

## National Poets and Cultural Saints of Europe: Latvian (questionnaire)

Literary culture: Latvian

Contributor: Benedikts Kalnačs, full professor

Institution: Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art, University of Latvia, Riga

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1. Which individual poet (male or female) is generally considered to be the greatest poet in your literary tradition? (Give the first name, last name, year of birth, and year of death.)

Rainis (a.k.a. Jānis Pliekšāns; 1865–1929)

2. Are there other poets that come near or even reach such a status? If yes, name up to two, give their basic information (first name, last name, year of birth, and year of death), and assess their stature in relation to the greatest poet (scale 1–5; 5 = “equally important,” 1 = “marginal in comparison to”).

Kārlis Skalbe (1879–1945) [2]

Aleksandrs Čaks (1901–1950) [2]

3. Is there a (single) poet that is considered the “national” poet? (Give the first name, last name, year of birth, and year of death.) Is the notion of “national poet” (NP) widespread in your literary culture? (Assess on a scale of 1–5; 1 = “irrelevant,” 5 = “very common.”)

Rainis (a.k.a. Jānis Pliekšāns; 1865–1929) [5]

4. Were there many rival poets to the position of national poet during the canonization process that were later marginalized? If yes, name up to three, give their basic information (first 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.)

Kārlis Skalbe (1879–1945) [2]

Imants Ziedonis (1933–2013) [2]

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 of the most important canonization events (state the year and type; e.g., 1860: crucial textual edition; 1905: 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 = “equally important,” 1 = “marginal in comparison to”).

1900–1910: Early publications of some major works;

1910–1920: Wide social and aesthetic recognition while the work is carried on in exile;

1920–1930: Critical text edition of complete works;

1960–1970: Celebrations of birth centenary;

1980–1990: Major academic edition of complete works and important theater productions.

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

1920–1930: The Latvian Social Democratic Workers' Party;  
1960–1980: The Latvian exile community;  
1970–1990: The Institute of Latvian Language and Literature, Latvian Academy of Sciences;  
2010–2015: The Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Latvia.

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 = “excessive,” 3 = “not particularly strong,” 1 = “marginal”). If there were unusual shifts or breaks (due to politics, etc.), add a brief comment.*

In the 1960s; the overall presence is [4].

8. *Are there other literary writers (prose writers or playwrights) in your literary culture that come close to the canonical position of the national (or greatest) poet? If so, name up to three, give their information (first 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 = “much more important,” 5 = “equally important,” 1 = “marginal in comparison to”).*

Rūdolfs Blaumanis (1863–1908) [4]

Jānis Jaunsudrabiņš (1877–1962) [1]

9. *Are there other artists (composers, musicians, painters, architects, etc.) in your literary culture that come close to the canonical position of the national (or greatest) poet? If yes, name up to three, give their basic information (first 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 = “much more important,” 5 = “equally important,” 1 = “marginal in comparison to”).*

Janis Rozentāls (1866–1916); painter [4]

Jāzeps Vītols (1863–1948); composer [4]

10. *Name up to three other individuals (in politics, military, scholarship, etc.) that were most venerated in the nation-building context and remain highly canonized today. Give their basic information (first 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 = “much more important,” 5 = “equally important,” 1 = “marginal in comparison to”).*

Krišjānis Valdemārs (1825–1891); ideologist of the national movement [3]

Krišjānis Barons (1835–1923); folklore collector [5]

Kārlis Ulmanis (1877–1942); politician [4]

11. *Briefly describe the main reason why the chosen poet was considered “national” (or greatest in the case of no NP).*

Rainis's literary career and the issues he raised coincided with the period of the establishment of an independent state in 1918. Despite being forced to spend more than two decades around and after 1900 in exile, he constantly tackled topical social and national issues, while at the same time delving deeply into the soul of the modern individual.

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

The concept of a national poet is deeply grounded in Latvian society due to important links between late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century literature and art and the nation-building processes.

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.*

The importance of Rainis was determined by his exceptional literary talent as well as his slightly marginalized position on the literary and political scene, which allowed him to stand out as a major figure of individual creative aspirations and social protest.

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.*

I do not think there is such a close resemblance, possibly due to the Lutheranism of about two-thirds of the population in Latvia.