

Milena Hübner

Nicolaus Copernicus University Toruń

Simplicity and Utility in Closed Space. The Art of Biedermeier on Polish Lands

The art of Biedermeier is usually considered to flourish between the end of the Congress of Vienna (1815) and the onset of the Revolutions of 1848. It originates from the German-speaking countries: the Kingdom of Prussia and the Austrian Empire. The Biedermeier style – or rather the Biedermeier epoch – that was oriented towards family and private space, permeated other European lands and cultures, such as Scandinavian, Czech, Hungarian and Polish. The problem of reception of the Biedermeier style on Polish lands has not been a subject of systematic research yet. There are few publications concerning that matter: the recent one is a joint publication *Polish Biedermeier – domesticated romanticism* (ed. by A. Rosalez Rodríguez, 2018), which is a result of an exhibition held in National Museum in Warsaw (2017). In contrast to the title, the book address multiple but selected aspects of the European culture of the first half of 19th century – without giving an overall definition of Polish variant of the Biedermeier style, if such existed. The method of joint publications, that yield interpretations of single problems, was criticised by a researcher in the area of Biedermeier literature – Friedrich Sengle, who stated that they do not give a coherent historic reconstruction.

The aim of my Ph.D. project is thus to research into the Biedermeier style on Polish lands (within the borders of 1772) – its character, regional disparity and how it permeated Polish culture on partitioned territory. The core of the dissertation will be analysis of representative Biedermeier artworks, that were undoubtedly executed on Polish lands and are preserved in main Polish national collections, and also in the museums in Vilnius, Lviv and Minsk. Museum queries will be complemented with archival inquiry in the main artistic centres, which will allow the reconstruction of craftsman's workshops' activity.

There is no single, recognized definition of the Biedermeier style in Central Europe so far. The first part of the study will thus confront the European and American literature on the Biedermeier style and verify the existing statements, such as the widely used term "domesticated romanticism", that was formed in correspondence with history of literature – yet applied also in terms of art. It will also concern Biedermeier's formal and ideological relations to other historical styles and epochs – classicism, romanticism, historicism. Biedermeier distinguishing characteristic existing in art, as well as in literature and lifestyle, lead to the question of its importance in Polish historiography – shall Biedermeier be considered as an epoch or just a style? When did researchers in the area of art notice the existence of Biedermeier style on Polish lands? Did they consider it as an autonomic, Polish variant of style or as a copy of German and Austrian art? What was their assessment of

Biedermeier and how did their opinions correspond to the socio-political and cultural changes in Poland?

Forming the definition of the Biedermeier style on Polish lands requires elaboration on the influence of main foreign artistic centres. It is therefore crucial to carry out comparative analysis of the preserved objects in German, Austrian and Polish national collections and also to ascertain the relation of Polish objects to the foreign templates. The phrase "Biedermeier on Polish lands" applies also to objects that were imported from foreign artistic centres. Such artworks, preserved in Polish collections, will be also a research subject. Both the Polish and foreign objects were forming interiors – closed space depicted on paintings, drawings and graphics. This leads to the question how Biedermeier style permeated Polish culture. The answer to this question will result from an interdisciplinary approach – based on history of culture and sociology, as it is a complex problem of social and political changes on Polish partitioned lands.

Last but not least problem is the longevity of Biedermeier artworks, which as the time passed became part of museum and private collections. The mentioned museum queries will provide information about provenance of the objects, what may lead to interesting conclusions about the historical development of collectors' interests concerning Biedermeier style.