
was already in the water  
wiping the wounded, blind  
cavity in his forehead - already  
groaning from the salt - and yet  
he heard your noise  
on the ships - and bore down in fury  
and sightlessly smote  
the air - his irate hands  
seeking he knew not who,  
or what, and howling  
the mountain trembled like  
an eruption, and other  
Cyclops emerged from the woods  
gazing toward the rocks - boulders  
they themselves had hurled in other frenzies -  
and you - Aeneas - and your companions  
and Anchises and Ascanius -  
and the *Penates* with you - turned the prows  
away - the only sign of tenderness  
around the neck of the Cyclops hangs  
a flute –



This long, unpublished work by one of the most established voices in contemporary Italian poetry, Anna Cascella Luciani, hailing from Rome (born: 1941), is composed in fragments separated by hyphens. It consists of a rewritten version, in verse, of Aeneas' entire route, from the "Greek flames in Troy" to the moment he is taken in by the king, Latinus, and his marriage to his daughter, Lavinia, after the loss of Creusa "in the mists/ of the city taken by storm" and "the African love of Dido", crossing seas and ports. All this, all the while, "by fate and by destiny", a formula which, by repeating the concept, skilfully reinforces its centrality throughout the whole poem. Especially reworked is the depiction of the stay among the Cyclopes, covering several moments in that long section (*Aen.* III 568-683): the shelter afforded by the woods, against the background of Etna, which "smokes/ and quakes"; the appearance of a "man in rags", the Greek Achemenides, and his tale of the slaughter at the hands of the Cyclopes, with the compassion shown by Anchises; the arrival of Polyphemus himself and the other Cyclopes, in response to his rage, while, "prows away", Aeneas's followers sought to save

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themselves, and to rescue the Penates along with them, too. However, the reader's attention is caught by the detail to which the final lines are dedicated: the flute that hangs from Polyphemus' neck. The poetess' decision is probably due to a desire to lend a touch of humanity to the monster, taking advantage, in what is perhaps no coincidence, of a particular half-line (hemistich) that is usually considered to be an apocryphal completion to be expunged, given its absence in the oldest and most authoritative manuscripts of the *Aeneid* – and therefore its good fortune may be sometimes surprisingly be mediated also by a suspected interpolation, that is missing in Mandelbaum's translation:

<p><i>Trunca manum pinus regit et vestigia firmat; lanigerae comitantur oves: ea sola voluptas solamenque mali [de collo fistula pendet].</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Aeneid</i> III 659-661</p>	<p>His steps are steadied by the lopped-off pine he grips. His woolly sheep are at his side-- his only joy and comfort for his loss.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Translated by Allen Mandelbaum</p>
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Further reading:

- *La luna e le sue forme. Testimonianze critiche per la poesia di Anna Cascella Luciani*, a cura di M. Corsi con un'antologia poetica, Francavilla Marittima, Macabor, 2020.