

5 Visualising the Nation

While it is easy enough to represent a ruler through a portrait or a statue, how does one go about giving a face to a nation? Artists in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries found a way out by personifying a nation. In other words they represented a country as if it were a person. Nations were then portrayed as female figures. The female form that was chosen to personify the nation did not stand for any particular woman in real life; rather it sought to give the abstract idea of the nation a concrete form. That is, the female figure became an **allegory** of the nation.

You will recall that during the French Revolution artists used the female allegory to portray ideas such as Liberty, Justice and the Republic. These ideals were represented through specific objects or symbols. As you would remember, the attributes of Liberty are the red cap, or the broken chain, while Justice is generally a blindfolded woman carrying a pair of weighing scales.

Similar female allegories were invented by artists in the nineteenth century to represent the nation. In France she was christened Marianne, a popular Christian name, which underlined the idea of a people's nation. Her characteristics were drawn from those of Liberty and the Republic – the red cap, the tricolour, the cockade. Statues of Marianne were erected in public squares to remind the public of the national symbol of unity and to persuade them to identify with it. Marianne images were marked on coins and stamps.

Similarly, Germania became the allegory of the German nation. In visual representations, Germania wears a crown of oak leaves, as the German oak stands for heroism.

New words

Allegory – When an abstract idea (for instance, greed, envy, freedom, liberty) is expressed through a person or a thing. An allegorical story has two meanings, one literal and one symbolic

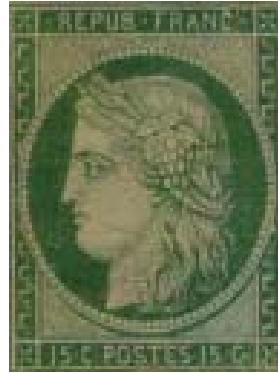


Fig. 16 – Postage stamps of 1850 with the figure of Marianne representing the Republic of France.



Fig. 17 – Germania, Philip Veit, 1848. The artist prepared this painting of Germania on a cotton banner, as it was meant to hang from the ceiling of the Church of St Paul where the Frankfurt parliament was convened in March 1848.

Box 3**Meanings of the symbols**

Attribute	Significance
Broken chains	Being freed
Breastplate with eagle	Symbol of the German empire – strength
Crown of oak leaves	Heroism
Sword	Readiness to fight
Olive branch around the sword	Willingness to make peace
Black, red and gold tricolour	Flag of the liberal-nationalists in 1848, banned by the Dukes of the German states
Rays of the rising sun	Beginning of a new era

Activity

With the help of the chart in Box 3, identify the attributes of Veit's Germania and interpret the symbolic meaning of the painting. In an earlier allegorical rendering of 1836, Veit had portrayed the Kaiser's crown at the place where he has now located the broken chain. Explain the significance of this change.



Fig. 18 — The fallen Germania, Julius Hübner, 1850.

Activity

Describe what you see in Fig. 17. What historical events could Hübner be referring to in this allegorical vision of the nation?



Fig. 19 — Germania guarding the Rhine.

In 1860, the artist Lorenz Clasen was commissioned to paint this image. The inscription on Germania's sword reads: 'The German sword protects the German Rhine.'

Activity

Look once more at Fig. 10. Imagine you were a citizen of Frankfurt in March 1848 and were present during the proceedings of the parliament. How would you (a) as a man seated in the hall of deputies, and (b) as a woman observing from the galleries, relate to the banner of Germania hanging from the ceiling?