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THE MYTH OF EUROPE IN ART AND EUROPEAN IDENTITIES¹

THE DIVIDED MEMORY OF EUROPE – WILL EUROPE SUCCUMB TO DISINTEGRATION?

ABSTRACT The Polish government commissioned from Franciszek Starowieyski, a renowned Polish painter, a composition to embellish the new building of the Permanent Representation of the Republic of Poland at the European Union in Brussels. The monumental *Divina Polonia rapta per Europa profana*, executed in 1998, was put on permanent show in the main hall of the Permanent Representation seat. 'Divina Polonia,' the second female figure featured in the canvas next to Europe, is depicted with a halo. F. Starowieyski referred to the classical myth of Europe (a Phoenician princess abducted by Zeus disguised as a bull) in order to emphasize the contrast between secular Europe and 'holy' Poland. What is the source of this combination of nudity and saintliness? Why has this otherwise liberated artist, who in hundreds of compositions obsessively portrays the female nude and remains distant from bigotry or clericalism, suddenly resorted to religious symbols? These intriguing and disturbing questions arose after seeing the exhibition on the myth of Europe shown in Florence. There, works of twentieth-century artists from Western Europe did not contain religious symbols. We seem to be approaching the topical problem of the unity of Europe. The canvas *Divina*

¹ The article uses some analyses contained in the Ph.D. dissertation by Beata di Biasio: *The Myth of Europe in Polish Artistic Culture and Painting of the Twentieth Century* (2006).

Polonia rapta per Europam profana is a symbolic summary of the two different historical experiences of the East and West of Europe.

Keywords: Europe, myth, art, history, values, identity

1. WEST BEST, EAST BEAST OR JAMMER-OSSIS AND BESSER-WESSIS

Europe shall not integrate until its two parts, western and eastern, do not become acquainted with the path which they have traversed.² At the European Parliament forum it is the past which frequently proves decisive for the future of Europe since the Euro-deputies are outright doomed to become embroiled in assorted debates imposed by various historical experiences.³

² In this respect Western Europe has greater arrears to overcome in order to become familiar with the past of the East. In turn, Central-Eastern Europeans will find that more detailed knowledge of the past of the West will enable them to understand why their Western neighbours find some of our problems outright irritating.

³ Such an example could be the spectacular conflict concerning the inclusion of the “Christian roots of Europe” into a project of the European Constitution. Immediately after Poland became a member of the Union on 1 May 2000, she became engaged in a fierce battle waged on the European Parliament forum. This is the reason why the whole of Poland, her leftist government (which in a programme-like manner remains secular) and rightist opposition (connected with the Church), the Polish post-communists (whose majority is composed of atheists) and anti-communists all joined ranks to defend the controversial entry. Why are the Poles being opposed by almost the whole of Western Europe? The most hostile attitude appears to be that of France while the most fervent spokesmen of the inclusion of the Christian roots are the Poles. Why have those two countries, friends for centuries, now assumed such extreme stands? Let us go back to sixteenth-century Europe when France became the scene of a religious civil war. According to TAZBIR (2000: 97) on St. Bartholomew’s Night (23-24 August 1572), King Charles IX (a Catholic) leaned out of the windows of the Louvre to aim at the French Calvinists – “it would be difficult to imagine one of the Jagiellons in this role.” Some 30 000-100 000 French Protestants died at the hands of their Catholic compatriots. Under the impact of such experiences France became the first European state to carry out a radical separation of the Church from the state (so as to prevent future violence inspired by religious differences). This particular historical experience probably became the source of the tradition of French Enlightenment-era laicism. At the time when the French Christians slaughtered each other for the sake of dogmas of the faith, Poland proved to be a country where Europeans found refuge from religious persecution. This is not to say that she was free from troubles of her own, being engaged in the protection of her frontiers against the enemies of Christendom: the Turks and the Tartars (subsequently, at the time of the partitions, the struggle conducted in Poland against Russia, Prussia and Austria aimed at the preservation of national identity). In both those battles the Poles sought the support of the Catholic Church and creed. During the partition era the Poles owed the preservation of the feeling of national identity only to their closely connected strong religious faith and national culture. Those two historical experiences of France and Poland, with religion proving to be a downfall or salvation, are the fully-fledged experiences of a single Europe. If the Europeans do not learn about their past, they shall be doomed to continue their barren disputes which merely reinforce the enmity between the East and the West. The West will continue perceiving the East as a “beast” while the residents of Eastern Germany will be seen by their compatriots from the West as eternal grumblers (“Jammer-Ossis”).

Two different histories of Europe are suggestively rendered by European painting, and this theme (whose artistic merits remain outside the range of our reflections) constitutes a suggestive historical narration; its components include i.a. the works by Dürer, Perugino, Parmigianino, Veronese, Titian, Rembrandt, Rubens, Moreau, Vallatton, Bonnard, Masson, Picasso, Grützke, Topor, Carol Rama, Hambling, Starowieyski, Hasiór and Grzywacz. All these artists tell two different histories of Europe with the assistance of a single classical legend. The representatives of the East and West were inspired by the identical myth of Europe recorded by Ovid.

All these *Rapes of Europe* refer to the legend about Zeus abducting Europe, a Phoenician princess, to Crete to inaugurate a new civilisation. The imagery itself was created in the course of two and a half thousand years, from antiquity to the twenty first century. The visualisations of the legend of Europe that emerged in the twentieth century (on which we shall focus) deserve our particular attention since they prove to be a specific mirror reflecting not only the history of art and its most recent currents, but also primarily the history and drama of Europe. They portray the evolution of twentieth-century Europe, spanning from the trauma of the First World War and the encroaching epoch of totalitarianism (fascism and communism) to the newly integrated Europe and the globalisation of European ideas radiating beyond the Old Continent.

The myth of Europe, visualised by artists from Central-Eastern Europe, shows the special connection between culture and religion. In Eastern European interpretations of the myth of Europe we observe, most importantly, an evolution of the classical myth of Europe into the myth of the *antemurale*. This conception has been functioning in the awareness of the East Europeans for more than five hundred years, while remaining totally alien to the historical tradition of the West (see: TAZBIR 2004: 206). The legend about the rape of Europe also becomes a pretext and a universal tool for demonstrating not merely the political transformations transpiring in Europe but also their social counterparts. The discussed likenesses show the position held by the woman in West European societies, from bourgeois dependence to emancipation and feminism. The social-moral-mores motif is present also in the Eastern and Western European interpretations of the myth of Europe, but the *antemurale* is an invention of the eastern part of the Continent exclusively.

What sort of archetypes, symbols and myths does the legend about the rape of Europe stir? How did our awareness of affiliation with Europe evolve in the course of two and a half millennia? Does the universalism of certain themes in European art stem from its classical roots, Greece and mythology, which KERENYI (2002: 13) described “as collective psychology operating with common and universally understandable archetypes comprising a supreme individual factor of directly perceived imagery”?

2. VISUALISATIONS OF THE LEGEND OF THE RAPE OF EUROPE IN THE ART OF EAST AND WEST EUROPE

This particular theme has been present in European art from antiquity to contemporaneity. A metope preserved from the temple on the Acropolis (fifth century B.C., fig.1)

refers to the same symbols used for constructing Claudio Parmigiani's *Pellemondo* from 1968 (fig. 2). A bull's hide stretched over a globe symbolises the process of globalisation, i.e. the dissemination of traditional European concepts and values. Today, the bull may signify also financial power (after all, the expression "bull market", denotes the rising prices of shares) and is symbolised by the sculpture of a golden bull executed by Arturo di Modica (1980) and situated in Wall Street (fig. 3).

The Greek myth about the rape of Europe (the subsequent mother of Minos, the ruler of Crete) by Zeus, who for this purpose assumed the shape of a snow-white bull, was described at the turn of the eras by the Roman poet Ovid in his *Metamorphoses*:

And, now perceiving all her fears decay'd,
Comes tossing forward to the royal maid;
Gives her his breast to stroke, and downward turns
His grizzly brow, and gently stoops his horns.
In flow'ry wreaths the royal virgin drest
His bending horns, and kindly clapt his breast.
'Till now grown wanton and devoid of fear,
Not knowing that she prest the Thunderer,
She plac'd her self upon his back, and rode
O'er fields and meadows, seated on the God.

From that time on the legend continued to inspire artists for the next two millennia. The legend of Europe⁴ mentions Zeus who abducted the princess of Phoenicia (today: Lebanon) to Crete, thus transferring westward the fruit of the older civilisation of Egypt to the younger colonies located on the islands of the Aegean. The legend (let us note that Europe herself was not a European) described the onset of the Mediterranean civilisation, at the same time indicating its eastern source⁵. Europe astride the bull's back followed the Sun from the East to the West, from an old civilisation to a new one, and from that which was familiar to that which remained indeterminate. The journey accomplished by Europe designates not merely the sources of our civilisation but also its essential features: mobility and variability. In contrast to the great civilisations of Egypt, Mesopotamia and China which, according to Norman DAVIES (2003: 20-21),

⁴ The name "Europe" appeared for the first time in seventh century B.C. in Hesiod's *Theogony*, in which Europe and Asia are presented as sisters, the daughters of the god of the oceans. See: CARDINI 2002: 29.

⁵ "This story begins in Tyre, a town in that part of Syria which will become known as Phoenicia: let us recall that here lay the source of the Greek alphabet, the ruin of natural memory according to Plato (*Phaedrus*, 275a-) but at the same time more precise. According to a tradition recorded by the authors of myths and Greek historians, Tyre was ruled by King Agenor, born on the Nile as the son of Poseidon and Libya, the daughter of Epaphus. Agenor wandered from the banks of the Nile to Phoenicia where he married Telephassa, the mother of his three sons, including Cilix and Cadmus, as well as a daughter named Europa [...] the beautiful girl was admired by Zeus who in order to possess her assumed the shape of a tame bull. He frolicked in the meadow until Europe succumbed to temptation and climbed onto his back. Then the bull carried her across the sea to Crete." KUBIAK 1998: 369.

developed gradually, the Mediterranean civilisation was from the very outset characterised by three elements: the bull, the woman and the sea. Already during the Palaeolithic era the bull was regarded as a component of nature, a symbol of strength and potency. In Persia, the bull symbolised the beginning of life, both animal and plant. In turn, in Egypt, a bull's hide served as a shroud and guaranteed the deceased a safe journey to the "other side" of life. The woman introduces a human element into the myth of Europe, neutralising the divine nature of the bull-Zeus. It is she who "tames" the bull's divine force. The third element of the myth – the sea – combines the diversity of all symbolic associations: the human tendency to become familiar with new religions, other ways of life and cultures. The most important of all seas, described by HERODOTUS (1954) as the "great sea," is the Mediterranean, which turns into a spatial and temporal liaison connecting the memory of our joint European past with the spatial notion of European integration. The myth of Europe depicted in sculpture and painting proves to be a universal instrument. It adapts its symbolism to the changing requirements of the epoch, captures the essential features of the reality surrounding the artist and renders them indelible in ever-changing compositions always built out of the same elements: the bull, the woman and the sea. The twentieth-century depictions of the myth of Europe devised in the imagination of artists from both parts of the Continent comprise an excellent instrument showing two different versions of the history of European civilisation

The Rape of Europe by Felix Vallotton from 1908 (fig. 4) is a depiction of the relation between Europe and the bull characterised, on the one hand, by the strength and protectiveness of the bull-man and, on the other hand, by the dependence of Europe-woman. The bourgeois model of those relations is emphasised by the image of the sea, which seems to resemble more Lake Geneva than the Mediterranean. In turn, Valentin Serov's *The Rape of Europe* from 1910 (fig. 5) discloses already a slightly different relation between man and woman, namely, emotional unity. In Pierre Bonnard's painting from 1919, also entitled *The Rape of Europe* (fig. 6), the woman and the man constitute not only an emotional but also predominantly a corporeal unity.

During the 1930s, the beauty and informality of the depictions of the myth of Europe from the beginning of the century were replaced by the dread and a foretaste of the catastrophe which Europe was to experience in the near future. In the political caricature by Arthur Johnson from 1935, *In the Roman Market* (fig. 7), featured on the cover of a German nationalistic and anti-European periodical "Kladeradasch," two bulls (brown and red) embody the forces governing Europe. In Werner Peiner's *Aryan Europe* (see: GUTHMÜLLER 1997: fig. 101) from 1937 (fig. 8) the massive figure of an Aryan woman in the foreground and the tamed bull led by her in the background stress the new fascist vision of Europe. In Beckman's *The Rape of Europe* (see: DAVIDSON REID 1993: 428; GUTHMÜLLER 1997: fig. 98) from 1933 (fig. 9), a brown bull has overpowered the woman-Europe. Andre Mason in *Pasiphae* (1937, fig. 10) protests against rape, racism, encroaching genocide and an era of contempt. Maggi Hambling (*Pasiphae and the Bull*, 1978, fig. 11) shows moral emancipation and corporeal partnership, this time of Pasiphae and her partner, the bull-man. *Huguette's Mirror* from 1983 by Carol Rama (fig. 12) portrays conscious, dominating womanhood. In Roland To-

por's *Europe* or *Minotaur* (the painting has two titles) from 1985 (fig. 13) we are dealing with the moral frenzy of the Continent, symbolized by a transvestite bull.

The leitmotif of contemporary depictions of the myth of Europe is, in the opinion of Luisa Passerini, the sheer sexuality of Europe-woman, contrasted with the bull symbolizing primeval masculinity (see: PASSERINI 2002). The author notices that in Western twentieth-century art the classical relation between the abductor and its victim has been interpreted *à rebours*. The oppressor becomes the victim and *vice versa*, an evolution exemplified by the two earlier mentioned paintings, the first being Felix Vallotton's work from 1908. In this case, the woman appears to be totally at the mercy of her abductor-saviour. An example of an *à rebours* perceived relation between the abductor and his victim is Carol Rama's *Huguette's Mirror* – the black figure of a bull with a lolling tongue, walking on a strange wall decorated with human limbs and shown against a green background, carries the powerful figure of the female Europe. The latter's sexuality is manifested in the ample proportions of her body and stressed by its red colour. Her hair is embellished with a floral or laurel wreath, a symbol of victory. Behind her back the artist has placed a rectangular ornamental mirror frame. The half a century separating the two works shows the fundamental difference in the system of European values and mentality. Vallotton drew attention to the dependence of the woman upon the male, while Carol Rama, who in 1938 portrayed a resigned bull groaning under the weight of the female, showed conscious and dominating femininity. A step further in progressing feminisation was taken by the comical vision of the "transvestite bull" proposed by Roland Topor. In the epoch of belligerent feminism, the myth of Europe ceased to satisfy the artists of the second half of the twentieth century. The changing social role played by the woman calls for still other references. Artists began to resort to different classical heroines, one of whom was Pasiphae.⁶ The myth of the "valiant" Pasiphae carried an unambiguous message: "the absurd love for the bull [...] a horrible infatuation [...] a disgusting passion" (KUBIAK 1998: 370-371), portrays her as an "embodiment of a mockery of the natural and divine laws, and a triumph of animal passion over the intellect" (KOPALIŃSKI 1987: 839).

The 1930s witnessed the emergence of paintings expressing crushed human dignity and the violence rampant in the century of both varieties of totalitarianism. In anti-fas-

⁶ See: KERENYI 2002: 94: "The family history of Minos contains the recurring motif of wedlock with a bull. Minos married Pasiphae, 'she who shines for all,' the daughter of Helios and Perseis, whose name became familiar to us as a description of the goddess of the Moon. It was said that Pasiphae fell in love with a magnificent, radiant white bull that the gods – Zeus or Poseidon – dispatched to Crete. Since the bull indubitably emerged from the sea, we call him 'Poseidon.' On the other hand, it was claimed that the bull was Zeus. For the ancient Cretans a bull was unquestionably one of the forms of the symptom of a supreme deity. In our famous tales Pasiphae was, however, enamoured by a real bull – she commissioned master Dedalus to execute an artificial cow and then concealed herself in its interior. The deceived bull conceived with the queen a son – Minotaur, the 'bull of Minos,' known as 'Asterius' – a child with a bull's head who had to be kept hidden. Minotaur grew up in a Labyrinth – a building composed of a network of passages without an exit, specially designed by Dedalus. Ultimately, Theseus the Athenian killed the bull-man." Assorted authors of myths offered different descriptions of the conception of Minotaur; further on, I shall cite still other versions of the same legend.

cist art the woman-Europe once again played the part of the victim, and the bull symbolized violence. During the period preceding the outbreak of the Second World War, the myth of Europe fulfilled chiefly a political function. The most representative example of such an approach is Beckman's *The Rape of Europe* from 1933. The brutal bull, whose raised head and dilated nostrils bring to mind a field gun, carries Europe-the victim. The nude, helpless female body draped across his mighty back appears to be emitting a "cry of death" (GUTHMÜLLER 1997: 326). Her forearm displays a yellow band, this being the colour used already in the Middle Ages to brand prostitutes and Jews.

The secular allegorical language of colour considered yellow, wrote Rzepińska, to be the hue of enmity, evil intentions and shamelessness, and ascribed it to streetwalkers and Jews, which appears to confirm the Spanish genealogy of this emblem. During the Renaissance, Italian courtesans were forced to wear yellow as part of their clothes (RZEPIŃSKA 1983: 132).

The yellow band used by Max Beckmann becomes, therefore, an archetype of the Star of David with which the Nazis marked the Jews at the time of the Holocaust. Just as characteristic is the brown colour of the bull, applied by the artist in a reference to fascist uniforms.

1932 was the start of a whole series of paintings, some of which dealt with existing myths, such as "Ulysses and Siren" or "The Rape of Europe," both painted in 1933 [...] myths are not based on a canonized text but on images which can be constantly reworked and updated (BOEHM/MOSCH/SCHMIT 1996: 319).

Brimming with expressive tension and voiced with the help of simple synthetic measures, the visualisations of myths proposed by Beckmann did not serve the past but showed archetypes in the, at first glance, haphazard contemporary human existence.

Another voice protesting against fascism was that of the above mentioned Masson who during the 1930s executed a series of works in which Europe was replaced by Pasiphae. This myth, according to the artist, referred to fascist cruelty much more convincingly than the legend of Europe. In this manner, the myth of Europe once again assumed the form of the myth of Pasiphae. Both appear in the oeuvre of numerous European artists, not only in the West – the same holds true for the works of the Polish artists Jan Lebenstein and Adam Hoffmann. Upon his return from the front, Andre Masson, a gravely wounded veteran of the First World War, was treated in a mental asylum. His wartime experiences acted as a direct inspiration for a series entitled *Abductions, Massacres and Rapes* (LEIRIS 1971: fig. 13-26), with the artist comparing the cruelties of war to rape. In 1937 Masson showed his Pasiphae in a portrayal of a woman raped by a brown bull.

Those who regarded fascism as salutary for Europe worked alongside artists protesting against its growing tide. Norman DAVIES (2003: 67) wrote about fascism's striving to transform European culture: all was to become exclusively Aryan. An allegory of this vision is Peiner's mentioned work from 1937, known also as *Aryan Europe*. Here

Europe has been granted the features of a nude displaying distinctly Nordic beauty – an image of European civilisation, degrading the role of tradition and subjugating it to a new race embodied by the Aryan female (see: GUTHMÜLLER 1997: 327).

Contrary to gloomy reality, Pablo Picasso (*Minotaur*⁷, 1937) showed Europe in the gentle embrace of a monster that appears to be a saviour carrying his willing victim onto a ship⁸ envisaged as a source of refuge and solace (the scene was interpreted either as salvation or as... rape) (COWLING/MUNDY 1990: 223, fig. 146).

References to Central-Eastern Europe are made in the depiction of the myth of Europe proposed by the German painter Johannes Grützke (GUTHMÜLLER 1997: 191) (1976) and entitled *Woman on a Bull* (fig. 15). The figure of Europe sitting on the back of a bull promenading along the Berlin Wall points to the other side of the Wall. The composition won first prize at a competition on the history of the world and is the property of the Berlin Wall Museum – “Checkpoint Charlie.” Europe makes a symbolic gesture of her hand towards the East, and both the artist and the viewer see the Wall and the figures on it from the viewpoint of the West, which has “forgotten” the East.

The myth about Europe and the bull in the interpretation proposed by Grützke is a symbolic reference to the political situation in Europe in the mid-1970s, and especially the history of Eastern Europe. The myth of Europe inspired painters and poets who created works constituting diverse interpretations. Raphael, Titian, Dürer, Rubens, Gauguin, Max Beckman, and Picasso painted Europe carried by a bull. Such writers as Antoine de Baif, Andre Chénier, Laconte de Lisle, Georg Kaiser, Massimo Bontempelli, and Heinrich Boll described the same motif. Innumerable interpretations of the myth appeared in successive centuries, always bearing religious and philosophical contents (GUTHMÜLLER 1997: 310-311).⁹

The majority of the above described paintings inspired by the myth of Europe were shown in 2002 at an exhibition held at the Uffizi Gallery in Florence¹⁰, in itself a significant contribution to an important moment in the history of our Continent (the expansion of the European Union). The weight of the show, however, consists of something more – an opportunity for observing the evolution of a single motif in

⁷ The story of Minotaur, closely associated with the genealogy of the myth of Europe, contains new details depending on the author treated as a source: “The enraged Poseidon (angered by Minos) breathed into the bull concealed within the passion of ferocity, and into Pasiphae – a ridiculous love for the bull [...] the queen, probably discerning in the incomparable constructor [Dedalus] the nature of a lowly lackey, confessed to him her disgusting passion (Apollodorus, 3, 1, 4). Dedalus obediently built a wooden cow on wheels, covered with real hide. He dragged this quasi-cow, with Pasiphae hidden inside its empty interior, to the meadow where the bull was grazing [...] Their horrible intercourse was to give birth to a monster, Minotaur, or ‘Minos’-‘Bull,’ with the head of a bull and a human body. In order to imprison and conceal him, the king ordered Dedalus to erect a labyrinth.” KUBIAK 1998: 370-371.

⁸ One of the versions of the myth of Europe describes rape as “carrying onto a ship.” See: CALASSO 1995: 17-18.

⁹ Translated by B. di Biasio.

¹⁰ “Il mito di Europa, da fanciulla rapita a continente,” Galleria Uffizi, June 2002 – January 2003.

time, as well as the manner in which the myth of Europe appears in art from antiquity to the present day. Changes of its depiction in successive epochs demonstrate the essential features of European civilisation: “Our existence in history receives its energy from the very roots of the myth” – maintained Kołakowski – “and thanks to it we win the right to render events meaningful” (KOŁAKOWSKI 1994: 39). Everyone who has seen the exhibition must ask oneself whether the myth of Europe is a love story involving a man and a woman or rather whether it describes the roots of European civilisation. Could the legend of the love between the bull-Zeus and the princess-Europe become a pretext for reflections on European identity? Another prominent question, which remained unresolved in the wake of the Florentine exhibition, was whether artists from Central-Eastern Europe resorted to the classical theme just as often as their colleagues from the West. Unfortunately, the display did not provide a satisfactory answer. Among the 181 works at the Uffizi, there was not a single one from regions located to the east of the (fortunately no longer extant) Berlin Wall. For all practical purposes, the display never embarked upon the presence of the myth of Europe in art from this part of the Continent. This absence was even stranger considering that it was precisely at the time of the Florentine show that Central-Eastern European states, in the company of Malta and Cyprus, were signing the access treatise, and that the exhibition itself was conceived as a *sui generis* commemoration of the eastwards expansion of the Union!

This paradox urged the co-author of the article to initiate a further quest. A survey conducted in Polish museums provided an astonishing outcome. Apparently, more than ten twentieth-century painters had referred to the myth of Europe. Moreover, it became obvious that it was precisely this myth which inspired Franciszek Starowieyski, who in 1998 was commissioned by the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs to execute a fresco for a new seat of the Permanent Representation of the Republic of Poland to the European Union in Brussels. The moral message of Starowieyski's *Divina Polonia rapta per Europa profana* (see: FRANCISZEK STAROWIEYSKI 1998) was clearly distant from the secular symbolism present in the majority of works on show in Florence. What is, therefore, the specificity of the treatment of the classical theme in Polish twentieth-century painting? So far no one has sought a solution nor studied the perception of the myth of Europe in Polish artistic culture from earlier centuries¹¹.

Divina Polonia rapta per Europa profana (1998, fig. 16) is a portrayal of a metal and much tarnished bull, a symbol of disintegrating communism. *Divina Polonia*, which the artist contrasts with secular Europe, recalls the Christian tradition of *Polonia semper fidelis*, ever alive in this part of the Continent. *Divina Polonia* – the second female figure – boasts a nimbus [...] Starowieyski resorted to the classical and thus “pagan” myth, and upon this occasion contrasted secular Europe and saintly Poland. What is the source of this combination of nudity and sanctity? Why did the openly liberated artist, who in hundreds of his works obsessively sketched the female body and who re-

¹¹ Scarce Polish-language studies on the presence of antiquity in Polish art refer mainly to the earlier period and make no mention of the myth of Europe.

mains distant from bigotry or clericalism, suddenly apply religious symbols?¹² This issue shall be discussed more extensively in a further part of our text.

In his assemblage *The Rape of Europe*¹³ from 1983 (fig. 17), Władysław Hasiór, another Polish painter and sculptor, replaced the bull with a black bird¹⁴ and reduced the figure of Europe to the accessories of womanhood: a slender hand and a thick braid. The background is composed of a Gothic cathedral and a townscape.¹⁵ The foreground shows Christ – the shepherd tending a lamb. The black eagle's talons hold a female hand made of soap and plaited human hair trails along. The soap symbolizes the fragility and sensitivity of the human body, so easily annihilated in the age of genocide. After all, in the century of crematoria human fat was used in the production of soap.

¹² An interesting contribution to understanding the *antemurale* ideology are the circumstances of the origin of *Divina Polonia* mentioned in an interview conducted by our student, Aneta Kaprzyk, with Jan Truszczyński, at the time the Polish Ambassador to Brussels:

A.K. What are your recollections of the reaction of Polish diplomats to the painting by F. Starowieyski?

J.T. Naturally, the reactions were extremely diverse but generally speaking the prevailing feeling was anxiety that the message transmitted by the canvas – especially together with its title – could be interpreted by viewers from the European Union countries as pretentious pomposity and a conviction about the exceptional status of Poland or, worse still, as Poland's unfriendly attitude towards a Europe devoid of all virtue and our inclusion into the club by force, as if contrary to our will. Obviously, such an interpretation of the Starowieyski canvas would have been at odds with the general image of Poland, whose creation and reinforcement were the objective of the efforts pursued by our diplomatic corps. On the margin, we were worried that such an overwhelming amount of female nudity, in extra large dimensions, could produce critical remarks among the more conservative/traditional guests from Poland. All told, less attention was paid to the artistic merits of the painting and more to questions concerning the possible interpretations of its message.

A.K. Upon the request of Your Excellency, part of the inscription was painted over already prior to the unveiling and in this fashion *Divina Polonia Rapta Per Europa Profana* exists up to this day as *Divina Polonia*.

J.T. True, this took place upon my request and after consultations with my superiors in Warsaw who were also of the opinion that the words *rapta per Europa profana* contain an overly obvious verbal message, imposing a certain interpretation of the composition and in all likelihood suggesting a conviction that Poland wishes to accentuate her Euro-scepticism and not her willingness to join the region of European integration. (Interview conducted on 28 December 2006 as part of qualitative research for an M. A. dissertation: KAPRZYK).

¹³ Unpublished work, property of the Tatra Mts. Museum in Zakopane; the Hasiór Gallery in Zakopane features also two other works by this artist, both entitled *The Rape of Europe*, executed in 1986 and 1988.

¹⁴ The fact that Hasiór replaced the snow-white bull (in antiquity a symbol of adventure but also of love and security) with a black predatory eagle carrying in its talons the emaciated hand of a woman-Europe is a reference to twentieth-century European experiences – fascism and communism. During the reign of those two forms of totalitarianism, the Europeans were deprived predominantly of the security which in accordance with classical symbolism the bull was supposed to provide. See KERENYI 2002: 94.

¹⁵ The photograph shows probably the cathedral in Ulm (1377) whose tower was designed by Mathew Boblinger in 1482; in the opinion of Pevsner, the building owes its present-day appearance to reconstruction carried out in 1877-1890. See: PEVSNER 1979: 257. See also ERLANDE-BRANDENBURG 1989: 542-543 and 582-583.

The whole composition is rendered additionally horrifying by the strand of hair which in European imagination brings to mind associations with death camps, those macabre entrances to Hell where the victims were deprived of the last attributes of their humanity: hair, eyeglasses, prosthetics and children's toys. The figure of Christ is a clear reference to Polish Catholic tradition and messianism. Suffering Poland is compared to the torments of Christ. Deprived of her independent statehood by the partitions and, subsequently, by fascism (the Second World War) and Soviet communism, Poland feels anguish. Polish consciousness is obsessively concerned with a longing for freedom and a wish to possess a sovereign state. Polish national identity thus consists of a mixture of religious and national symbols present in Polish art and arranged into a dramatic appeal addressed to the West:

Adherents of radical secularism, understand us! – wrote Bohdan Cywiński. Us from a geographical region known for long as “antemurale christianitatis”! We are by no means merely simpleton obscurants and clericalists! You and we have been shaped by different historical experiences: in our case mainly the feeling of insecurity¹⁶, an incessant threat posed by strangers representing a different faith as well as the knowledge that the fruit of the labours of a whole lifetime can vanish in the course of several minutes and that all possession is impermanent while an experienced and confirmed truth maintains that often the price to pay for one's faith is our life; finally – there is the distrustful distance towards those privileged few who could cultivate their Christianity in a luxurious and safe fortress (CYWIŃSKI 2004).

All becomes connected with the specific role played by culture (associated with religious faith) in Eastern Europe. Here, culture and religion proved to be the strongest bastion in the centuries-long battle waged by small nations against the imperialist proclivities of their mightier neighbours. In the second half of the twentieth century, Polish national awareness, closely linked with religious consciousness, was protected against totalitarian enslavement and subsequently took part in the struggle for toppling communism in Central Europe. A negative aspect of such a union was the growth of nationalism, whose consequences have been adversely experienced by the minorities living in Poland. During the “Solidarity” era, however, its edge was directed not against the ethnic minority but against communist rule.

The work of yet another Polish artist, Zbylut Grzywacz, this time from the period of the emergence of “Solidarity,” refers indirectly to the myth of Europe. The central part of the composition entitled *Ursus* (from 1979 – and inspired by *Quo vadis* by Henryk Sienkiewicz) (see: PAWLAK 1978) is filled with a mighty charging bull whose back displays the sprawling and lifeless figure of a woman arranged in dramatic pose, an embodiment of helplessness, exhaustion and resignation. Her limp left hand holds

¹⁶ According to Tazbir, from the mid-fifteenth century to the middle of the seventeenth century there were about thirty Turkish and Cossack invasions of Lithuania and 75 of Podolia, The statistics of murder, rape, arson and captivity along the *antemurale* was quite imposing – these acts took place every three years in Lithuania and on a yearly basis in Podolia.

a shopping bag and a purse. The painting shows the moment when a worker wearing a protective hardhat of the sort used by miners and dockworkers and a T-shirt revealing muscular arms grasps the bull's horns. The train tracks on which the scene takes place suggest its site – possibly next to a mine or a shipyard. The background is composed of a long row of presumably female figures standing next to a wall and queuing up in front of a shop in which they will be more than likely to find empty shelves. The motionless observers watching the scene transpiring in the foreground stand against the backdrop of a red stand featuring microphones similar to those used by Party chiefs to address shipyard workers, the ever-hungry citizens of a communist state.

The painting by Zbylut Grzywacz presents the national myth in its pure form, without any admixtures of religious symbolism – an excellent example of the way in which the myth of Europe has changed in the course of the twentieth century into the myth of the *antemurale*. The crimson flayed body of the powerful stampeding bull (already lame – without a leg) is indubitably an allegory of communism. The worker wearing a hardhat suitable for a shipyard worker or a miner is, in turn, an allegory of “the Polish working class” and “Solidarity” while the swooning, exhausted woman, carried by the bull, is Poland. Taking the bull by the horns, literally and metaphorically, he is not only saving Poland from the system destructive for the substance of the nation but also quite possibly protecting Europe against the communist onslaught.

3. THE CENTRAL EUROPEAN MYTH OF THE “ANTEMURALE”

In the East, the classical myth of Europe is intertwined with a much younger national myth; thus, the East European version has assumed the shape of the myth of the *antemurale*. The visualisations of the rape of Europe which emerged in Central-Eastern Europe during the course of the twentieth century echo with the mission ideology of the *antemurale*, which has been functioning in the historical consciousness of Central and Eastern Europe for more than 500 years and now has been brought up to date:

The average nobleman believed firmly that by protecting the south-eastern boundaries of his state against the Tartars, Turkey or Muscovy he was guarding the whole of Christendom. More, that by doing so he was also winning a reward in heaven [...].

This was the origin of political reflections at odds with views prevailing in

Western Europe where the award (or punishment) in the netherworld had long ceased being included into the balance sheet of anticipated profits (TAZBIR 2004: 207-208). Almost from the very outset it [the *antemurale* – BdB and BM] possessed a double edge: religious (since it was conceived as a barrier against Islam) and civilisation-political (considering that it was to constitute a dam protecting European civilisation against Asian barbarians) (TAZBIR 2004: 205).

The *antemurale* evolved from the seventeenth-century anti-Turkish and anti-Cossack stand to its anti-Russian successor (nineteenth century); in the twentieth century it signified the protection of Western civilisation against communism.

The Serbian case is a version of an *antemurale* mentality even more distinctive than the Polish example. Defeat at the battle of Kosovo, waged against the Turks in 1389, left an indelible imprint upon Serbian mentality. Six centuries later, its repercussions remain very much alive in contemporary Serbian literature, as if the battle had taken place during the twentieth century. The significance of this historical experience for the Serbs has been described by Adam Ryszkowski:

If we were to refer to Polish history we would be forced to find in our past a single moment that would combine the symbolic of the battle of Grunwald, the humiliating defeat at Ceca-ra, the catastrophe of the partitions, and the tragedy of the Warsaw Uprising (RYSZKOWSKI 2006: 126).

The imposed Turkish servitude (which the Serbs suffered for over 400 years) was the reason why in South-Eastern Europe, just as in North-Eastern Europe, religion became a constitutive element of the state and the nation giving rise to the conviction that “Serbia is the work of God.” During the centuries of servitude, the Church became a guarantor of freedom concerned with the survival of Serbian ethnic identity. The image of the “true Serbian” cultivated in national literature shows an ideal defender of the *antemurale*. This is a warrior ready to make sacrifices, a “hero” willing to forfeit his life for the sake of protecting the freedom of his nation, “a Serbian Troy besieged by foes.”

The symbolic culture of Serbia is suffused with messianism. A nation intended for greatness and the construction of a new Byzantium, the *antemurale* of Eastern Christianity, fell as a result of betrayal and Turkish, Moslem barbarian supremacy. From the death of Tsar Lazar at Kosovo the Serbs have been lauding their defeat [...]. If from the very onset of its history a nation is attacked, ridiculed and insulted, it is simply impossible for its origin to be other than divine’ (Bruckner) (NAWROCKI 2001: 241).

The mission ideologies (which include the *antemurale* myth) are by no means a novelty, even in Western Europe. As the Polish historian Janusz Tazbir wrote, the French Revolution proclaimed the slogan of introducing the principles of social equality across all of Europe and postulated the dissemination of progressive French culture. In turn, nineteenth- and twentieth-century Englishmen of letters were deeply concerned with the “mission of spreading white man’s civilisation on other continents” (Tazbir 2004: 210). Moscow, on the other hand, regarded herself as the Third Rome. In the West, such mission ideologies served territorial expansion while in the East they were used for defence and comfort in the face of catastrophes.

The myth of Europe in Polish twentieth-century painting is present simultaneously in both embodiments. On the one hand, the “Western” version describes, similarly to the art of the West, the social emancipation of women and comments about timeless

relations between the man and the woman (Skoczylas, Nacht-Samborski, Manastyrski, Linke, Hoffmann, Lebenstein, Nowosielski). The myth in question is also present in its “Polonised” or “national” variant in which it tells not so much a story about Europe but a legend about the special mission to be carried out by Poland in Europe – “Poland as the *antemurale* of Christianity and Europe” (Starowieyski, Hasiór, Grzywacz). The example of Polish painting shows how the *antemurale* myth underwent a renaissance at the time of the emergence of “Solidarity” and after the proclamation of martial law in 1981. The works of Grzywacz (1979), Hasiór (1983) and Starowieyski (1988) executed at the time are definitely the outcome of the uncertainty, rebellion and trauma associated with the “Solidarity” revolt and its subsequently stifling by the communist authorities, which thus deprived the Poles of all hope. It became apparent that thanks to Polish painting from the second half of the twentieth century the *antemurale* had not – as Tazbir maintained – “been relegated to the storehouse of Polish historical myths” but continued to be embedded in the historical awareness of yet another generation.

The concept of the *antemurale* is absent in Italian, Hungarian or Austrian historical consciousness although *de facto* this was precisely the role played in the seventeenth century by Venice, the whole of Hungary and Vienna. Why did this type of political reflection not become part of Western awareness but pervaded only the thought of the East? The decisive factors included the subsequent history of Venice, Hungary and Austria, which contrasted with the plight of Poland or Serbia. Austria and Hungary jointly created a strong empire while Poland and Serbia, suffering the torments of servitude, sought comfort in utopia.

Those visualisations of the legend about the rape of Europe which were devised in Poland in the second half of the twentieth century resound with an echo of the historical experiences of the East emphasised by the more recent dramatic political events from the end of the twentieth century.

4. A DEFICIT OF JOINT EUROPEAN SYMBOLS

While on the subject of Europe, we all probably agree that regardless of the nature of the united Continent its very existence, seen from the perspective of the tumultuous European past and even more so from that of the horrendous twentieth century, appears to be a sheer miracle. This is the reason why it is even more disturbing that the European Union monolith has already disclosed its first cracks (as evidenced by the refusal to enact a common constitution). Will the Europeans, therefore, be capable of creating a single European nation which in accordance with a definition by Ernest-Wolfgang Böckenförde:

Is constituted to a lesser degree by biological-natural factors and to a greater one by [...] living memory and consciousness passed on from generation to generation [the nation lives – BdB and BM], common hopes, shared suffering and the contempt expressed by others, jointly anticipated pride and finally, jointly cultivated myths.

The phenomenon described by Böckenförde is usually known as “identity” although Adolf Muschg recommends treating the concept of united European identity rather sceptically (MUSCHG 2005: 5).¹⁷ As regards this particular question, he claims it would be better to manage without words since a “joint European past” suffices for determining European identity. The heart of the matter, however, does not consist in the claim that there is no such thing as a “joint European past”! The historical experiences of the new members of the European Union (Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Slovenia) differ essentially from those of our western neighbours, the old Union members – Germany, France, Great Britain, Italy and Portugal, not to mention Sweden, which has avoided war for over two centuries. Only familiarity with history will make it possible to alleviate many of the debates conducted at present on the European Parliament forum. Such knowledge will make it feasible to understand that the source of multiple conflicts between the West and the East is not ill will but divergent experiences. The experiences of communism among the Poles (and the populations of other countries-members of the so-called bloc) were totally at variance from those of the democratic and free West. Parliamentarians from the West are entitled to their own appraisal of communism, which they have often conceived as a project for a just social system. That same right is also due to us who remember well various communist acts of genocide, such as the one committed in Katyn or the death of millions of Ukrainian peasants punished by Stalin by means of an artificially induced famine. Once we become aware of this disparity, it will become obvious why the European Parliament refused to commemorate the victims of Katyn with a minute of silence (a gesture postulated by Euro-deputies from Poland) and at the same time remembered the victims of the terrorist attack carried out in Spain in 2004. It will also explain why Western deputies voted on the issue of condemning totalitarian systems differently from their colleagues representing the new member-states (located to the east of the former Iron Curtain) and protested against including the word “communism” in the pertinent document. Just as understandable will be the attitude adopted by the ministers of justice of some of the European Union countries who disagreed about a project establishing penalties for “historical lies” or the controversy whether the crimes of the Holocaust and those perpetrated in former Yugoslavia, regarded as crimes against mankind, should be treated on par with the crimes of communism. Although understanding such approaches does constitute a step towards constructing a joint identity, it still is not tantamount to their co-ordination.

The reason why attempts were made to divide the victims of the twentieth-century genocide into “better” and “worse” lies in the absence of consent as regards an inter-

¹⁷ One should agree with Muschg who maintains that every attempt at grasping the entity instead of a fragment is mythical and does not possess a logical character. It belongs to a metaphysical order of thought and not its scientific counterpart. Today, when positivistic hostility towards the mythical core of culture is already a thing of the past, the cognitive role of the myth can no longer be doubted. We are no longer compelled to protect the myth by referring to the opinions of Cassirer, Jung, Fromm, Levi-Strauss, Eliade, Gadamer and, last but not least, Kołakowski, who consented that we learn about man primarily from his myths and symbols.

pretation of the past. Up to this day, Europe does not have its own “commissions for truth and reconciliation” whose task would consist of determining a certain minimum of facts from the past; all the interested parties universally agree about their assessment.

The onset of the new century inclines towards formulating a fundamental question: will the Europeans become a single nation or will divided memory prove to be an obstacle? Will it be possible to overcome the different historical experiences of the East and West and discover some sort of a joint foundation that will facilitate better harmony? In other words, will the “European dream” about a contented 450-million strong nation living in harmony and sharing a past, symbols, dreams and objectives come true? Will conflicts and the apocalyptic twentieth-century European genocide become a mere warning and recollection?

In the introduction to the collected material from “Figures d’Europe. Images and Myths of Europe” (PASSERINI 2003), one of the most important conferences on integration (examined, unfortunately, solely from a Western perspective) organised by the European University Institute (EUI) in Florence in 2002, Romano Prodi wrote:

These ‘Images and Myths of Europe’ remind us that tomorrow’s European Union cannot be based exclusively on economics and that, if Europe is to become a positive example for the whole world, it is perhaps necessary to place greater emphasis on ethical and aesthetic values [...] looking beyond day-to-day concerns, however elevated these may be, is not the European Union too inclined to neglect these values? I am deeply convinced, and profoundly worried, that this is the case (PRODI 2003: 9).

Nonetheless, it seems worth asking about the contents of the joint symbols and myths required by the Europeans so that after 1 May 2004 they would be capable of merging the West and the East into a certain entity. What sort of myths from their past should the Europeans make a selection from in order to render them the joint myths of the future? Does there exist a single idea that could turn the two parts of the Continent into a single Europe? We have in mind a conception which all the Europeans will regard as their own and around which they shall commence building a joint identity.¹⁸

¹⁸ After the disillusionment with their “American dream” experienced by the Americans themselves, the eyes of the whole world turned to the “European dream” which became a source of new hope for creating an “ideal” society. This was the spirit in which also the Americans, including Timothy Snyder, George Soros and Jeremy Rifkin, began to write about Europe. The first of these authors has ascribed the role of the common denominator of European identity of the twenty first century to the myth of civic society. He went on to ponder whether the outcome of Polish “Solidarity,” i.e. a civic society transformed in Eastern Europe into an instrument of protecting the individual against the threat of global forces, could become the myth of an international civic society. Could a thus comprehended freedom legend assume the form of the founding myth of a United Europe? Are the Europeans capable of becoming a “group of citizens on the European Maidan of Freedom” who in the twenty first century will take matters into their own hands for the sake of joint protection against new global hazards? SNYDER 2005: 2. The advice proposed by Soros is similar: “Europe is seeking her identity. In my opinion, she is not forced to seek far. I believe that the European Union is an embodiment of the principles of open society and should serve as a model and spiritus movens of global open society.” SOROS 2007. In turn, Rifkin regards Europe as the first empire in history emerging by peaceful means

Or could it be that in order to exist Europe simply needs diversity? After all, one of its possible definitions mentions “a maximum of differences in a minimum of space.”

First and foremost, we have at our disposal the old “minimum of European security” myth, based on fear. Today, it may be expressed by asking what could be done to prevent the twenty first century from becoming an age of a new Auschwitz, Kolyma, Sarajevo, Srebrenica, Kosovo and two world wars, an age of “two totalitarianisms,” “an age of the wolf,” or of the “puzzle of evil,” so that it may become an age of the “puzzle of reconciliation.” Second, there is the “Solidarity” myth; over a quarter of a century old, the idea that created the first “civic society” in the former communist bloc¹⁹. Ten million citizens opposed the monopoly of power wielded by a single party which identified itself with the state. Third, the Europeans cherish the myth of the “velvet revolution” which thanks to the person of Vaclav Havel brings to mind exclusively positive associations. Finally, there are the myth of the “fall of the Berlin Wall,” the “orange revolution” myth and the “civic society” myth.

“Solidarity” demonstrated – Timothy SNYDER (2005: 2) wrote – that a group of citizens is capable of cooperating for the purpose of creating a force that is not identical with the individuals building it and is separate from the state.²⁰

The same author asserted that *the idea of a civic society possesses a European mandate*, and that the modification proposed by Eastern Europe, i.e. that society produces means for protection against the state, renders this idea particularly attractive for all civic ventures protesting against globalisation. Could, therefore, the “civic society” myth be proclaimed the contemporary European freedom legend? Might it become the new founding myth for the second European integration of 2004?

without resorting to violence, plunder and conquest: “Our links are vanishing. Without a strong binder in which the decisive majority firmly believes, a country is incapable of functioning well. This is why the binder created by another great dream appearing across the Atlantic has become so important. [...] In the American dream success is individual. Some win all while others lose all. In the European dream no one is a total loser. [...] In our model the superiority of American culture is unquestioned. In the European model each culture has something to offer to the others. [...] In America emphasis is on wealth. In Europe – on the quality of life. [...] We live in order to work, and you work in order to live” (ŻAKOWSKI 2005). The above cited positive opinions about the European Union are not the only voices about the Old Continent heard in America: “American anti-Europeans have produced a steady stream of books with titles like ‘America Alone,’ ‘Our Oldest Enemy,’ ‘While Europe Slept,’ ‘The West Last Chance.’ [...] America’s anti-Europeans have three big complaints about the Old Continent. The first is that Europe is committing demographic and economic suicide: the European birth rate is well below replacement level, and the economy is hog-tied by regulations and overburdened by welfare commitments. The second is that, unlike America, Europe is a post-Christian society. [...] The third complaint is that Muslims are filling Europe’s demographic and spiritual void. Bernard Lewis, the White House’s favourite Islamic scholar, thinks that Europe will turn Muslim by the end of the century, becoming part of the Arab West” (LEXINGTON 2007: 56).

¹⁹ By following the example of Alexis de Tocqueville they could be described as a network of voluntary associations.

²⁰ Timothy Snyder is a professor of history at Yale University.

One thing is certain, namely, that the first integration myth (based on the need for security and on economic reasons) has already fulfilled its task. The presence of the new members in the Union calls for discovering an equally novel historical myth, a legend that would define anew the factors capable of uniting all the Europeans and showing them the direction in which they should strive. Will Europe prove capable of finding such a common denominator, or will it simply disintegrate?

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