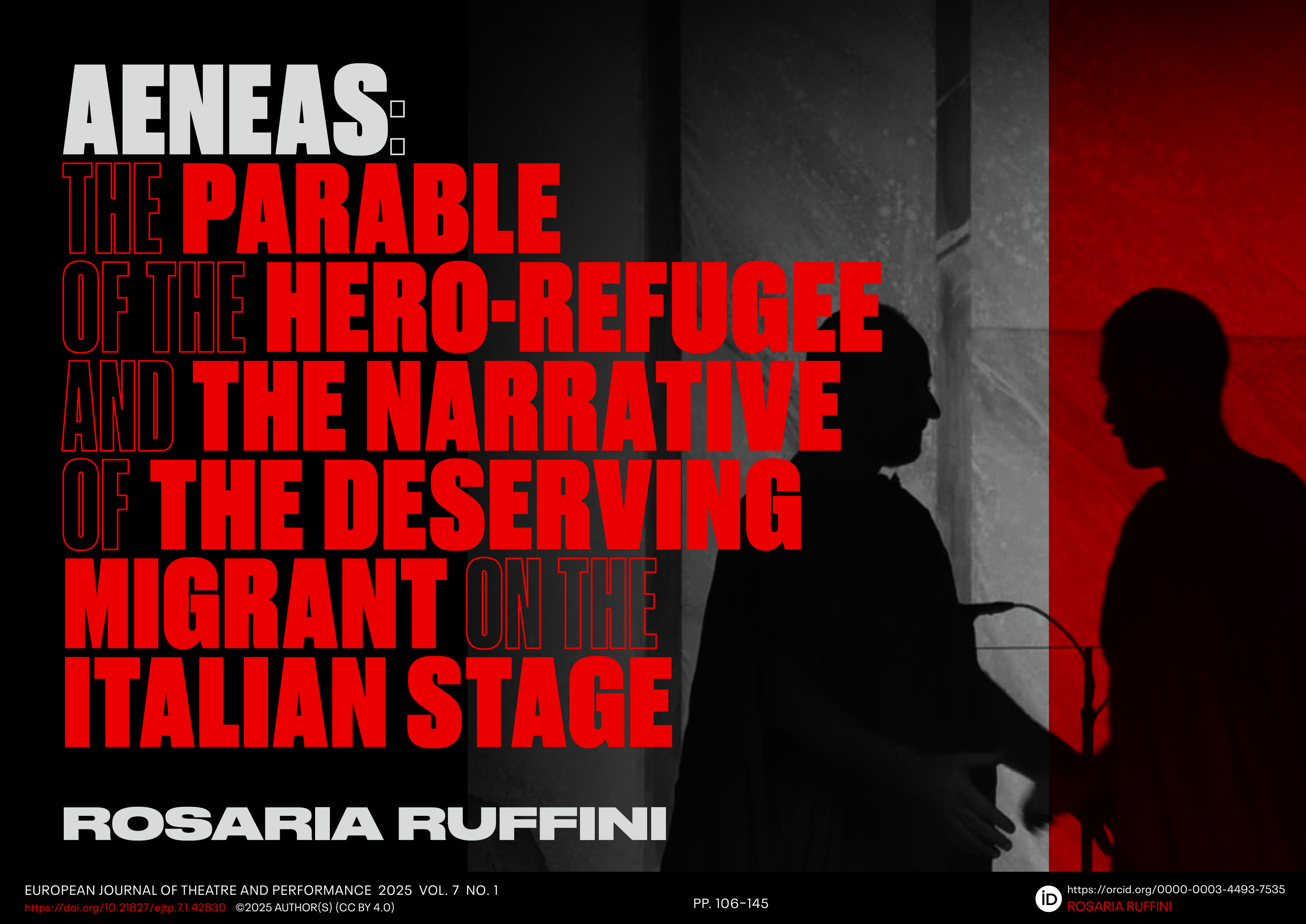




AENEAS:

**THE PARABLE
OF THE HERO-REFUGEE
AND THE NARRATIVE
OF THE DESERVING
MIGRANT ON THE
ITALIAN STAGE**

ROSARIA RUFFINI

ROSARIA RUFFINI

Sapienza University of Rome, Italy
rosaria.ruffini@uniroma1.it

Rosaria Ruffini is a Researcher in Performance Studies at Sapienza University of Rome, Italy. She has been Marie Skłodowska-Curie Global Fellow at Ca' Foscari University of Venice in Italy, where she directed the interdisciplinary research project, 'Playing at the Gateways of Europe: Theatrical Languages and Performative Practices in Migrant Reception Centres of the Mediterranean Area', funded by the European Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme. After a double PhD in Theatre Studies at the University Sorbonne Nouvelle and the University of Bologna, she has taught Performance Studies in Italy (University IUAV of Venice), Morocco (Ibn Zohr University of Agadir), and France (Sorbonne Nouvelle University, Mines Paris PSL, Paris 8 University, ENSTA Paris Polytechnic, University of Franche-Comté).

ABSTRACT

Negli ultimi due decenni, sulla scena italiana, la rappresentazione della migrazione ha attinto spesso a miti classici, in particolare a quello di Enea. Molti gli spettacoli che ritraggono il migrante come figura eroica (maschile) che affronta un pericoloso viaggio in mare per raggiungere una terra accogliente, dove il suo valore viene infine riconosciuto. Tracciando parallelismi tra l'esilio epico di Enea e i rifugiati contemporanei, queste creazioni mirano a suscitare empatia e a contrastare sentimenti xenofobi. Tuttavia, questo inquadramento mitologico rivela tratti controversi e problematici che finiscono per confermare e rinforzare quelle stesse ideologie nazionaliste ed escludenti che tentano di combattere. La mitologizzazione del migrante riproduce un paradigma di 'eccezione' che permea narrazioni di accettazione condizionata, molto più prossime alla contestata nozione di 'deserving migrant' che a una critica trasformativa delle politiche di esclusione. L'articolo analizza questi tropi teatrali, rintracciandone i legami con una certa eredità mitopoietica fascista e nazionalista, con alcune narrazioni eurocentriche postcoloniali e con il dibattito contemporaneo sul 'migrante meritevole'. Evidenziando le complessità sottese a tali rappresentazioni, l'analisi vuole contribuire a una riflessione sulle modalità in cui il teatro rischia di riprodurre o rafforzare immaginari, tropi e vocabolari funzionali alla retorica nazionalista.

ABSTRACT

Over the last two decades, on the Italian scene, the representation of migration has often drawn upon classical myths, particularly that of Aeneas. Productions portray migrants as heroic figures (males) undertaking perilous sea voyages to reach a welcoming land where their worth is eventually recognised. By drawing parallels between Aeneas's epic exile and contemporary refugees, these creations aim to foster empathy and counteract xenophobic sentiments. However, this mythological framing reveals controversial and problematic aspects that ultimately confirm and reinforce the nationalist and exclusionary ideologies they attempt to combat. The mythologisation of the migrant reproduces a paradigm of 'exception' that perpetuates narratives of conditional acceptance, far more akin to the contested notion of 'deserving migrant' than to a transformative critique of exclusionary policies. The article critically analyses these theatrical tropes, tracing their links to the enduring fascist and nationalist mythopoesis, to post-colonial Eurocentric narratives, and to the contemporary debate on the 'deserving migrant'. By highlighting the complex dynamics underlying these representations, the analysis contributes to understanding how theatrical productions can unintentionally reproduce or reinforce certain imaginaries, vocabulary, and stereotypes that are functional to nationalist rhetoric.

KEYWORDS

refugee, Aeneas, nationalism, deserving migrant, Italian contemporary theatre

PAROLE CHIAVE

rifugiati, Enea, nazionalismo, *deserving migrant*, scena contemporanea italiana

The Migrant at the Border

– Aeneas Enters the Scene

Over the last two decades, Italian theatrical production has increasingly addressed the theme of migration. Among the quantity and variety of plays, a specific vein emerges that draws on classical myths to frame modern narratives. In particular, the figure of Aeneas from Virgil's *Aeneid* has emerged prominently as a representation of the migrant. These plays portray the migrant as a brave and just man (never a woman) who, after experiencing tragic adventures and overcoming unspeakable dangers, reaches a shore by sea. Thanks to his extraordinary qualities, he is recognised as a man of value by the community, and in the case of Aeneas, he becomes a leader and the founder of a new civilisation. By drawing parallels between the character of Aeneas and contemporary refugee experiences, these dramaturgies utilise the classical myth to approach and foster empathy with the theme of migration through a paradoxical process that is the opposite of actualising the myth on stage.

The operation of functionally bending this classical myth to represent the migratory phenomenon raises a series of critical issues that point to post-colonial Eurocentrism and the risk of integrating the migrant into a role consistent with contemporary nationalist narratives. In the case of Italy, in particular, the myth of Aeneas is intricately connected to the Italian founding mythography that has been widely used by Fascism since the early 1920s as the archetype of a new Italian nationalism and nationhood. The works of Publius Vergilius Maro, as the *Eclogues*, the *Georgics*, and above all the *Aeneid*, were included early in the regime's ideological baggage.¹ The poet was presented as a 'perpetual prophet of Italian virtue' (Del Vecchio 1930: 16), and the *Aeneid* became a 'poetic glorification of national history' (Cocchia 1924).² This triumphalist and nationalistic reading of the *Aeneid* involved a hagiographic interpretation of its hero, Aeneas, who was seen as 'a martyr hero', 'holy in suffering and strong in action' (Beltrami 1929: 281). The exaltation of the sense of duty and the spirit of sacrifice lent itself as a model of behaviour for Italians. As Oddone Tesini observed in 1930 in his commemorative text for Virgil, 'the Virgilian re-enactment is particularly made for the working people and their children, little new Italians [...], because, following the example of the little ancient Romans, they grow up to be worthy citizens of Italy, daughter of Rome' (quoted in Vallortigara 2022b: para. 3).³

Adapted and manipulated for various purposes since its creation, the myth of Aeneas has followed political and historical changes, becoming a reference in the Italian imagination, and is currently used as an 'open sesame' for the representation of contemporary migration.

1. In 1930, the regime organised a series of events to celebrate the two-thousandth anniversary of Virgil's birth and to claim a legacy with his work. See Vallortigara 2022a.

2. This political and cultural operation was carried out, in particular, through the interventions of Ettore Romagnoli and Emilio Bodrero.

3. All translations are my own, unless indicated otherwise.

However, today, the paradigm seems to be inverted, since what is emphasised is his refugeeism and his ability to maintain a just profile despite the adversity and injustice he suffers. This article examines the complex dynamics and the specific effects of comparing the character of Aeneas to that of the contemporary migrant, mythologised yet de-historicised (Malkki 1997). It investigates whether and how the current theatrical reimagining of Aeneas reflects and potentially reinforces the imagery widespread by a traditional rhetoric of nationalism and nationhood in Italy.

The first part of the article introduces the ubiquitous dissemination of populist tropes related to migration over the last decade, during which Italy, a so-called frontline country, has become one of the European laboratories for implementing control and management of migration. In this context, it presents an analysis of the relationship between the use of Aeneas's myth and contemporary Italian nationalism, tracing back to the never-severed historical-cultural legacy of Fascism and its instrumental use of Latin myths, Roman traditions, and classical plays (Arthurs 2012; Gentile 1993).

In addition to highlighting the significant burden of historical rhetoric that accompanies the character of Aeneas as a symbol of national unity and identity, the article examines how the theatrical panorama, even when well-intentioned and aimed at countering representation, risks perpetuating some contemporary, post-colonial, and racial tropes that permeate the country.

The second part of the article focuses on the contiguity between the representation of the heroised migrant and the trope of the 'deserving migrant', who performs meritorious and extraordinary deeds, thereby earning integration. The metaphor of the migrant as pious Aeneas, widely used in the Italian cultural panorama, not only in theatre, proposes

a synthetic manifestation of the refugee demonstrating his capacity to become an integrated citizen, typical of nationalist ideologies. The notion of 'deserving migrant' amplified by the press and endorsed by welfare policies that consider the right of asylum a conditional privilege to be deserved, rather than an inalienable human right, has been critically analysed across various academic fields, reflecting its complex intersection with migration studies, sociology, and political theory (Fassin 2005; Sales 2002). As many researchers and activists contest the notion of moral and economic worth in asylum rights and the way this narrative shapes public attitudes, we can notice that tropes of the 'deserving migrant' and 'exceptional migrant' are still widespread in theatre and cinema productions and, particularly, in countries of migratory transit, such as Italy. Yet this aspect has not been critically addressed in performance and theatre studies.

Starting from an interdisciplinary theoretical framework, the article examines two Italian plays that evoke the *Aeneid: Human*, by Marco Baliani, and *Virgilio Brucia*, by Anagoor, produced between 2014 and 2016, a period marked by intense political narratives on migration and Mediterranean shipwrecks. The two pieces are not dramaturgical adaptations of Virgil's poem but rather scenic evocations aimed, in the case of *Human*, at associating the myth of Aeneas with contemporary migration and, in the case of *Virgilio Brucia*, at a critical reflection on Virgil's intentions (see fig. 1). The article points out how the construction and multiplication of nationalist narratives can contaminate even the thinnest layers of the artistic imagination. This highlights the need to delve into creative counter-imaginary strategies conceived through alternative processes, which disrupt roles, adjectival assignments, and frameworks, rather than producing counter-narratives that arise from the same imaginative repertoire.

Non parlare a nome della tua nazione,
chi sei tu per pretendere di rappresentare chiunque, oltre a te stesso?



FIGURE 1. Virgilio Brucia, *Anagoor*, 2014. © Alessandro Sala
<https://www.anagoor.com/virgiliobrucia>

Sovereignist Imaginaries and Bent Mythologies

A jungle of imaginaries and narratives surrounds the interpretation of the migration phenomenon in Italy. For nearly thirty years (since the first legislation on the subject with the Turco Napolitano Law of 1998 and the Bossi-Fini Law of 2002), the migratory issue in Italy has become one of the contemporary themes most imbued with ghosts, filters, and biases, which progressively accumulate and cross over into a macro-narrative politically manoeuvred. Furthermore, in the last decade, corresponding to the bloodiest period of mass refugee deaths, the migration issue has become a territory for experimentation and production of a detailed and complex political narration, mostly sovereignist, aimed at mystifying the segregationist policies that produce these massacres at the borders of Europe.

These mass-produced and mediatised narratives replicate some of the colonialist representative tropes and reproduce the stereotype of the migrant as a passive element that deprives the country of economic, labour, administrative, and cultural resources. The exiled is a figure that indissolubly undermines the roots of the nation's cultural, civil, and religious project and its 'identity' (Colombo 2012; Triandafyllidou 2001; Wodak and Boukala 2015).

If this propagandistic tendency runs transversely through all European nations, the peculiarity of the Italian case is even more evident, given

that, in this country, it is difficult to decline the notion of identity with the idea of nation, unlike in other European states — for both historical and anthropological reasons (Aime 2004).

The emergence of the 'migrant' in the Italian political landscape triggers a shift in priorities, even for regional, independentist, and secessionist parties, which slowly but progressively adopt a sovereignist narrative that emphasises the supreme authority of the nation-state.⁴ Particularly in recent years, the rise of the Fratelli d'Italia party, whose very name ('Brothers of Italy') suggests a claim to nationhood, has brought the theme of the nation and national identity back into the political and media arena, working towards its post-creation.

In Italy's complex multiculturalism and multilingualism, where the sense of regional belonging prevails over national identity, the concept of nationhood must be continually reconstructed. If the national unity of Italy is a historically recent phenomenon (1861) and linguistic unity is even more recent, as it was only implemented around the end of the 1950s with the advent of television, the utopia of cultural unity seems to elude a people that rarely recognises itself in national epics (Rossi 2012; Parlato and Zaganella 2011). As Hobsbawm (1990) underlined in his study on the construction of modern nations, Italy's internal divisions hindered the development of a repertoire of founding myths and shared symbols.

Therefore, in a territory that is geographically fragmented and historically marked by hundreds of migrations, emigrations, and foreign occupations (Colucci 2018; Sanfilippo 2011) the construction of the idea of nationhood is arduous, and it is currently carried out not much in positive

⁴. It is important to note that the party Lega, now in government with the nationalist party Fratelli d'Italia, was founded in 1989 from the federation of regionalist and independentist movements active in northern Italy, aiming to advocate for secession from the national central administration (Aime 2004).

terms ('the Italian is') but rather in negative terms ('the Italian is not').⁵ In this process, the figure of the migrant is central because, through his existence, he unequivocally defines what Italians are not: 'Italians are not Blacks',⁶ 'Italians are not Muslims',⁷ 'Italians are not migrants'⁸ — as influential political and administrative representatives repeat.

This line is currently sweeping the country, combining and recovering some nationalist narratives used by historical Fascism, particularly ethnic propaganda.⁹ Indeed, the lack of adherence to constitutional anti-fascism allows the present government (Fratelli d'Italia, Lega, and

Forza Italia) to convey some specific ideological fascist references related to national and ethnic identity. Despite being adapted to the contemporary context, these narratives still present Italians as a people of homogeneous culture and language, even evoking the concept of 'race'.¹⁰ The tendency is sometimes coupled with the infamous far-right theory of 'ethnic substitution' of the Kalergi plan,¹¹ repeatedly waved by government ministers and members who define the migration as a plot to mix and replace 'white Europeans' with 'other races'.¹²

Thus, the legacy of historical Fascism and its 'Romanolatry'¹³ (Canfora 1989: 254) resorts to the invention of Italianness and the construction of

5. According to Botti: 'Meloni [the Italian Prime Minister] claims to unite Italians not in the name of Fatherland and Nation, but in the name of her nationalist conception of Fatherland and Nation' (2022: 7). 'Patriotism and Sovereignism are the functional, more polite and elegant equivalents of Nationalism, a term semantically saturated with negative meanings by the history of the 20th century' (ibid.: 3).

6. Roberto Vannacci, the current deputy secretary of the Lega, stated: 'Italians are white-skinned and have typically Caucasian facial features' (quoted in Ansa 2024: n.p.). The affirmation deliberately recalls the slogan 'There are no black Italians' used by Fascists and which became famous after the 'Race Protection Laws' of 19 April 1937 which, with Royal Decree 880, prohibited mixed marriages and introduced a rigid apartheid regime in the Italian colonies in Africa.

7. The current Italian Prime Minister, Giorgia Meloni, in 2015, argued: 'All over the world, many Muslims interpret their religion violently, and this view is also shared by many of them who live in the West. This is the stark reality of the facts. What can we do? We must avoid importing into Italy a problem that we don't have today: enough immigration from Muslim countries' (quoted in Camilloni 2015: n.p.).

8. Italy has a conflicted relationship with its past (and present) emigration. Comparing today's migratory phenomenon to the vast Italian historic emigration provokes intense and critical reactions. In 2017, on the occasion of the sixty-first anniversary of the Marcinelle massacre, in which 262 Italian immigrant miners died in Belgium, President Sergio Mattarella compared Italian emigrants to asylum seekers who arrive in Italy, prompting a chorus of protests. Deputy Paolo Grimaldi declared: 'It is shameful that President Mattarella compares the Italians who went to work in Belgium or other countries, where they worked with their heads down, to asylum seekers and immigrants housed in hotels, equipped with mobile phones, internet access, and who hang around all day, causing public order problems, disorders, riots' (quoted in Lenardon 2020: n.p.).

← **9.** In 1938, Italy formally became a racist country with the introduction of the Racial Laws promulgated by Benito Mussolini between 1938 and 1944. Mussolini appealed to Italian nationalism, advocating the construction of an Italian Empire in the Mediterranean under the banner of 'Great Italy', evoking the legacy of the Roman Empire. Following the war in Ethiopia and the annexation of Albania, he declared the rebirth of the Empire from the 'fatal hills of Rome'.

10. Guido Bertolaso, Lombardy's regional councillor for welfare, stated during a conference in Milan: 'The Italian race is at risk of disappearing' (quoted in Baldi 2024: n.p.).

11. The 'Great Replacement' theory is akin to the so-called Kalergi Plan, a theory propagated by neo-Nazi Gerd Honsik, who referenced it in 2005. This theory claims the existence of a secret plan developed by Western political and economic elites to bring millions of people to Europe and mix them with the 'European races', creating a weakened and easily manipulated 'mestizaje'.

12. The leader of the Lega Party, Matteo Salvini, on 15 August 2015, interviewed by a *RaiNews* journalist, declared: 'There is an attempt at genocide of the Italian people, someone wants to replace it with other populations' (quoted in *Corriere della Sera* 2015). On 6 October 2016, the current Prime Minister of Italy, Giorgia Meloni, posted on her official Facebook page: 'Dress rehearsal of ethnic replacement in Italy'. On 18 April 2023, Francesco Lollobrigida, Minister of Agriculture and Food Sovereignty, reiterated similar rhetoric during his speech at the CISAL congress: 'We cannot give in on the idea of ethnic substitution'.

13. Luciano Canfora defines the fascist cult of Rome as a true 'Romanolatry' which provided the regime with a solid identitarian backdrop and, at the same time, constituted a mobile device to relaunch ambitious political and social objectives. According to Canfora, the commemoration of the Virgilian Bimillennial was 'the first experiment in mass cultural celebration supported by explicit political intentions' of the regime (Canfora 1985: 469).

an identitarian and cultural identity. Just as Fascism made instrumental use of Latin myths to anchor a sense of common belonging and invent a people descended from the ancient Romans, so today, Post-fascism (Traverso 2024)¹⁴ looks back to the past to functionally represent an ideal and fictitious community.

However, the current cultural politics is not aimed at rewriting myths or producing new works but rather focuses on occupying spaces of power (Ponte di Pino 2024) that allow for the control and circulation of narratives. By filling the space with tropes that primally invest in the theme of migration, sovereigntist propaganda can rely on a powerful media machine that produces and disseminates functional content, slogans, and frames. The contemporary migration phenomenon thus becomes a valuable ideological laboratory for the new season of neo-nationalism, as Hannah Arendt argued as early as 1943, underscoring the relationship among nationalism, racism, and migration.

It is, therefore, not surprising that amid the array of imaginaries and narratives surrounding the figure of the migrant in contemporary Italy, a certain resurgence of the figure of Aeneas can be observed in Italian cultural productions, even in theatre. According to the declared intentions of many artists, Aeneas, the Migrant, is intended to provide a positive model serving as a counter-narrative to xenophobic and racist narratives. However, a critical question arises: what happens when sovereigntist narratives and counter-narratives both feed on the same dominant and pervasive imagery (Augé 1997)?

¹⁴. Enzo Traverso introduced the concept of Post-fascism to describe contemporary authoritarian and nationalist movements that have evolved beyond historical Fascism while remaining tied to its legacy and retaining some of its ideological and structural characteristics. In *The New Faces of Fascism: Populism and the Far Right* (2019), Traverso argues that Post-fascist movements emphasise ethnic and Islamophobic nationalism, often targeting immigrants and refugees. The notion of post-fascism also defines an evolving 'fascism in motion' that extensively utilises the media to disseminate populist rhetoric.

Translating Migration into European Mythologies

The evocation of Aeneas and Virgil's epic in Italian theatres records a growing presence of dramaturgies, especially since 2015, the year of the so-called migration crisis.¹⁵ Among the plays that make direct allusion to contemporary migratory phenomena, we can mention *Il viaggio di Enea* (2017), by director Emanuela Giordano, based on the dramaturgy of Olivier Kemeid and presenting an Aeneas escaping from the bombs and seeking a homeland in a refugee camp; the play, *Eneide La rotta mediterranea*, directed by Edoardo Gubetti in 2021, to provoke a reflection on 'reception, integration, rejections'; the project, *Enea in Viaggio* by Teatro di Roma in 2017, that brings a stage truck that presents 'migrant stories' around the three suburbs of Rome; the play, *Human* by Marco Baliani and Lella Costa (2016); and *Virgilio Brucia* by the theatre company Anagoor, produced in 2014.

¹⁵. The notion of a 'migration crisis' used to describe the events of 2015 has been criticised by several scholars, as large-scale migration was not a new phenomenon for Europe. In 2015, the portrayal of migration as a 'crisis' was amplified by political discourse and media framing, often linking migrants to security threats and economic instability. Some scholars (Kopeček and Sutterová 2024) note that this concept is a political construct employed by right-wing parties, populist leaders, and authoritarian governments, who weaponised the topic as a means to shape public attitudes and foster nationalist sentiment. Some analyses demonstrate how the concept of a 'migration crisis' is instrumental in rearticulating the notion of 'European-ness' (De Genova 2017).

Most of these theatrical operations are carried out with the declared intention of ‘bringing the European spectator closer’ and familiarising the ‘migrant’ by presenting him as an epic European figure. In these productions, the migrant-Aeneas pairing does not follow a post-Brechtian heroism, either relative or situational, but rather an unveiling of a reassuring familiarity that aims to arouse a comforting empathy. But it is precisely the declaration of this virtuous process that raises some questions. In fact, this functional device is the opposite of the scenic movement that permeates much of contemporary theatre: the process of revitalising the myth through interpretation. In this sense, it seems important to recall Peter Brook’s (1987) critical vision, which advocated that current events should not be normalised on stage and should rather be placed at a distance to be observed more effectively. When, instead, the myth of Aeneas is employed as a vehicle to bring the public closer to the ‘migrant’ through a mythological normalisation of contemporary reality, it becomes crucial to critically interrogate the underlying process which risks being more didactic than interpretive: Why is it necessary to make the migrant *familiar*? And who is the *migrant* in these operations?

The translation of the migrant into a main mythological figure of the European repertoire is a process akin to assimilation and integration. It is a comforting regularisation of a figure, the migrant who, with his mere existence, challenges society (Sayad 1999) and the notion of the nation-state.

In his book, *Illegal Traveller: An Auto-Ethnography of Borders*, the anthropologist Shahram Khosravi criticises that ‘to obtain recognition as a refugee [the right of asylum] it is necessary to translate the story of one’s life into a Eurocentric legal language and to know how to play the role’ (2019: 68). In the same way, on stage, a Eurocentric translation seems to be required to include and ‘familiarise’ the migrant. The profile

of the person with a migration background disappears in favour of their character, becoming a modern archetype of ‘commedia dell’arte’ that flattens the multiplicity of lives and existences of people crammed into a generic function. Furthermore, the superposition of Aeneas’s fate with a variegated range of biographies reproduces on stage the tendency to universalise the refugee as a ‘generalizable “kind” or “type” of person or situation’ (Malkki 1995: 495), a concept that has been critically contested in the field of migration studies. By creating the character of the ‘migrant’ on stage, we operate a forced oversimplification that reduces their complex identities to a one-dimensional status. The conceptualisation of the ‘refugee’ reinforces a static notion of people in exile: ‘almost like an essentialized anthropological tribe’, refugees thus become not just a mixed category of people sharing a certain legal status but ‘an identity, a social world’ (ibid.: 511).

Similarly, on the Italian stage, we might notice a tendency to de-individualise and de-historicise a category of people, as if refugees all share a common condition, fate, or identity (Stein 1981: 174). We are thus far from the complex and subtle notion of ‘reluctant tragic heroes of our troubled times’ that Yana Meerzon analyses in her essay on tragedy and the crisis of history: ‘Today’s tragic hero is a hesitant, angry, fatigued, and often confused ordinary person who has never wanted to be a leading actant of history’ (2022: 15). The movement from the individual to the myth, which Meerzon (2019) identifies in the dramaturgical work *L’Énéide* (2008), of the Québécois Olivier Kemeid, ‘as an act of constructing subjectivity — the process of remodelling one’s consciousness’, rarely emerges on the Italian stage. While Kemeid’s rewriting gives substance to the myth of Aeneas, bringing his personal and biographical destiny to the stage, the line of inclusive and ‘humanitarian’ theatre that has emerged in Italy since 2015 is based on the inverse principle: making the migrant ‘closer and familiar’: from singularisation to characterisation.

In the urgency of responding to the migration issue, the cultural risk is to use the same nationalistic frames and categories that reinforce, rather than contest, the hegemonic narratives. The inclusion in a Euro-centric repertoire, the de-individuation and de-historicisation processes, are traps even for theatrical projects aimed at confronting the fascist and nationalist propaganda. This uncritical approach, motivated by good intentions, reveals the subtle and slippery relationship between artistic imagery and the tropes of media representation marked by nationalist ideologies (Ieracitano 2020). A vicious circle of image and imagery about refugees is created (Szorenyi 2006), extending a vision of migration that is functional to segregationist and inequality policies.

As Jerzy Grotowski stated: ‘Worse than bad intentions, there are only good intentions’ (quoted in Banu 2021: 78), it is crucial to critically reflect on the ‘humanitarian’ representations of migrants through mythological prisms and to examine the risk of reproducing and reinforcing paternalistic (Fassin 2012) and depoliticised practices (Malkki 1997). How blurred is the boundary between the ‘compassionate and humanitarian’ representation of the migrant and the reassuring neo-nationalist narrative of the deserving and ‘integrated’ exiled?

→ 16. The shipwreck of a fishing vessel in the Strait of Sicily, carrying an estimated 1000 individuals (of whom only twenty-eight survived), garnered extensive media and political attention. The European Union convened an urgent and extraordinary European Council, and the Italian government made the unprecedented decision to recover the wreck and proceed with the identification of the victims’ remains, marking the sole instance in Europe of such an undertaking after a migrant shipwreck in the Mediterranean Sea.

→ 17. Marco Baliani is an actor, playwright, and director. He is one of the prominent artists of the so-called *teatro di narrazione* (theatre of narration), in which actor-authors tell stories without representing them. The play *Kohlhaas*, by Baliani (1989), is a remarkable example of this kind of theatre.

Humanitarian Narratives and Anthropophagic Hospitality

The epiphany of theatre imaginaries and aesthetics linked to contemporary migration and shipwrecks can be dated back to 2015, a period in which the Mediterranean began to be regarded as the largest cemetery in Europe. After the large media coverage of the image of the body of the drowned child Aylan on a Turkish beach, and after the tragic shipwreck on the night of 18 April, where about 1000 victims drowned south of Lampedusa,¹⁶ the Italian stage responded with a rich production of plays — some of which involve Aeneas. A significant project realised by three renowned Italian artists (the actor-authors Marco Baliani¹⁷ and Lella Costa¹⁸ and the jazz musician Paolo Fresu) is *Human*, in 2016.¹⁹

The project’s starting point is the Virgilian epic poem, as the theatre booklet states: ‘The first inspiration is the *Aeneid*, which celebrates the birth of the Roman Empire by a refugee population’ (Baliani 2016: n.p.). The director, Baliani, explains that the idea arose when the University of Bologna invited him to hold a *lectio magistralis* on the *Aeneid*: ‘I chose the parts of the poem that tell of refugees and ship landings, and in reading them, I drew a parallel with our daily situations.

18. Lella Costa is an actress and author. As a playwright, her debut on stage is the monologue *Adlib* (1987). She practices monologue theatre and cabaret theatre and works extensively in radio and television.

19. *Human*, directed by Marco Baliani, is based on a dramaturgy by Marco Baliani and Lella Costa. The show premiered at the Piccolo Teatro in Milan on 7 October 2016.

The public liked it' (quoted in Raponi 2017: n.p.). Then, he decided to create a play to tell 'the upturned odyssey' of contemporary migration.

The play opens with the exact translation of the proem of the first book of the *Aeneid*: 'Of arms I sing and of the hero who/ first, from the shores of Troy came to Italy/ a refugee by his fate', introducing the fate of Aeneas as the founder of the Roman lineage. The equation of the project is to propose a close parallelism between the figure of contemporary migrants arriving in Italy by sea and the *pious* Aeneas, who travelled across the Mediterranean in search of a new home and, after long wanderings, landed in Latium and founded the city of Rome. The play repeatedly evokes this linear assumption that critics and the press embrace warmly: 'Have you ever thought about that? Aeneas was a migrant, in no way different from the refugees who flock to our shores today' (Perazzolo 2017: n.p.).

The programmatic comparison unfolds through a succession of stage frames that alternate between mythic and contemporary episodes about the relationship with the 'foreigner'. There is the Christian and racist old lady; the journalist who immortalises migrant tragedies in search of the scoop; the fishermen debating whether to rescue a migrant boat or not; a starving woman unable to feed her child, who we discover is Jesus; and there is the Ovidian myth of Hero and Leander, in which two lovers are separated by the stormy sea of the Hellespont Strait and the hostility of their respective peoples.

Although some critics highlight the weaknesses of the scenic and dramaturgical structure, which appears didactic and formal, as well as the fragmentation of the episodes presented (Ferrari 2016), the comparison with Aeneas is the most praised element. The press reception applauded the choice to address the theme of migration by the authors, Baliani and Costa, who are prominent figures in a genre of committed theatre,

also known as *teatro civile*.²⁰ The authors themselves present the project as research that tries to go beyond 'civil theatre':

Through our theatrical research, we would like to enter the threshold where the human being loses their universal connotation. By using theatrical forms, we aim to explore what has been happening in recent years in our Europe, conceived not only as a geographical entity but also as a 'Western' system of values and ideas: walls that rise, fundamentalisms that advance, attacks that shock cities, and refugees seeking refuge. But if we stopped there, it would be another example of so-called civil theatre, and that is not enough for us: we do not want the public to come away just more aware and virtuously indignant or moved. We want to displace him, disturb him, besiege him with questions. And, at the same time, enchant and amuse him, for that is our work. (Baliani 2016: n.p.)

However, the intention to go beyond 'civil theatre' falls into a generic humanitarianism, which loses its connotation of denunciation and fails to portray individual histories and exiles. The operation of mythologising the migrant's destiny, generic and de-individuated, is accompanied by some rhetorical tropes of migration and 'border spectacle' (De Genova 2013),²¹ which are also reproduced through video projections featuring images of boats carrying indistinct masses of migrants. The iconography and aesthetics of the 'shipwreck remains'²² also emerge in the scenography, composed of a wall of wet rags of clothes, which recalls the

²⁰. *Teatro civile* (civil theatre) is an Italian theatrical genre that addresses contemporary political and social issues in narrative form. Actors-authors do not play characters but tell the facts based on their research, assuming an informative and didactic role.

²¹. The definition of 'Border Spectacle' is used by anthropologist Nicholas De Genova (2013) and refers to how borders are transformed into media stages where migration is portrayed for a global audience, and where migrants are reduced to a mass, de-individualised, racialised crowd.

²². On the issue of border spectacle and the aesthetics of shipwreck, see also Mazzara (2019).

installation created by the artist Ai Weiwei in February 2016, featuring thousands of life jackets collected from shipwrecks on the island of Lesbos.²³ As Baliani explains, the scenes and costumes are ‘a collection of rags and real discarded clothes, lost as if washed away by the saltiness of an ever-present sea, but also washed away by time, consumed by a life in a rush, by an existence in perpetual flight’ (2016: n.p.).

The directorial choice aims to evoke images through scenic compositions and *tableaux vivants*. Among the selection of episodes to be included, the play offers some of the popular iconographies of migrant representation. ‘Caravaggio’s painting *Rest on the Flight into Egypt* appears and reveals that Joseph and Mary were also refugees fleeing’ (Baliani quoted in Raponi 2017: n.p.). As some scholars remark (Wright 2000), the episode of the Flight into Egypt and, more generally, Christian iconography with its long tradition of depicting forced migration, are often associated with refugees, who are portrayed as the personification of eternal human suffering. Because ‘in short, pain and suffering have become the hallmarks of the refugee’ (Khosravi 2019: 131).

Following a certain objectifying representation prevalent in Italy, the migrant remains a victim to be welcomed by the observer in a humanitarian vision that ensures the stature of protagonist to those who welcome them. Yet, according to the authors’ intentions, the project is built on a reflection on gazes, positions, representation, and rhetoric. The director’s notes state that *Human* is not a play ‘about the migrant issue’, but

it is about us, not them [...] The play is built on the theme of looking at the Other. When, with Lella Costa, we began to think of a play to discuss our encounter with Diversity, with the many souls enclosed within the definition of Refugee, we immediately told ourselves that we needed to avoid all rhetoric and emphasis. [...] there is an epic, there are images of frightened bodies. (Baliani 2016: n.p.)

Despite these intentions, *Human* is running on a rhetoric: that of the encounter with the Other and Diversity. The ‘images of frightened bodies’ mentioned in the theatre booklet display on stage this sense of Othering in which the notion of ‘deservingness represents a highly sensitive barometer’ (Tošić and Streinzer 2022: 6).

By juxtaposing Aeneas’s epic journey with the experiences of contemporary migrants, the production aims to *humanise* the refugee experience through familiar mythological lenses addressed to an Italian audience. The compassionate normalisation of the ‘Other’ positions the migrant as a figure of suffering, exiled by an adverse fate, who arrives on a lucky beach, where we, the spectators, recognise his true identity and welcome him, demonstrating our unfailing humanity. This process perpetuates the disequilibrium of an anthropophagic hospitality aimed at nullifying the ontological otherness of the foreigner by eroding his differences. In this sense, we may recall ‘the strategy anthropophagic’ defined by Khosravi as ‘more covert but nonetheless intrinsic to the nation-state system, intent on preserving its cultural uniformity’ (2019: 211).

Welcomed as an example of civil theatre that stimulates debate on socially relevant issues, the play *Human* exemplifies the approach that characterises the Italian stage and criticism, which tends to re-propose a certain image of migration and reproduces some imaginative phantasms that run through Italian populist narratives. Despite the two authors’ stage and dramaturgical competence, *Human* expresses a humanitarian framework that obscures the political context and violence (Casas Cortés et al. 2014) and unintentionally employs the same vocabulary and tropes of political narration. This result highlights the significant impact of migration propaganda on the Italian scene, even in productions that aim to present themselves as counter-narratives.

← 23. The installation *Konzerthaus* was composed of 14000 orange life jackets collected on the beaches of Lesbos and covering the columns of the Berlin Konzerthaus.

Pious as Deserving?

The apparent shifting of the migrant from a peripheral to a heroic and resilient figure emphasises his intrinsic eccentricity and decentralisation within the community. The migrant Aeneas is acceptable and ‘integrable’ due to the exceptional nature of his destiny: he embodies the values of morality. This modern hero, worthy of becoming part of the nation without compromising national security or endangering societal conformity (Sayad 1999), subtly reflects the narrative of nationalism, which valorises model migrants who conform to neoliberal ideals and values of determination and sacrifice. The rhetoric of the migrant fair-minded and generous, capable of extraordinary acts and willing to sacrifice himself for the homeland, is contiguous to the notion of the ‘deserving migrant’, a construct that distinguishes migrants who are perceived to contribute positively to their host society from those who do not meet these standards of merit. This controversial and comforting narrative is widely disseminated in the contemporary cultural sphere, amplified by the press and endorsed by political narratives and welfare policies that view the right to asylum as a conditional privilege rather than an inalienable human right.

Deeply entangled with colonialism and racism (De Genova and Peutz 2010; Fassin 2012), this trope is among the most widely used in nationalist and sovereigntist discourses to legitimise and justify restrictive migration policies. As Saskia Sassen argued as early as 1999, the concept of ‘conditional deservingness’ underscores a nationalist framework that views migrants instrumentally, depending on shifting economic needs, political agendas, societal expectations, and national anxieties. Closely related to a capitalist, merit-based social structure, it correlates with

narratives of sacrifice, hard work, and assimilation to dominant cultural values or moral worth.

This conceptual device serves to demonstrate that nationalist ideologies are neither racist nor xenophobic, because they do not concern individuals but their moral conduct (conveniently omitting the fact that indigenous citizens are never required to be deserving, whereas migrants must continuously prove their worth). Furthermore, this rhetoric contributes to reinforcing immigration ‘control’ policies, retrenching the criteria of granting refugee status, not as an inalienable right but as a *privilege* to be acquired through virtue, skills, and actions. In this way, sovereignty asserts its authority over borders to avoid unproductive hospitality and exclude from its territory those individuals who represent a cost, who are not specialised or have not been assimilated. As Khosravi notes: ‘The resulting policy is part of the nation-building process: admitting “deserving” and “genuine” refugees and rejecting the “unworthy” and “fake” ones is a sovereign act of border reconfirmation’ (2019: 208). If the current literature in migration studies and political theory (Fassin 2005; Sales 2002) critically contests this notion, unfortunately, the trope of the ‘deserving migrant’ is still widespread in theatre and even in theatre criticism, which often uses the same rhetoric.

The metaphor of the ‘pious Aeneas’ in the *Aeneid* as a migrant, widely present in the Italian cultural panorama, proposes a variation of this trope, narrating a model of the migrant who demonstrates the ability to become an integrated citizen. The exiled welcomed on our shore is accepted because, after all, he is one of us. As ‘pious Aeneas’, the migrant has demonstrated courage and resilience and is entitled to enter into the Italian lineage. The theatrical model of the refugee Aeneas is no longer an anomalous individual — an exile — who, by his mere existence, challenges the ‘national order of things’ (Malkki 1995), thereby

braving the assumption that people naturally belong to specific territories organised into nation-states. Aeneas is no longer a foreigner, having become the founder of a new unitary order.

However, the linear and comfortable superimposition of Aeneas and the migrant is not as elementary as the question of nationalism and nationhood in Virgilian's poem. As Yana Meerzon observes:

The historical function of Virgil's *Aeneid* is difficult to overestimate: often seen as a propaganda piece, this text became the defining narrative of the Roman Empire, in which the vision of a prosperous economic, cultural, political, and military regime was put forward. The poem recognised the primacy of the organised rule, the state's authority over its people, as the only social order that could provide a nourishing environment for its citizens and their happiness. It also became Virgil's philosophical, political, and artistic statement. (2019: 202)

The power of this artistic and political statement can manifest itself in unexpected ways.

Burning the Propaganda Machine – Burning the *Aeneid*

When the questions become rhetorical and the audience finds on stage the same narratives in a sort of global uniformity (Augé 1997), then, faced with the impossibility of breaking away from tropes, the operation of zeroing out the imagery that covers the *Aeneid* can pass through disruptive dynamics: an example is the play *Virgilio Brucia*,²⁴ where the theatre company Anagoor²⁵ proposes a daring operation that treads the thread of doubt, presenting an *Aeneid* that was supposed, in the poet's intentions, to be burnt. The performance focuses on Virgil's desire to burn the papyrus scrolls of the *Aeneid* on his return from a trip to Greece.

Why did Virgil want to set fire to a work that he had been composing with enormous effort for a good eleven years? This question, addressed at the beginning of the play, hovers throughout the performance and each spectator is called upon to find their answer. (Anagoor 2014)

²⁴. *Virgilio Brucia* by the Anagoor company was directed by Simone Derai, written by Simone Derai, Patrizia Vercesi; with words inspired by Publio Virgilio Marone, Hermann Broch, Emmanuel Carrère, Danilo Kiš, Alessandro Barchiesi, Alessandro Fo, Joyce Carol Oates. The play debuted at Festival delle Colline Torinesi in 2014. In 2016, the play was presented at the Piccolo Teatro in Milan.

²⁵. The Anagoor company was founded by Simone Derai and Paola Dallan in 2000, and the current directors are Simone Derai and Marco Menegoni. Anagoor's iconic aesthetic is nourished by performing arts, philosophy, literature, and hyper-media theatre. Anagoor was awarded the Silver Lion for Theatre in 2018 at the Venice Biennale.

LIBRO SECONDO

ILIO BRUCIA



FIGURE 2. *Virgilio Brucia, Anagor, 2014.* © Dietrich Steinmetz
<https://www.anagor.com/virgiliobrucia>

Anagoor's play revolves entirely around this question and the fate of Virgil's unfulfilled wills, staging the figure of the poet through fragments that compose a complex fresco.²⁶ It opens with the death of Virgil, after Hermann Broch's novel, *The Death of Virgil*, telling of the poet's decision to destroy the *Aeneid*. In fact, Emperor Augustus prevented Virgil's followers from burning the work and ordered it to be published. The poem was an immediate success throughout the empire, instantly becoming an extraordinary and highly effective propaganda tool for the political experiment that was being developed at the time: the Empire. An instrument of imperialism, which Virgil feared. A laboratory of power on which the history of the West would be modelled.

Virgilio Brucia examines the relationship between art and power, as well as the function of culture and memory. It investigates the figure of Publius Virgil Maro, who was marked by the prejudice of being the poet for Augustus, serving imperial ideology and proclaiming the triumph of Roman arms. From an unsettling perspective, Anagoor identifies cracks: the points of attack are two books from the *Aeneid*: the second, which narrates the destruction of Ilion and the collapse of the kingdom of Troy and the sixth, which tells of Aeneas's descent to the underworld to find his father, Anchises. The heart of *Virgilio Brucia*, to which all the chapters of the play are a dense preparation, is the staging of the second book (see fig. 2), featuring a forty-five-minute performance in Latin, 'a narration of unparalleled violence that starts the story of people fleeing towards Italy' (Anagoor 2014: n.p.). An actor interpreting Virgil performs the book, at the Emperor's insistence (see fig. 3).

²⁶ The dramaturgy, composed of seven chapters, is divided into two main parts. The first part comprises six different scenes featuring the poet and the epic poem, drawn from texts by contemporary authors. The second is based on the author's writing, featuring a forty-five-minute performance in Latin of the second book of the *Aeneid*.

FIGURE 3. *Virgilio Brucia*, Anagoor, 2014. © Andrea Macchia
<https://www.anagoor.com/virgiliobrucia>



But the first verses, uttered by the poet in the presence of Rome's absolute Emperor, revealed a completely overturned project: not the tale of the birth of a new empire, but the collapse of an ancient kingdom, the extermination of a people, flight and exile... Virgil, on closer inspection of the folds of history, reveals himself to be anything but a supine poet. Such a conscious poet, perhaps, knew that the great work would become a deadly propaganda machine. Perhaps that is why he wanted to burn the *Aeneid*? (Anagoor 2014: n.p.)

With a sophisticated rigour, *Virgilio Brucia* sheds light on poetry that has been weaponised and forged *a posteriori* into propaganda, used and abused by Roman imperialism, twentieth-century Fascism, and contemporary Italian neo-nationalism. By exposing the propagandistic manipulation of the *Aeneid*, *Virgilio Brucia* demonstrates how myth can be deconstructed to challenge dominant narratives, even today. The subtle allusions to the present become poetry, as in a scene evoking the context of forced migration in the nascent Roman Empire, the violent demographic policies of the Augustan age, and the impact of migration on imaginaries. What price was paid for the construction of the Empire? Even that of using poetry to celebrate Rome's power and imperialism.

The play reflects on colonialism and the rejection of the cultural models imposed, including the *Aeneid*, which can be seen as a product of Western colonialism. The text is intertwined with the stories of exile and the struggle of people in the British colonies, as described in Amitav Ghosh's book, *The Glass Palace*. Following these scenes, Virgil performs the raw devastation of a people battered and forced into exile. The character of Virgil blurs with that of Aeneas, who, sorrowful, undergoes the arduous process of creation, raising a funeral chant. The text is cadenced by ancient Balkan and Macedonian chants performed live, in a sort of pre-tragic choir.

Et iam nox umida caelo praecipitat suadentque cadentia sidera somnos. sed si tantus amor casus cognoscere nostros et breuiter Troiae supremum audire laborem, quamquam animus meminisse horret luctuque refugit, incipiam. (The moist night falls to its end, the setting stars urge sleep. But if you are so passionate to hear, briefly, of the death agony of Troy, I will begin, although my heart shrinks back from memory.) (Virgil: Book 2, lines 8–13)²⁷

The Virgilian performance is sprinkled with so much violence and pain that the future glory and empire claimed by the poem seem to end up buried by those same ruins. There is no room for heroes, only for pain and interrogation. It is an *Aeneid* that burns, finally, in the fire of its creation. Perhaps in this liberating fire, the dissonances of the *Aeneid* and its hero shine forth in all their complexities, as the iridescent tongues of fire incinerate all manipulation and the dictatorship of the sovereigntist imagination.

²⁷. Translation by Sarah Ruden.

Conclusion

Like a book of divination, whose verses read at random reveal the future written within, the *Aeneid* has been used for centuries in various ways. Consulted in bibliomancy, adapted, used and manipulated since its very creation, the *Aeneid* has reflected the political and historical events. Aeneas has been presented in countless declinations: he is the refugee fleeing the war, the quintessential pious man who takes his father on his shoulders, the founder of Italy, and more.

Like an open myth, as Peter Brook (1987) intended it, it lends itself to multiple frames, yet it demands careful handling. It is not sufficient to evoke the character of Aeneas to counteract the racist and nationalist narratives. Therefore, it is imperative that theatrical discourse resist the romanticisation of migrant experiences by adopting a critical questioning of the myths they invoke and their complex dynamics. Potential resistance begins primarily with an awareness of the repertoire of image-ries on migration that pervades the cultural world, and furthermore, by recognising the historical persistence present in representational metaphors. As Serge Gruzinski (2001) explored in his essay on visual culture used as a tool of power and domination during the colonisation of Mexico, resistance means turning representation into a battlefield. Only the awareness of entering this arena of contested meanings allows for the creation of alternative and transformative processes that operate in subtle and strategic ways, subverting and disrupting roles, adjectival assignments, and structures to counter neo-nationalist narratives aimed at normalising the theme of exile and reinforcing the rhetoric of the nation. •

Bibliography

- AIME, MARCO. 2004.** *Eccessi di culture* (Excesses of Culture) (Turin, Einaudi)
- ANAGOOR. 2014.** *Virgilio brucia* (Virgil Burns), theatre booklet https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5b9b84f912b13fbf8c114fa9/t/5bf6ab5eb8a045b4c001d6b2/1542892397867/anagoor_virgiliobruca_dossier_ita.pdf [accessed 30 March 2025]
- ANSA. 2024.** 'Vannacci: La frase sui tratti somatici non offende e non è reato' ('Vannacci: The Sentence about Physical Features is Not Offensive and Is Not a Crime'), 16 August https://www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/politica/2024/08/16/vannacci-frase-su-tratti-somatici-non-offende-e-non-e-reato_5eeb128c-07c4-4538-a68a-870086d0ac5b.html [accessed 18 March 2025]
- ARENDT, HANNAH. 1943.** 'We Refugees', *Menorah Journal*, 31: 69–77
- ARTHURS, JOSHUA. 2012.** *Excavating Modernity: The Roman Past in Fascist Italy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press)
- AUGÉ, MARC. 1997.** *La Guerre Des Reves: Exercices D'Ethno-Fiction* (*The War of Dreams: Exercises in Ethno-Fiction*) (Paris: Seuil)
- BALDI, CHIARA. 2024.** 'La razza italica rischia di scomparire: polemiche per la frase di Bertolaso' ('The Italian Race is at Risk of Extinction: Controversy over Bertolaso's Statement'), *Corriere della Sera*, 3 August
- BALIANI, MARCO. 2016.** 'Appunti di regia: Human' ('Director's Notes: Human') <https://www.marcobaliani.it/human-3/> [accessed 27 March 2025]
- BANU, GEORGES. 2021.** *Les récits d'Horatio: Portraits et aveux des maîtres du théâtre européen* (Horatio's Tales: Portraits and Confessions of the Masters of European Theatre) (Paris: Actes Sud)
- BELTRAMI, ACHILLE. 1929.** 'Italia e Roma nell' "Eneide" di Virgilio' ('Italy and Rome in Virgil's "Aeneid"'), in *Atti del I° Congresso Nazionale di Studi Romani* aprile 1928, II (Rome: Istituto di Studi Romani), pp. 277–90
- BOTTI, ALFONSO. 2022.** 'Vox e le metamorfosi del nazionalismo' ('Vox and the Metamorphoses of Nationalism'), *La rivista Il Mulino*, 19 October
- BROCH, HERMANN. 1945.** *The Death of Virgil* (New York: Pantheon Books)
- BROOK, PETER. 1987.** *The Shifting Point: Forty Years of Theatrical Exploration, 1946–1987* (New York: Harper & Row)

- CAMILLONI, STEFANO. 2015.** 'Basta immigrazione dai Paesi musulmani, Giorgia Meloni alle Crociate' ('Stop Immigration from Muslim Countries, Giorgia Meloni to the Crusades'), *StranieriInItalia.it*, 29 June <https://stranieriinitalia.it/sos-razzismo/qbasta-immigrazione-dai-paesi-musulmani-giorgia-meloni-alle-crociate-sp-463300883/> [accessed 4 April 2025]
- CANFORA, LUCIANO. 1985.** 'Fascismo e bimillenario della nascita di Virgilio' ('Fascism and the Bi-millennium of Virgil's Birth'), in *Enciclopedia virgiliana*, II, ed. by Francesco Della Corte (Rome: Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana), pp. 469–72
- CANFORA, LUCIANO. 1989.** *Le vie del classicismo* (The Paths of Classicism) (Rome-Bari: Laterza)
- CASAS CORTÉS, MARIBEL et al. 2014.** 'New Keywords: Migration and Borders', *Cultural Studies*, 29.1: 55–87
- COCCHIA, ENRICO. 1924.** *L'arte e la storia nell'Eneide di Virgilio ovvero 'l'Eneide' considerata come glorificazione della storia nazionale* (Art and History in Virgil's 'Aeneid': 'Aeneid' Considered as a Glorification of National History) (Naples: Tipografia della R. Università)
- COLOMBO, ASHER. 2012.** *Fuori controllo? Miti e realtà dell'immigrazione in Italia* (Out of Control? Myths and Realities of Immigration in Italy) (Bologna: Il Mulino)
- COLUCCI, MICHELE. 2018.** *Storia dell'immigrazione straniera in Italia. Dal 1945 ai giorni nostri* (History of Foreign Immigration in Italy. From 1945 to the Present Day) (Rome: Carocci Editore)
- CORRIERE DELLA SERA. 2015.** 'Salvini: In atto un tentativo di genocidio del popolo italiano' ('Salvini: An Attempted Genocide of the Italian People is Underway'), 16 August <https://video.corriere.it/salvini-in-atto-tentativo-genocidio-popolo-italiano/128b89d0-43fb-11e5-9a44-839af1b02c5d> [accessed 20 February 2025]
- DE GENOVA, NICHOLAS. 2013.** 'Spectacles of Migrant "Illegality": The Scene of Exclusion, the Obscene of Inclusion', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 36.7: 1180–98 <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2013.783710>
- DE GENOVA, NICHOLAS. 2017.** 'The "Migrant Crisis" as Racial Crisis: Do Black Lives Matter in Europe?' *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 41.10: 1765–82 <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2017.1361543>
- DE GENOVA, NICHOLAS, and NATHALIE PEUTZ, eds. 2010.** *The Deportation Regime: Sovereignty, Space, and the Freedom of Movement* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press)
- DEL VECCHIO, PIETRO. 1930.** *Per la gloria della stirpe: Messaggio dell'Istituto del Nastro Azzurro nel bimillenario virgiliano* (For the Glory of the Race: Message of the Institute Nastro Azzurro on the Bimillenary of Virgil) (Rome: Cecconi)
- FACEBOOK. 2015.** Giorgia Meloni Post. 8 October <https://www.facebook.com/giorgiameloni.paginaufficiale/posts/prove-general-di-sostituzione-etnica-in-italia-nel-2015-pi%C3%B9-di-100-mila-italian/10154534547787645/> [accessed 5 April 2025]
- FASSIN, DIDIER. 2005.** 'Compassion and Repression: The Moral Economy of Immigration Policies in France', *Cultural Anthropology*, 20.3: 362–87 <https://doi.org/10.1525/can.2005.20.3.362>
- FASSIN, DIDIER. 2012.** *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press)
- FERRARI, SILVIA. 2016.** 'Intensità e fragilità in "Human" di Marco Baliani e Lella Costa' ('Intensity and fragility in "Human" by Marco Baliani and Lella Costa'), *Paneacquaculture*, 21 December <https://www.paneacquaculture.net/2016/12/21/intensita-e-fragilita-in-human-di-marco-baliani-e-lella-costa/> [accessed 4 April 2025]
- GENTILE, EMILIO. 1993.** *Il culto del littorio: La sacralizzazione della politica nell'Italia fascista* (The Cult of the Littorio: The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy) (Rome: Laterza)
- GHOSH, AMITAV. 2000.** *The Glass Palace*. (New York: Harpercollins)
- GRUZINSKI, SERGE. 2001.** *Images at War: Mexico from Columbus to Blade Runner (1492–2019)* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books)
- HOBBSAWM ERIC. 1990.** *Nations and Nationalism since 1780* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)
- IERACITANO, FRANCESCA. 2020.** *Lo storytelling mediale dei migranti come problema sociale, come soggetti deumanizzati e destoricizzati* (Media Storytelling of Migrants as a Social Problem, as Dehumanised and Dehistoricised Subjects) (Brescia: Morcelliana)
- KHOSRAVI, SHAHRAM. 2019.** *Io sono confine ('Illegal' Traveller: An Auto-Ethnography of Borders)* (Milan: Eléuthera)
- KOPEČEK, VINCENC, AND DITA SUTTEROVÁ. 2024.** 'Shifting Narratives of the Alternative for Germany', *Obrana a strategie*, 24.1: 87–105

- LENARDON, MATTEO. 2020.** 'Quando gli immigrati italiani erano considerati africani che dovevano essere buttati in mare' ('When Italian Immigrants were considered Africans who should be thrown into the Sea'), *The Vision*, 18 June <https://thevision.com/attualita/immigrati-italiani-africani/> [accessed 30 March 2025]
- MALKKI, LIISA. 1995.** 'Refugees and Exile: From "Refugee Studies" to the National Order of Things', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 24: 495–523
- MALKKI, LIISA. 1997.** 'Speechless Emissaries: Refugees, Humanitarianism, and Dehistoricization', in *Siting Culture: The Shifting Anthropological Object*, ed. by Karen Fog Olwig and Kristen Hastrup (London: Routledge), pp. 223–54
- MAZZARA, FEDERICA. 2019.** *Reframing Migration: Lampedusa, Border Spectacle and Aesthetics of Subversion* (Oxford: Peter Lang)
- MEERZON, YANA. 2019.** 'Staging the Ordinary/Constructing History in Olivier Kemeid's Theatre of Memory, History, and Forgetting', in *Theatre and (Im)migration: New Essays in Canadian Theatre*, ed. by Yana Meerzon (Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press), pp. 197–220
- MEERZON, YANA. 2022.** 'Tragedy and the Crisis of History: Staging Forced Displacement and Its Reluctant Hero', in *Staging 21st Century Tragedies: Theatre, Politics, and Global Crisis*, ed. by Avra Sidiropoulou (New York: Routledge), pp. 13–26 <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003046479>
- PARLATO, GIUSEPPE, and MARCO ZAGANELLA. 2012.** *Fare gli italiani. Dalla Costituzione dello Stato nazionale alla promulgazione della Costituzione repubblica* (Making Italians. From the Constitution of the Nation State to the Promulgation of the Constitution of the Republic) (Rome: Nuova Cultura)
- PERAZZOLO, PAOLO. 2017.** 'Il viaggio di Enea al teatro Argentina di Roma' ('Aeneas' Journey to the Argentina Theatre in Rome'), *Famiglia Cristiana*, 26 April
- PONTE DI PINO, OLIVIERO. 2024.** 'La cultura a destra due anni dopo' ('Culture to the Right, Two Years Later'), *Doppiozero*, 25 September <https://www.doppiozero.com/la-cultura-destra-due-anni-dopo> [accessed 7 January 2025]
- RAPONI, FEDERICO. 2017.** 'Marco Baliani, "Human" che si perde tra gli sbarchi' ('Marco Baliani, "Human" who Gets Lost Among the Landings'), *Opinione delle libertà*, 11 May https://opinione.it/cultura/2017/05/11/raponi_marco-baliani-lella-costa/ [accessed 4 February 2025]
- ROSSI, MICHELE. 2012.** *Una sola moltitudine. Saggio sull'identità italiana* (A Single Multitude. An Essay on Italian Identity) (Soveria Mannelli: Rubettino).
- SALES, ROSEMARY. 2002.** 'The Deserving and the Undeserving? Refugees, Asylum Seekers, and Welfare in Britain', *Critical Social Policy*, 22.3: 456–478
- SANFILIPPO, MATTEO. 2011.** 'Cronologia e storia dell'emigrazione italiana' ('Chronology and History of Italian Emigration'), *Studi Emigrazione*, 183: 357–370
- SASSEN, SASKIA. 1999.** *Guests and Aliens* (New York: New Press)
- SAYAD, ABDELMALEK. 1999.** *La double absence: Des illusions de l'émigré aux souffrances de l'immigré* (*The Suffering of the Immigrant*) (Paris: Seuil)
- STEIN BARRY N. 1981.** 'The Refugee Experience: Defining the Parameters of a Field of Study', *International Migration Review*, 15: 320–30.
- SZORENYI, ANNA. 2006.** 'The Images Speak for Themselves? Reading Refugee Coffee-Table Books', *Visual Studies*, 21.1: 24–41 <https://doi.org/10.1080/14725860600613188>
- TOŠIĆ, JELENA, and ANDREAS STREINZER. 2022.** *Ethnographies of Deservingness: Unpacking Ideologies of Distribution and Inequality* (Oxford: Berghahn Books)
- TRAVERSO, ENZO. 2019.** *The New Faces of Fascism: Populism and the Far Right* (London: Verso Books)
- TRAVERSO, ENZO. 2024.** 'Post-Fascism: Fascism as TransHistorical Concept', *Crisis and Critique*, 11.1: 161–73
- TRIANDAFYLIDOU, ANNA. 2001.** *Immigrants and National Identity in Europe* (London: Routledge)
- VALLORTIGARA, LAURA. 2022a.** *L'épos impossible: Il mito di Enea nel Novecento* (The Impossible Epic: The Myth of Aeneas in the Twentieth Century) (Macerata: Quodlibet)
- VALLORTIGARA, LAURA. 2022b.** 'L'épos impossible: Il mito di Enea nel Novecento' ('The Impossible Epic: The Myth of Aeneas in the Twentieth Century'), *Lettture.org*, 26 July <https://www.lettture.org/l-e-pos-impossibile-il-mito-di-enea-nel-novecento-laura-vallortigara> [accessed 15 January 2025]
- VERGIL. 2007.** *The Aeneid: A New Translation*. Trans. by Sarah Ruden (New Haven and London: Yale University Press)
- WODAK, RUTH, and SALOMI BOUKALA. 2015.** 'European Identities and the Revival of Nationalism in the European Union: A Discourse-Historical Approach', *Journal of Language and Politics*, 14.1: 87–109
- WRIGHT, TERENCE. 2000.** *Refugees on Screen*, RSC Working Paper, 5 (Oxford: Refugee Studies Centre)