Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Philologica, **5**, 1 (2013) 33–41

Europe's Fe/Male Identity

Vilma MIHÁLY
Sapientia University, Miercurea Ciuc
Department of Humanities
vilma_gote@yahoo.com

Abstract. The following study discusses Europe's identity focussing upon questions such as how Europa's destiny—the next of kin from Greek mythology—has influenced that of the continent, the relationship between Europe and its nations or Europe's role in the world. According to French anthropologist Annick de Souzenelle, there is a lunar, that is female and a solar, that is a male side to both Europa and Europe but whereas the mythical figure failed to find and integrate the opposite within herself, Europe does still have the opportunity to discover its solar aspects and reach unity within itself and the world as a whole. Apart from the theory the present paper also tries to give examples from different fields of study such as politics, philosophy and literature, which shall underline Europe's fe/male identity and role, e. g. Winston Churchill's *Iron Curtain Speech*, Jose Ortega y Gasset's *Meditation on Europe*, Sándor Márai's *Europe's Abduction* or Czeszlaw Milosz's *Native Realm*.

Keywords: Europe, identity, female, male, myth

Today, when many European countries are facing financial, political and social problems, with the fate of the European Union being insecure, we have to turn to Europe's identity once again and try to find, that is restate its common cultural roots, so that it can fulfil its goals on a wider, universal level.

There exists certainly more than one point of view to discuss the issue from, such as the outer perspective, Europe as seen from an outsider, or the inner one, as seen from an insider. A possible inner point of view would be to focus upon our continent's male and female characteristics and their relationship to each other. The way these two features interact influences Europe's identity as a whole, as well as Europe's inner and outer image.

In order to analyse Europe's male and female sides, I suggest an interdisciplinary approach, based, on the one hand, upon the thoughts of French Christian anthropologist Annick de Souzenelle, on the other hand, upon chosen literary works, written shortly after World War II, dealing with European identity.

BDD-A7541 © 2013 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 19:53:26 UTC)

In her book entitled *The Inner Oedipus. The Presence of the Logos in the Greek Myth,* Annick de Souzenelle (1999) dedicates a whole chapter to Europe's identity and destiny, taking as a starting point the myth of Zeus's kidnapping Europa. Within the female pantheon of Greek mythology, Europa, daughter of Agenor, king of Tyre and sister of Cadmos, appears as a charming young lady capable of seducing anyone. Yet, it is not anyone, but Zeus himself, the Father of Gods and men, who falls in love with the girl. When Zeus notices her, Europa is asleep and has a strange dream. She sees two continents, each of them in shape of a woman is trying to possess her. Asia pretends to have a right upon her, because she gave birth to her. The other continent, still unnamed, claims that Zeus would give Europa to her when she became an adolescent. Europa awakens and is deeply shocked by her dream, she wants to get rid of this strange impression and invites her friends to join her on the beach, to collect flowers and bathe in the sea. Zeus transforms himself into a white bull and comes down to play with the girls. When Europa caresses him and gets on his back, he jumps into the sea and swims away to Crete with her. Once on the island of Crete, Zeus changes into a vulture and rapes Europa. As a result of their union, Europa will give birth to three sons: Minos, Radamante and Sarpedon. Zeus also gives her a javelin which never misses its target, a dog which always catches its prey and a giant made out of bronze, vulnerable only on one spot, which is left to guard the island. Yet, Zeus does not stay with Europa too long, so the young woman marries Asterios, King of Crete, who adopts her three sons, naming them his successors (Graves 2001, 201–203).

We know the story of the three brothers, but we do not learn what has happened to Europa. Has she lived with King Minos and Queen Pasiphae on Crete? Her brothers have not succeeded in their quest of finding her. Only Cadmos has partially gone through the right path, and it is Oedipus of the fourth generation who finally completes the route. We can thus conclude that at the time of Cadmos, Europa faces a banalised end. According to Souzenelle, this is due to the fact that the reunion of brother and sister, two halves of the the same whole, does not take place (1999, 127–135).

Europa's myth with her dream of the two continents together with the etymology of Europe's name, that is "the one who flows/expands far toward the West," lead Souzenelle to the conclusion that Europa's mythical figure can be regarded as a personification of our continent (Souzenelle 1999, 139, translated by me, V. M.).

Europa's/Europe's destiny follows the traditional mythical founding process: the God of the Heavens separates the male and female poles from each other, dissolving the confusion that surrounds their primordial unity, in order to allow their reunification on a more conscious level. The male half is more active and combative, whereas the female part is supportive and full of life potential that helps the action to complete. Europa/Europe has been geographically, politically and religiously torn away from the Orient for centuries; she should try to heal this

BDD-A7541 © 2013 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 19:53:26 UTC)

rupture without recreating a confusing situation, but by finding her true identity. As every female being, Europa/Europe bears a male seed of divine origin within herself, which constitutes the essence of her life potential and will play a major role in activating this quality (Souzenelle 1999, 140–141).

The mythical Europa, sunk into her exile on Crete, seems to be unconscious of the essence. The fact that Zeus transforms himself into a bull to possess her underlines Europa's lunar features; she is not allowed to take part in Zeus's victories. The Father of Gods and men commits the abduction, yet through the rape he turns into the devil, embodiment of the fake solar aspect. Thus, two of Europa's sons, Minos and Radamante will be closely connected with the underworld and death, it is only Sarpedon who will contribute to saving Helena in the Trojan war (Souzenelle 1999, 141–142). After her lunar maternities the development of Europa dissolves in the Cretan waters; she dies without assuming her solar side, that is the divine word she unconsciously bears within herself.

Today's Europe seems to be in a deep crisis on all levels mainly because the sense behind things has been lost, there are no reference points. Our search for Europe's identity is still unconscious, since it is directed outward. National particularities are getting stronger and often confront each other, different ethnic groups ask for cultural and religious independence, they want freedom of language and custom usage, rather than to recall their forgotten traditions. If under these circumstances we want to construct a conscious Europe, we have to be aware of the masks our leaders are wearing, for they think they are following Ariadne's thread, yet they forget that Ariadne remained just as infantile as Europa, her grandmother. Her thread does not lead us out of the labyrinth but leaves us entangled in it (Souzenelle 1999, 144).

The question is how to get out of the labyrinth and how to build a solar Europe? Europe will not make sense if she does not succeed in bringing the mythic woman from within herself into the solar phase. Perhaps Europa/Europe should make use of the three gifts Zeus offered her: the javelin must reach its task, Logos, the unique language; the dog must lead her toward the light; the bronze giant must open the gates and let the light flow in (Souzenelle 1999, 145). We should try to use these items and set our tasks accordingly, not only follow the modern Daedalus and Icarus in their vain and foolish pursuit. We keep moving on the horizontal level and seem to have forgotten all about the vertical one. We have mistaken progress for an upward movement, thinking that it is capable of solving all contradictions. As a consequence of this diverted perspective what should be the source of great achievements has turned into demonic, destructive energies. The solution would be to return to our ontological laws. We have normalised our labyrinthine existence continuously ignoring and transgressing these basic rules. Our world is experiencing a period of development when the lunar Europe denounces the infantile and rejects morals without finding the ontological laws,

BDD-A7541 © 2013 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 19:53:26 UTC)

which leads to her becoming infantile again (Souzenelle 1999, 146). Among the ontological laws we can find the importance of the moment: When we regard the moment as belonging to historical time, it becomes repetitive and banal, when we live the moment aware of its eternal character, it reveals its creative power to us. Each and every human being is the eternal 'I am' in development. Every thing is real only if it is in relationship with its founding word. Thus, the principle behind each and every being, as well as its finality lies in its ultimate unity (Souzenelle 1999, 147).

If we want a solar and working Europe, its construction must obey the law of people's profound and clear unity. Anthropology meets quantum physics at this stage, since the latter also states that at a certain level we all belong to one unique entity. To forget this fact is the source of real confusion and leads to serious dangers (Souzenelle 1999, 148). It is essential for Europe to listen to the voice of our sacred books, or if she is not willing to, then to the quantum physicists of our days. These voices proclaim the existence of an ultimate reality that lies behind all phenomena and all forms eluding all sorts of description (Souzenelle 1999, 165).

At least since the end of World War II a rupture has existed within Europe itself, a break between the West/(fake) male side and the East/(fake) female part that not even the European Union has managed to reconcile. The meaning and the consequences of virtually cutting Europe in two entered the political and philosophical discourse right after the historic event took place. On the 5th of March 1946 Winston Churchill presented his *Sinews of Peace*, also known as the *Iron Curtain Speech*, at Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri. When speaking about our continent, Churchill acknowledged that it had become a ruin and its achievements had vanished (1946, 2). He drew a clear map of the new borders and limitations, referring to Europe's position in the world:

> From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic an *iron curtain* has descended across the Continent. Behind that line lie all the capitals of the ancient states of Central and Eastern Europe. Warsaw, Berlin, Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Belgrade, Bucharest and Sofia, all these famous cities and the populations around them lie in what I must call the Soviet sphere, and all are subject in one form or another, not only to Soviet influence but to a very high and, in some cases, increasing measure of control from Moscow. (Churchill 1946, 6)

Presenting facts Churchill tried to argue objectively for a reunification of the old continent:

> Whatever conclusions may be drawn from these facts—and facts they are—this is certainly not the Liberated Europe we fought to build up. Nor is it

BDD-A7541 © 2013 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 19:53:26 UTC)

> one which contains the essentials of permanent peace. The safety of the world, ladies and gentlemen, requires a new unity in Europe, from which no nation should be permanently outcast. (1946, 6–7)

According to Churchill, World Wars I and II could not be prevented, but our future depended on us, our fortunes were still in our hands. In his speech he encouraged a continuous dialogue between the two sides, namely Western and Eastern Europe with Soviet Russia (1946, 8). Many things that he proclaimed and argued for in his *Iron Curtain Speech* were kept and carried through by those who followed him in politics. Although we have witnessed wars, there has not been and hopefully will not be another war to engulf the whole world. The plea for peace has been constant throughout the decades.

If we wanted to 'translate' Churchill's discourse into Souzenelle's symbolic language, we should consider the aim of the politician's speech, that is to achieve everlasting peace worldwide as belonging to the female characteristics. In this view, the years following World War II have continuously strengthened Europe's female features. Yet, the means by which peace has been preserved have been represented by, at times fake male manifestations. One of the first measures Churchill suggested was to establish an international armed force within the United Nations Organization that would fight off every attempt to cause further disturbances (1946, 3). This has undoubtedly happened and even today we can see how sometimes local conflicts are handled with help of outer armed forces. The question remains whether war can truly be prevented by another war, by an armed intervention, by misusing active male power.

Politics often seems to fail precisely because although it sets the right goals, it uses the wrong tools. There is always 'the other' who turns out to be the enemy and has to be fought off. Armed forces (re)act right away, yet even if they win, they fail in the long run because the action-reaction chain has been set into motion, and peace under the strict surveillance of the army is a fragile one, in my opinion. A possible solution would be to consider other means of achieving harmony with 'the other.' In 1949, three years after Churchill's speech, the Spanish philosopher, José Ortega y Gasset, standing on the west side of the Berlin Wall, spoke about the necessity of uniting Europe by invoking the human intellect as an active force to help change the current situation (2007, 9). In Ortega y Gasset's view, pure intellectuality had the role of pointing at and defining the historic changes that occurred throughout the times. If great thinkers, intellectuals did not come out and speak about current happenings, the root of the problems would remain hidden from the eyes of the masses. For lack of highlighting interpretation the suffering of people would increase (2007, 10).

Another major issue Europe was confronted with in the years following World War II was that its other main pillars, civilisation and language had become

BDD-A7541 © 2013 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 19:53:26 UTC)

problematic. Words had lost their essence, they had become perverted with a double meaning. 'Democracy' had seized to exist as a valid concept after Yalta (Ortega y Gasset 2007, 10). Thus, politicians who were using these words and concepts, being blind to the truth could not be regarded as authentic. Europe as its peoples had known it did no longer exist. There were only its ruins left. In his speech Ortega y Gasset pleaded for the emergence of a new Europe with a strengthened European identity (2007, 13–14). Catastrophes got a meaning only if they served as a step to a rebirth. The only way for people to survive the changing times was to develop a positive attitude towards their situation, not to remain trapped in a petrified past, but to be able to step out of and look at the happenings from the outside. Quoting Herakleitos, our slogan should be: "Mobilis in mobile" (qtd. Ortega y Gasset 2007, 16). This type of mobility is closer to the true male active features than armed reaction, because it reaches to the essence of human beings and does not only involve outer, surface problems.

Literature, in its general pursuit to reveal truth, has always been a realm that tried to show people the true nature of all phenomena, helping us pull down the mask of a fake, perverted reality. Long before the Central European discourse had become a trend, somewhere at the beginning of the 1950s, two writers, Sándor Márai and Czeslaw Milosz, both from Central-Eastern Europe, reflected on this schism and tried to offer solutions to the problem.

Márai's work bears the title *Europa's Abduction* and was written between 1946 and 1947. It renders the author's impressions and experience while travelling to Western Europe, more precisely to Switzerland, Italy and France right after World War II. We have a first person narrative, rarely changing to a dialogue when the author turns to himself, so basically we have to deal with a diary. The journey gives the author the opportunity to take a close look at the political, social and mental changes that the war caused in Eastern and Western Europe, to compare these and view the two sides in each other's reflection. He concludes that although the overall situation seems to be better in the West, as far as human thoughts and quality literature are concerned, the West has not managed to keep its standards, moral and literary values have more accurately been preserved in the East. World literature as we had in the Renaissance or in the nineteenth century does no longer exist. It is as if "the word had got stuck in the throat of world literature," as Márai puts it (2008, 91):

> Does the intellectual/spiritual Europe still exist?... Or are there only countries, state borders, monetary and political systems and ailing nationalism left? I cannot answer this. Is there anything on which Europe agrees as it used to at the time of Erasmus—when Reformation ravaged national societies—but was still one through its humanist education? What does Europe agree on today?[1]

1 The fragments by Sándor Márai and Czeslaw Milosz quoted in the article are my translations, V. M.

BDD-A7541 © 2013 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 19:53:26 UTC)

Under these circumstances the only home for the author is language itself: "There is only one home, that is language itself. Everything else is either need or concept" (Márai 2008, 99). He primarily refers to his mother tongue, the Hungarian language, which serves as a refuge. For the whole of Europe he predicts that Art and Intellect/Spirit will speak up with an immense power and will take on a position above all other phenomena. Yet, this process takes time, first the finances have to be cleared, so that people would have a warm room and what to eat, only then can they think great thoughts (Márai 2008, 41).

The title of the book cannot be regarded as a coincidence either; the author makes reference to the mythical source twice. First only briefly: when he visits Palazzo Venezia, Mussolini's office, there is a bronze statue of Europa's Abduction dating from the sixteenth century. He thinks it might be a coincidence or a mocking gesture, since the exhibition has been organized by Americans (Márai 2008, 54).

The second time he mentions Europa's kidnapping is towards the end of the book, as part of the conclusion. "Ratto d'Europa? Has she really been kidnapped? By whom and what has been kidnapped?" the author asks (Márai 2008, 110). The houses, towns, though damaged, are still there. People are there and do their business in a hurry. Books are being published and there are plays on at the theatre. It is the sense of vocation that has been abducted, namely that Europe, the people on this continent have some sort of a mission to fulfill, a certain role to play in the world, which they have inherited from their European destiny. One can no longer feel this consciousness in Europe. No one believes in Europe's mission the way Columbus, Michelangelo, Goethe, Planck or Einstein used to do. "Not only does the generation not have a common inspiration any longer, but neither does the whole continent" (Márai 2008, 110). The intellect, the spirit have been crippled and Europe cannot exist unless they are reconstructed (Márai 2008, 125).

The text is organised around this metaphor, we can find Europa's abduction in the title, that is at the beginning, then in the middle and at the end, with a gradual increase in the amount of narration referring to it. Furthermore, at the end of the book the author draws his conclusions only after rereading what he wrote, a clear proof of the fact that this particular literary work underwent a thorough, conscious creating process. This in its turn underlines the important role literature plays in presenting reality, showing us the true face of history and in offering solutions. On the one hand, the author deconstructs the idea of a unified Europe, on the other hand, he shows us that it can be reconstructed through and in language.

If we were to use Souzenelle's terms, we could say that the two World Wars were manifestations of Europe's solar aspect, which having been misunderstood, was used in a wrong way. Next to quantum physics and sacred texts, as mentioned by Souzenelle, literature could step up as a means of expressing the true solar and lunar aspects of Europe in our case. The word could be the javelin Europa

BDD-A7541 © 2013 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 19:53:26 UTC)

received from Zeus, the Logos. Intellectual and spiritual power would be the light, whereas literature itself would be the gate to be opened in order to allow light to flow in.

Czeslaw Milosz's work entitled *Native Realm*, was written in the 1950s and published in 1958. In many respects Milosz's book can be compared with that of Márai. We have a first person narrative here as well, sort of an intellectual autobiography with many excerpts about journeys made to Western European countries such as Switzerland, France or Italy after World War II. The autobiographic mode helps create a personality's continuity beginning with the narrator's childhood in Lithuania to his emigration to France, although meanwhile cities and countries have disappeared from our maps.

In spite of what he witnesses in the early 1950s, namely the efforts to deprive Central Europe, not to talk about Eastern Europe, of its cultural identity, he goes on proclaiming this region's European status.

> Why did they cut Europe in two, and why did they throw us into this 'outer darkness' […]?[…] I was foreign to them, as if I had not grown up in a baroque city, as if I had not learnt Latin in school just like they had. Rome had been my religion's capital, the Jesuit order had educated several remarkable people, and my university had been established as a follow-up of the Jesuit academy. Yet this is not all. I was proud of my origin, why should I have pretended to be someone who was down-and-out. (Milosz 2011, 6)

Parallel to showing the central and eastern parts of our continent to the estranged public, the narrator takes an inner journey towards his own identity, by trying to find his homeland's place within Europe and within the world (Milosz 2011, 9–12). Like in Márai's work, the role of the mother tongue plays an essential part: "I didn't want them to like me, on the contrary, I wanted to declare that I was from the East and a foreigner. And this meant above all that I would cling to the Polish language" (Milosz 2011, 5–6).

It might seem a paradox to us that while both authors deplore Europe's dismembered state and talk about its common root and origin, they insist on their foreignness and on the use of their mother tongue, as opposed to emigrants who have chosen to take up another language, for example. Native language is closest to the essence which in its turn is universal. Besides, it is often useful to speak about foreignness in order to make others notice the similarities next to the differences.

The aim of Milosz's book is to bring Europe closer to Europeans, as the narrator puts it in the introduction. The target audience are not the Poles, but Western Europeans who seem to have forgotten all about the *other* Europe, their other half.

Milosz's view is very similar to that of Souzenelle's: although he believes identity to be enigmatic, he is convinced that behind appearance and masks,

BDD-A7541 © 2013 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 19:53:26 UTC)

there is an inner essence which does not get lost and which we can meet through introspection.

The solution offered to us by Souzenelle is to become aware of and use Europe's lunar and solar aspects more consciously. Through their works Márai and Milosz prove to us that literature cannot only be aesthetically pleasing, but can also make a difference in the world by reaching for the essence behind both male/solar and female/lunar aspects.

Works cited

Churchill, Winston. 1946. *The Sinews of Peace*. Quoted in Mark A. Kishlansky. 1995. ed., *Sources of World History*. New York: HarperCollins, 298–302.

Graves, Robert. 2001. *Görög mítoszok*. [*The Greek Myths*.] Vol. 1. Trans. László Szíjgyártó. Szeged: Szukits.

Márai Sándor. 2008. *Európa elrablása. Útirajzok. Röpirat a nemzetnevelés ügyében*. [*Europe's Abduction. Travelogues. Manifest for National Education*.] Debrecen: Helikon.

Milosz, Czeslaw. 2011. *Családias Európa*. [*Native Realm*.] Trans. Endre Bojtár, Jolán Cservenits, Zsuzsa Mihályi, Lajos Pálfalvi, Viktória Szathmáry-Kellermann. Pozsony: Kalligram.

Ortega y Gasset, José. 2007. *Elmélkedések Európáról*. [*Meditation on Europe*.] Trans. Dezső Csejtei and Anikó Juhász. Budapest: L'Harmattan.

Souzenelle, Annick de. 1999. *Oedip interior. Prezența Logosului în mitul grec*. [*The Inner Oedipus. The Presence of the Logos in the Greek Myth*.] Trans. Margareta Gyurcsik. Timişoara: Amacord.

BDD-A7541 © 2013 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 19:53:26 UTC)