

National Poets and Cultural Saints of Europe

Questionnaire for international contributors

I. Introduction

The main purpose of this short questionnaire is to establish which poets, writers, and/or artists were most intensely commemorated, venerated, and canonized in the nation-building process within the individual (European) cultural communities / literary cultures (incl. those without political independence, such as Galician, Catalan, Provençal, Scottish, or Faroese). The principal object of interest is not the lives but the cultural “afterlives” of these individuals – more specifically, the process of their canonization. The spatial frame is Europe broadly understood (incl. Turkey, Armenia, Georgia, and Israel). The temporal emphasis is on the developments from the mid-nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries; however, earlier periods as well as the current situation are also relevant (quite often, the most exposed artists would be those who were active in the eighteenth or nineteenth century, but sometimes figures from earlier periods were selected for veneration in the context of national revivals, e.g. Shakespeare, Dante, or Cervantes). As we aim to approach the problem of “national poets” comparatively, we want to establish the relevance of this concept in individual cultural communities / literary cultures. Was this concept important in the literature that you study; and if so, is there a single individual connected to it or are there more? What was the role of national poets and their canonization in the nation-building process related to the canonization of other figures? Furthermore, as we are developing the concept of “cultural saints”, we want to see to what degree the canonization of poets and other artists in different literary cultures resembled the canonization in religious contexts.

Many of the questions that you will find below are not easy at all, and we realize that definite answers do not exist. What we are looking for are informed presumptions and initial indications which can help us to define a provisional starting position for future comparative, critical, and in-depth research. Such estimations can only come from experts with an intimate experience of having lived “inside” a certain culture and who know its traditions and legacies, institutions, social systems, geography, history, etc. In the assessment of the stature of individuals, it may be helpful to think about canonization as a highly complex process that includes a wide variety of textual practices as well as rituals, material culture, formal ratification procedures, “lieux de mémoire”, etc. Please pay attention also to the fact that the “stature” of individuals might change dramatically in the course of time: mass adoration can dwindle to complete oblivion in a few decades.

Questions 1–10 require specific data and/or scalar assessment; please provide these even if you are not completely convinced in your estimation (consulting your colleagues may help in such cases). Questions 11–14 are descriptive, but we prefer if you answer in a condensed manner as the purpose of the questionnaire is only to gather basic information. If you are in doubt or unable to answer, add brief comments. The questionnaire will be published on our project website (as a pdf) and used for further comparative studies.

II. Questionnaire

Literary culture _____

Contributor (name, last name, academic position) _____

Institution _____

Date _____

Place _____

1. Which individual poet (male or female) is generally considered to be the *greatest poet* within your literary tradition (give the name, last name, year of birth, and year of death)? _____
2. Are there other *poets* who come near or even reach such a status? If yes, name up to two, add their basic data (name, last name, year of birth, and year of death), and assess their stature in relation to the greatest poet (scale 1–5; 5 is “equally important”, 1 is “marginal in comparison to”).

3. Is there a (single) poet who is considered the “national” poet (give the name, last name, year of birth, and year of death)? Is the notion of “national poet” (NP) widespread in your literary culture (assess on the scale 1–5; 1 is “irrelevant”, 5 is “highly common”)?

4. Were there many *rival poets* to the position of a national poet during the canonization process who were later marginalized? If yes, name up to three, add their basic data (name, last name, year of birth, and year of death), and assess the decade of their utmost presence in the canonization processes (e.g. 1880s). (If there is no NP, answer for the “greatest” poet.)

5. Which period of canonization of the NP (or the greatest poet in case of no NP) was most important (state the year or decade)? Name up to five most important canonization events (state the year and type; e.g. 1860: crucial textual edition; 1905: the unveiling of an important memorial)? Assess the current stature of the national (or greatest) poet compared to the most intense period (scale 1–5; 5 is “equally important”, 1 is “marginal in comparison to”).

6. Who were the individuals, institutions, and interest groups (cultural fractions, political parties) that played major roles in the promotion of canonization process? State the names and assess the most active decade(s).

7. When were the works of the national (or greatest) poet fully integrated into the education system (name the decade, e.g. 1910s)? Assess the overall presence of the national (or greatest) poet and his or her works in education (scale 1–5; 5 is “excessive”, 3 is “not too emphasized”, 1 is “marginal”). If there were unusual shifts or breaks (due to politics etc.), add a brief comment.

8. Are there other *literary writers* (prose writers or playwrights) in your literary culture who come close to the canonical position of the national (or greatest) poet? If yes, name up to three, give their data (name, last name, year of birth, and year of death) and assess their stature in relation to the national (or greatest) poet (scale 1–9; 9 is “much more important”, 5 is “equally important”, 1 is “marginal in comparison to”).

9. Are there other *artists* (composers, musicians, painters, architects, et al.) in your literary culture who come close to the canonical position of the national (or greatest) poet? If yes, name up to three, add their basic data (name, last name, year of birth, and year of death), and assess their stature in relation to the national (or greatest) poet (scale 1–9; 9 is “much more important”, 5 is “equally important”, 1 is “marginal in comparison to”).

10. Name up to three *other individuals* (in politics, military, scholarship, etc.) who were most venerated in the nation-building context and remain highly canonized today. Add their basic data (name, last name, year of birth, and year of death) and assess their stature in relation to the national (or greatest) poet (scale 1–9; 9 is “much more important”, 5 is “equally important”, 1 is “marginal in comparison to”).

11. Describe shortly the main reason why the chosen poet was considered “national” (or greatest in case of no NP)?

12. Speculate briefly on reasons why the concept of NP did (or did not) gain ground in your literary culture.

13. Speculate briefly on the reasons why the position of a national (or greatest) poet was either occupied by a single poet or shared by a number of poets.

14. Do you notice any interesting connotations regarding the canonization of a national (or greatest) poet that resemble the veneration and cults of religious saints? What about other artists? Specify briefly.
