

Summary

KATHARINA UTE MANN/ Polonia – national allegory as a place of memory in 19th century Polish painting

The article first of all discusses the ways in which the artists – after the Polish state had lost its sovereignty – were engaged in bringing back the former grandness of the nation and country, and the way they awoke the state rebirth. The task was hindered by the annexationists' policy, which – especially after the January Uprising – introduced intensive Russification or Germanisation by banning the use of Polish language in schools.

Polonia, as an allegory of the enslaved nation, is present not only in Jan Matejko's works. Thanks to complexity of the symbolic contents and various pictorial instances in different paintings this allegory implies on us a careful look at the compound and multi-layered mechanisms of creation which the artists reached out for in order to bring about the desired effects. In their works they employed this amazing figure as the centre of national identification, which was capable of producing deep impression on the audience and allowed the people to build permanent, collective, national memory. This process along with the artists' operations were best seen in extremely opposite approaches to Polonia as the Dead Polonia and the Crowned Polonia. These images moved the viewers in many different ways acting on them according to the artists' intention. The author of the article is convinced that the artists not only cherished the memory and built the national awareness, but also directed or even manipulated both of them.

The figure of Polonia is not deprived of her European context, which the author has taken into consideration together with analogous personifications, to name but Marianne or Germania. With this background, and by contrast, Polonia's individuality has been revealed. Polish Messianism applied on its banner Adam Mickiewicz's phrase "Poland the Christ of Nations" adding to the figure of Polonia a mark of martyrological beauty, and ascribing to it the roles of a redeemer and a leader of the enslaved nations on their road to political and social liberation. This martyrological aspect echoed most and endowed Polonia with a character of "a place of memory".