Teresa Pinheiro
Beata Cieszynska
José Eduardo Franco
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Europe – Europa: Between Myth and Continental Allegory: On the Gendering of a Complex Relationship, from Herodotus to Georg Kaiser

Almut-Barbara Renger

Introduction

This article looks at the myth of Europa and the bull and, more precisely, its connection with perceptions, concepts and ideas of Europe that have arisen throughout European history – a Europe, in fact, that has been subject to constant and, at times, drastic changes from antiquity to modernity and the present day. We shall see that in a period spanning over 2,500 years, *Europa/e* (Gr. *Εὐρώπη, Eurṓpē*) has been seen, so to speak, through a multiple lens, in which the ancient mythological figure of *Europa* has been associated and conflated with the name of the continent, the cultural concept of *Europe* and their gendered representations. This association is both complex and multi-faceted. For centuries, conceptions and definitions of Europe have been influenced, informed and inspired by gendered and sexualised representations and portrayals of *Europa/e*, a small selection of which is presented here. These seminal texts and images include literary and visual references to the abduction story, allegories, maps and numerous other images of Europa and Europe.

Gender Stereotypes at Stake: Georg Kaiser's Modern Europa – Active Founder and Eponym

In English, Europe and Europa constitute two different words and two different concepts: *Europe* refers to the continent, and *Europa* to the woman abducted by the bull. The fact that ancient Greek and Latin, as well as many modern languages (such as German, Italian and Spanish), use one and the same word for both continent and woman has furthered a diversity of connections between Europa and Europe from the earliest times to the present day. Let me begin my reflections on the Europa-Europe relationship with a representative example from modern German literature, Georg Kaiser's play *Europa*. This drama will help us better understand the long history of Europa's and Europe's receptions since Homer and Herodotus. Indeed, certain elements and emphases of Kaiser's dance play figure very strongly in this reception history.[1]

1 All quotes from Kaiser's text and other German and French sources have been translated into English by myself. Ancient authors and works are not cited in the APA style as is otherwise done here, but according to Liddell-Scott-Jones's and Lewis and Short's index of authors and works; see Charlton T. Lewis / Charles Short (1975) and Henry G. Liddell / Robert Scott (1996). For those ancient Greek and Latin authors and works that are specifically referred to or quoted in this text or that are pertinent to the subject matter I have provided editions and/or translations in the bibliography at the end of this article. For other ancient sources only mentioned in passing, I refer to author, chapter and verse or line, etc. according to the conventions established.

The play, published in 1915 and staged in 1920 with music composed by Werner R. Heymann, takes up the familiar relationship between the myths of Europa and Cadmus, and carves out innovative aspects using dance and music.[2] In the myth, Zeus transforms himself into a bull and carries off the king's daughter from Phoenician shores, bringing her to Crete. After bull-god and girl have sexual relations, Europa gives birth to Minos, Rhadamanthus and Sarpedon.[3] At this point, the myth exhausts Europa's role and turns to the three sons, who, like Europa's brother Cadmus, founded sites around the Mediterranean that later bore their names. Sent out by his father Agenor to find the missing Europa, Cadmus becomes the founder of several cities and temples, and serves as the eponym for the castle that will later become the city of Thebes, where he defeats the holy dragon out of whose teeth, upon being sown in the earth, sprout mighty armed men.[4] Kaiser's Europa is a different – a modern, transformed – Europa. To be sure, she is abducted by Zeus in the guise of a bull, but she does not become the mother of his three sons. Rather, she returns after one night and takes a man, the leader of warriors who prove to be the mythical Spartoi (Sown Men) of Cadmus. Sent by Cadmus, they appear before king Agenor's palace on the day after the abduction, and Europa leaves with them to look for a new country that will bear her name. She thus plays the role of active founder and eponym.

This story, of course, derives from a long tradition. Kaiser's play *Europa* can be understood against the background of two strands of *Εὐρώπη* reception. To use the term coined by Aleida and Jan Assmann (and based on Maurice Halbwachs's idea of a "mémoire collective"), both strands of reception are inscribed in the Western "cultural memory" (Assmann 1988: 9-19; Assmann 1992; Halbwachs 1997; Assmann 2006: 1-30). A closer consideration of the strands reveals again the function of literature, art and music as media of cultural memory. This consideration demonstrates that literary, visual and musical reinterpretations of the abduction story of Europa have contributed not only to producing and establishing collective identities of specific groups, even today, but also to questioning and undermining them. Both strands of reception in which imaging of gender and sexual categories of identity plays a pivotal role have become increasingly important, particularly since the 17th century, and especially in the development of distinct national identities and the subsequent appearance of a collective European identity (Renger / Ißler 2009). These two strands refer back to the first great texts of the West, which (re)construct the abduction myth under varying conditions and circumstances. The first strand of reception against whose background

2 Cf. Herodotus 4.174.4 in connection with 2.49.3. The mythographic tradition surrounding Europa's genealogy has made the association of Europa and Cadmus canonical, which we can see from (Pseudo-)Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* 3.2ff and Hyginus, *Fabellae* 178 up to dictionary entries and articles in influential works such as Natale Conti's *Mythologia, sive explicationis fabularum libri decem* (8.23 = "De Europa") (1551), Benjamin Hederich's *Gründliches mythologisches Lexikon* ("Cadmus" and "Europa") (1724) and Gustav Schwab's *Die schönsten Sagen des klassischen Altertums, nach seinen Dichtern und Erzählern* ("Europa" and "Kadmos") (1883-1840).

3 For sources in ancient literature, cf. Bühler 1968: 7-46; Renger 2003: 19-59, 222-226.

4 Other ancient literary sources that tell the story of Cadmus, apart from those mentioned in footnote 2, are, e.g., Hesiodus, *Theogonia* 937, 975ff; Pindarus, *Pythian Odes* 3.88ff; Diodorus Siculus 5.48.5ff; Ovidius, *Metamorphoses* 3.3ff; Pausanias 9.12.1ff; Nonnus, *Dionysiaca* 1.138ff.

Kaiser's play must be read leads to Homer, the second to Herodotus. Let us turn to the first strand of reception.

In the *Iliad*, Europa appears as one of Zeus's many exploits (14.312-328). A figure in a series of youthful, beautiful objects of desire, for whose conquest the father of the gods repeatedly transforms himself, Europa is henceforth known as one of Zeus's sex-objects. This emphasis changes in late antique, patristic and medieval reinterpretations, which typically regarded pleasure and sexuality with outright hostility, and were defined by the Christian concept of historical salvation. It is not until the Renaissance that Europa once again appears as the object of desire. For centuries to come, the story is passed on as a tale of abduction-as-love, in which Europa plays the obedient bride, which of course conforms to traditional gender roles and sexual categories of identity (Renger 2008).

In Kaiser's play, Europa no longer assumes a subservient role; nonetheless, she can hardly be viewed as an agent of women's emancipation, despite her wilful rebellion against her father Agenor. Like her brother Cadmus, who leaves his homeland, according to Agenor, "without goodbye" because, according to the Spartoi, he wants to "be a man" and create his own empire "with armed men" (642f.), Europa also acts out against her father.[5] The "headstrong daughter", as Agenor calls her (599f., 605), is weary of the excessive refinement of her father's court and country. Her pronounced boredom becomes manifest in a number of scenes: first, in her obvious disinterest in the country's androgynous men, who, schooled in dance and decidedly refined, attempt to court her; second, in her meeting with the wild warriors, whom she finds inordinately fascinating, after her night with Zeus. The meeting precedes a psychosociological process, which Alexander Mitscherlich (1969), in his book *Society without the Father: A Contribution to Social Psychology* calls the breakdown of the authority figure based on the father image. Just as Cadmus and Europa do with their father, Cadmus's Spartoi (648), "the children of his deeds" (649), also break away from their king. They decide not to return to Cadmus, for they believe that only the king's independent sister is fit to rule. They refuse to bring him the women necessary to populate his kingdom. They want to found "a new country", independent of him, "that will bear the name of its queen […] Europe!" (649).

We could thus postulate that the author is reinterpreting the ancient myth as a woman's founding act. Instead of repeating the sharp binaries of gendered behaviour, i.e., masculinity as warmongering, femininity as peaceful, Europa represents a kind of opposite, namely, a feminine will to power that militates against masculine decadence. Indeed, Kaiser's adaptation of the Europa myth is extremely original in this regard. It presents a woman who, independently and forcefully, founds the continent which is (in the play) named after her. To do so, she leaves the personified masculinity of the divine bull and the earthly father and sovereign, and freely chooses the warriors as her companions. One particularly original element of Kaiser's rendering lies in its presentation of gender difference as a cultural and historical construct that changes as cultures evolve. Europa shows how much this difference, to quote Ina Schabert, "is involved in historical processes affecting both mindset and society" (Schabert 1997: 23)

5 References to Kaiser's play will henceforth be cited from the 1971 edition (cf. bibliography), from pages 585-651.

and demonstrates how drama and theatre also negotiate, stimulate and transform these constructs. To be sure, seen from the critical perspective of feminist studies, the play does not altogether relinquish conventional gender roles. Although it depicts shifting gender differences, it ultimately re-establishes them.

This is particularly apparent in the play's ending, where all characters in the drama leave themselves open to the prospect of war. Asked if his soldiers want to come back "from this Europe", the warriors' leader answers the king in the negative, yet responds to the king's "Thank heavens" with the threat that one day their sons would flood "the borders" of Europe and destroy Agenor's nation (650). This threat has a strong effect on Agenor; once conciliatory, he now becomes hostile. Upon his call to "create men for me […] who will brandish swords and defend this life that needs our protection" (650), the previously androgynous men undergo a transformation: they gather their skirts, tie back their hair and find women who are "robust" and "maids from the farm" (650) to bear them new men, in a style reminiscent of the rape of the Sabine women, an episode in the legendary history of Rome, in which the first generation of Roman men took wives from the neighbouring Sabine families.[6] The old king first seems disconcerted by the sight of these women struggling in the arms of his men, but quickly agrees: "I see your sons. Flooding life gushes here too". With this invigorating image, his readiness for war finally prevails. He challenges Cadmus's warriors to fight the "new race: Come later and measure yourselves against this race. Fight for dear life […]" (650). Both sides answer lustily to the war cry: "THE WARRIORS: We are coming to you. THE MEN: We are waiting for you" (650). The king seals the "good" outcome – the vision of two new generations and their battle to prove which is the stronger race – with a tried and true sign of the happy ending: wedding torches are lit for everyone.

This ending, well-intentioned though it may be, shows signs of gender trouble. Gender difference, which is constructed, on the one hand, through the satirical mockery of the androgynous characters and, on the other, the reaffirmation of traditional gender stereotypes, is reinforced by using the ambivalent model of ancient founding myths, based on the violent abduction and rape of one or more girls (Doblhofer 1994: 83-93) – in Kaiser's case, first of Europa, then of the farm girls. Thus one of Agenor's men, "exhibiting the now acquiescent girls" at the end of the play, says: "[s]he shall bear you men". The other men, meanwhile, turn to the other girls: "The earth is blooming because Europa is finally pulsating". Carol Diethe has suggested that this statement is based on the premise that "what a bored virgin really needs is a good rape" (Diethe 1991: 343). Diethe is not wrong. It is only in the figures of the rebellious Europa and her androgynous suitors that Kaiser seems to question traditional gender roles. In the end, he demonstrates that there are not only fixed feminine, but also fixed masculine gender roles and represents these with the usual stereotypes of masculinity: power and domination, strength and discipline, assertiveness and physical force (Walter 2006: 77-100, esp. 82).

6 As told e.g. by Livy, the legend provided material for Renaissance and post-Renaissance artworks and has thus been passed on into our present day. Livius 1.9-13 (and e.g. Plutarchus, *Vitae Parallelae* 2.15 and 19).

There is still much we could say about this topic, which space does not allow for.[7] Instead, we will turn our attention to the relationship between the first strand of reception and the second, against which Kaiser's Europa is also to be understood.

The Phoenician Princess in Ancient and Medieval Times – Abductee and Eponym

This second strand, which treats Europe as a cultural concept, continent and political issue, brings us to Herodotus's *Histories* and further back into early antiquity.[8] The early Greeks divided the earth into two (or, with Africa, three) continents (Meier 2006: 1-21, esp. 3-5). Hecataeus of Miletus, active in the second half of the 6th century B.C.E., improved the first world map of the West drawn by Anaximander (ca. 550 B.C.E.) and added a literary description to it.[9] The cartographic apportioning of the Northern Hemisphere to Europe and the Southern to Asia (and Libya) had a widespread effect: in the course of the 5th century B.C.E., it became common practice to use these kinds of maps, especially in schools. In the 4th century B.C.E., Herodotus also mentions maps in which the earth is divided into Europe and Asia, and uses the term *Εὐρώπη*, which still in approx. 600 B.C.E. did not refer to the continent, but rather only to the Greek mainland, excluding the Peloponnesus (Schumacher 1990: 24-28, esp. 26ff). Furthermore, Herodotus refers, albeit sceptically, to the conflation of the continent with the mythological figure of the same name. In a passage of his *Histories*, in which he expresses his thoughts on the three continents, Asia, Libya (Africa) and Europe, as well as on how they got their names, he writes:

> No one knows for certain whether or not there is sea to the east or to the north of Europe; it is known, however, that lengthwise it is equal to the other two continents together. […] As for Europe, not only does no one know whether it is surrounded by water, but the origin of its name is also uncertain (as is the identity of the man who named it), unless we say that it is named after Europa from Tyre, and that before her time, the continent was after all as nameless as the other continents were. But it is clear that Europa came from Asia and never visited the land mass which the Greeks now call Europe; her travels were limited to going from Phoenicia to Crete, and from there to Lycia (4.45).

The above passage clarifies three things. First, that it was already unclear to Herodotus how the continent had got its name. Second, the assertion that the Tyrian Europa never came to Europe shows that Herodotus was exceedingly sceptical about the supposed connection between the name of the continent and the name of a mythical princess. Third, it demonstrates that Crete, the island to which Europa had been taken, did not count as part of the continent of Europe as it was then understood. Reading this passage next to other passages from Herodotus's discussions of Europe, it also becomes evident that the geographical term *Europe* underwent certain changes. Herodotus uses

7 For more details and further information on the play, see Renger 2009: 165-187.

8 Before Herodotus (4.36-45) produced an initial, coherent transcription of the three continents Europe, Asia and Africa (Libya), Pindar had called Europe a continent in *Nemean Odes* 4.70.

9 For a description of the Oikumene, see Hecataeus Miletus Historicus in *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker* T 12a. Regarding Hecataeus, also cf. Pearson 1939: 25-108.

the term synonymously for the designation of Hellas as the antithesis of Asia, i.e., the Empire of Persia, which had for quite some time been subject to wars, as well as a designation for Thrace and the region west of the Hellespont.[10] We could conjecture that the name of the region neighbouring Asia Minor (or indeed several regions in central and northern Greece) was gradually transferred to the entire area behind it.[11] In any event, Europe was initially not so much a fixed, delineated geographic area as the concept of an abstract topography with borders that could not be precisely defined. It remains a mystery whether it really was the name of a Phoenician princess used to designate the historical space where so many peoples and cultures converged. And even assuming, as Herodotus did, that the conflation of Europa and Europe dates back to an old misunderstanding, it is not at all clear from where the Greeks got the name *Εὐρώπη*.

In any case, the conflation on which Herodotus reflects has in effect proven extremely fruitful. Despite the doubts expressed by the historian about tracing the continent's name back to the mythical princess, the two have, nevertheless, always been referred to together and conceived of in causal relation to one another since antiquity. Since Herodotus's *Histories*, *Εὐρώπη* has shifted back and forth in Western thinking between myth and continent. The two delineated strands of *Εὐρώπη* reception have converged over time, both qualifying and diverging from each other. Their relationship has become increasingly charged and interesting, thanks to the development of the concept of Europe in the modern period, and is already part of early texts that are significant for the reception of the abduction story. Particularly important texts were Ovid's versions in the *Metamorphoses* (2.836-3.2, 6.103-107) and *Fasti* (5.607-618), as well as Moschus's epyllion *Europa*, which – besides Hyginus's mythographical treatment in the *Fables* (178) and the humorous treatment of the myth by Lucian of Samosata in his *Dialogues of the Sea Gods* (15 = "West Wind and South Wind") – became more and more famous in late medieval times. Both authors – Ovid explicitly (*Fasti* 5.618), Moschus implicitly (2.8-15) – associate the continent Europe with the king's daughter of the same name. Another example is Horace's *Ode to Galathea*. Approximately half of it consists of Europa's (who has now been abducted to Crete) speech, in which she blames herself for leaving her paternal home and laments her abject state. Venus's answer to this is to create a light-hearted solution for the apparently hopeless situation of the abductee. It serves the same purpose as Zeus's comforting words in Moschus's work: Zeus the abductor, prompted by Europa's lament, uses the pretext to reveal his true identity to the girl. Europa is told that now she is Jupiter's wife and a whole continent shall be named after her.[12]

The tendency to trace the continent's name back to the princess reappears in many variants, among others, through the influence of the *Etymologies* of Isidore of Seville

10 On Europe as Thrace or northern Greece, see Herodotus 4.143.1; 5.12.1; 7.8.1; 7.185.1-2; on Europe as a whole continent see Herodotus 4.36.2; 7.9.1; 7.50.4 passim. A detailed account can be found in Sieberer 1995.

11 See e.g. Gollwitzer 1951: 157-172; Pfligersdorffer 1966: 964-980, esp. 965; Demandt 1998: 137-157, esp. 140; Meier 2009: 31.

12 Horatius, *Carmina* 3.27.75-76; Speech and Answer in Moschus 2.135-162. For further references, see e.g. Helbig 1965: 1416.

(*Origenes* 14.4.1). We see it in medieval schoolbooks, in etymologies of the geographical term *Europe*, and finally in various forms in the modern period, particularly in works which pick up Boccaccio's rationalistic reading of the myth (for instance, in the chapter "Europe" of *De claris mulieribus* or *Famous Women*; Boccaccio 1995: 39-41). Christine de Pizan's *Cité des dames* or *The City of Women* (1405) is a good example. Here, Europa appears as a historical personality among virtuous women: "Europa, daughter of Agenor from Phoenicia, became so famous because Jupiter, who was in love with her, named the third continent after her" (Pizan 1986: 226). An interesting variation on the relationship of the abduction story with reference to geography can be found in Mercator's *Atlas* (1595). Here, the myth serves to represent the "customs and natural disposition of the European". That is, the Flemish cartographer focuses on the ethnographic sense that the abduction story may embody. According to the *Atlas*, the bull-god who possesses "a kind of noble courage" is "insolent, embellished by his horns, white in colour with a broad throat and a thick neck". So he stands, "leader and commander of the stud farm […]. Although he displays great continence, he exhibits great ardour when confronting the opposite sex, then again he becomes chaste and moderate" (quoted from Rougemont 1966: 16).

Gendered and Sexualised Representations in Modern Times – Beautiful Girl, Superior Queen, Disgraced Whore

A representative example for those Renaissance poets who tie Europa and Europe together is Pierre de Ronsard (Ißler 2006: 60-73). Not only can we find numerous allusions to the rape motif in his work, but Ronsard also concludes that the continent acquired its name from the woman abducted by the bull: "that one, violated by the bull in disguise, was both so sensible and so beautiful, that our Europe has borne her name" (Ronsard 1949: 158). The beauty that Ronsard sees as grounds for abduction is Europa's most notable quality in most representations of her in the Romance language-speaking countries of Europe since the 14th century. Apart from the beauty that makes her sexually desirable, two political elements made her attractive to producers and recipients of literature and art alike – namely, her status as princess and the violent abduction. The inherent political potential of the figure, and therefore the attraction of adopting her, will be clarified in examples below. Suffice it to say at this point that both aspects, the beauty and the possibility of political utility, are not only reflected in literary and artistic depictions of the abduction of the king's daughter. They also had an effect on the female allegory that artists and writers have used to represent the continent since the beginning of modern times (Guthmüller 1992: 5-44). From these interferences in both figures, a specific, subtle Europe-Europa tension arose, the effects of which can still be felt today.

Allow me a few basic remarks on the allegorical-political representation of Europe. The gendering of place with socio-political implications has a long history in Western cultures. Political allegory in the form of a female figure with typical characteristics is rooted in Roman antiquity as a way of representing regions, provinces and finally continents. Allegorical representations of geographical spaces typically legiti-

mise and pay homage to political rule. They continue to have an effect as long as the *Imperium Romanum* continues to exist. Although effaced and replaced during the medieval period, the female allegory of the continent was revived from the 16th century onward, particularly in the 17th century, not least due to the impact of Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia*, the illustrated edition of which came out in Rome in 1603 and was used by artists seeking authority for their work. Ripa personifies all four known continents of the time (Europe, Asia, Africa and America) as women, in accordance with the *Zeitgeist*: Europe's appearance as a continental allegory expands after the discovery of America, which adds a fourth continent to what had been known as the *triad of continents* since antiquity. As a result, we can find Europa in the grouping of the four continents. Visual art illustrations were then designed with a preference for cyclic ensembles, in which the allegories of Africa with a crocodile and Asia with a camel or dromedary are depicted just as Europe is with a bull (Poeschel 1985). Following the preferential colonial interests of the European great powers in other continents, their own continent was assigned a superior role and Europe was shown as the queen of the world (Acidini Luchinat 2002: 119-124).

At a time when modernity is suffused with the imperialistic urge to explore and measure the world empirically, the figure of Europa finds its way into cartography. Over the course of this process, the geographical silhouette of the continent comes to resemble the outline of a woman's body. Particularly representative are a wood carving from 1537, associating a cartographic outline of Europe with the figure of a woman in the image of a queen (see Schmale 2004a: 241-268, esp. 245ff; Schmale 2004b: 73-115, esp. 89ff, fig. 9) and a map by Franz Hogenberg, published in Michael Eytzinger's *De Europae virginis tauro insidentis topographica & historica descriptione* (1588), representing Europe as Europa on the bull (see Renger / Ißler 2009: 74, 371ff, 632, fig. 38). The illustration by Johannes Bucius (Putsch) becomes the new model for representations of Europe. It appears in numerous versions from the end of the 16th century on, e.g., in several editions of the earliest German description of the world, Sebastian Münster's famous *Cosmographia* (first published in 1543/44, and with a Bucius-like illustration first in 1588) as well as in Heinrich Bünting's *Itinerarium sacrae scripturae* (1581), a book on the geography of the Bible (see Duchhardt and Wrede 2006: 594-619, esp. 597ff, fig. 1). Bucius's gynecomorphic map represents the continent of Europe, turned 90 degrees to the left, as the figure of a female sovereign, her crowned head coinciding with the Iberian Peninsula. With her accompanying array of Carolingian arms, orb and sceptre, she is the representation of the empire itself. France and the Holy Roman Empire form the upper body. The seam of her long skirt encompasses the Baltic countries, Russia and Bulgaria, and basically the European part of ancient Sarmatia, including Greece.

The imaging of gender in maps of Europe – in the shape of a queen, as designed by Bucius and later by Hogenberg – opens up numerous layers of meaning. On the one hand, map makers represented their views of the world as perceived in contemporary "reality", and on the other, they presented maps in the form of a metaphor with hidden meanings and a much deeper "essence" to be interpreted. To treat all possible meanings would be impossible here. Of particular interest for us is that the cartographic gendering of Europe as a gracious young woman surrounded by water is a reference to