

National Poets and Cultural Saints of Europe: Macedonian (questionnaire)

Literary culture: Macedonian

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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.)*

Blaže Koneski (1921–1993)

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”).*

Konstantin Miladinov (1830–1862) [5]

Kočo Racin (a.k.a. Kosta Apostolov Solev; 1908–1943) [5]

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.”)*

Blaže Koneski (1921–1993) [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.)*

No.

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”).*

The canonization of Koneski as a national poet came mainly after his death, in the early years of the first independent state of Macedonia (after the collapse of Yugoslavia) in 1990. However, it is highly contradictory: on the one hand, Koneski is admired as an important national figure (mainly for his great poetry and for codifying standard Macedonian) but, on the other hand, he is accused of “Serbianizing” the language by hardline nationalists. The most important canonization events are the state funeral (for his distinguished literary career and his contributions to the codification of standard Macedonian), the renovation of his birthplace in the village of Nebregovo near Prilep after 2000, several monuments in Prilep and Skopje, naming the Faculty of Philology in Skopje after him in 2001, the critical edition of his collected works, and many conferences and events in his honor. His stature can be assessed as [5].

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).*

Institutions: the Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts, the Faculty of Philology, and the Association of Macedonian Writers. The two strongest political parties have opposing attitudes: the nationalist VMRO sees him as “the dwarf from Nebregovo,” whereas the socialist SDSM sees him as “the giant of Macedonia.” However, in the recent elections in December 2016, both parties used Koneski’s verses in their campaigns. The last three decades were the most intense.

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.*

Koneski’s poetry is highly artistic, and it was included in the educational program shortly after it was published, at all levels of education: in primary and secondary school, and also at the university, mainly because he was a professor at the Faculty of Philology during his lifetime. His presence is overly strong [5].

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”).*

Petre M. Andreevski (1934–2006) [3]

Gane Todorovski (1929–2010) [2]

Ante Popovski (1931–2003) [2]

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”).*

Yanaki Manaki (1870–1954) and Milton Manaki (1882–1964); cinema and photography pioneers [3]

Toše Proeski (1981–2007); pop-singer, loved by the whole nation [2]

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”).*

Goce Delčev (1872–1903); national revolutionary [9]

Krste Petkov Misirkov (1874–1926); philologist, codifier of Macedonian [8]

Dimitrija Čupovski (1878–1940); national awakener [8]

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

Because of his great opus with strong national feelings interconnected with universal values; also because of his role in the codification of standard Macedonian, and all of his activism as a professor, academy member, Slavic linguist, and historian.

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 has gained ground in Macedonian literary culture. There are many poets that are valued mainly for their patriotic verses. As people that have struggled throughout their history, but also have problems now, in the contemporary political constellation Macedonians need confirmation and broader recognition of their national identity.

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.*

All three poets mentioned are considered national poets in different phases of Macedonian nation-building. The first one, Konstantin Miladinov, was a typical Romantic poet. He wrote only fifteen poems, but the poem "T'ga za Jug" (Longing for the South) is like a poetic hymn of Macedonian culture—it is recited each year at the beginning of the international poetry festival, "Struga poetry evenings," at the Miladinov's birthplace: Struga. Macedonian culture considers him (together with his brother Dimitar Miladinov, who collected folk poetry) as the basis of the national literature. However, there is a major problem with their case—they worked within the framework of the Ottoman Empire and with a strong Slavic orientation (they were educated in Russia), and the fact is that the collection of Macedonian folk poems prepared by them was published under the title *Bugariski narodni pesni* (Bulgarian Folk Songs), with an emphasis on the Slavic origin of the poems. Thus, Bulgarians also see them as part of their cultural tradition—as they do with many Macedonians that were active in the period when there was no Macedonian state, and that were forced to use languages other than their native language (Bulgarian, Serbian, Russian, or Greek) to express themselves if they wanted to be published (some of them did not have a clear national identity). The Miladinov brothers died in an Istanbul jail, accused of being Russian spies, and the location of their graves is not known today.

The second poet, Kočo Racin, is from the period when the Macedonian people lived in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. Racin is the first Macedonian modern poet; his work is mainly expressionist with strong social motifs. His only Macedonian collection, *Beli mugri* (White Dawns), was published in Macedonian in 1939 in Croatia, and was disseminated illegally. He is also a tragic national figure: as a prominent communist he joined the Partisan movement, but in 1943 he was killed by his own comrades in a situation that was long considered to be a misunderstanding. In independent Macedonia it is believed that his murder occurred under strange circumstances, and was an attack on his nationalism and strong creative individuality, ordered by pro-Serbian communist leaders. Racin was buried in Memorial Ossuary in Veles together with about hundred Partisan soldiers, but there are many memorials; an annual Balkan literary festival is held in Racin's honor in his hometown of Veles, his poems are very popular among the people, a social movement is named after one of his poems, and so on.

In the case of Blaže Koneski the situation is very clear—he himself was very active in promoting the Macedonian authors and intellectuals that contributed to the Macedonian national cause. Koneski has broad and important opuses, both as a poet and as a linguistic scholar. He was mainly active in postwar Yugoslavia, when Macedonia gained a kind of semi-independence within the framework of the communist federation for the first time in history, with all the good and the bad sides of it, and so his national identification cannot be questioned, although there are some tendencies of that kind even nowadays, when the existence of the Macedonian nation is being negated. Thus my appraisal is that all three poets can be considered national poets, but in the case of Koneski there are the strongest arguments that cannot be neglected by those still attacking Macedonian national identity.

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 see a resemblance to religious saints. The only figure from Macedonian (popular) culture that was venerated as a religious saint was the pop-singer Toše Proeski in the years after his death, but I think this euphoria had died away now. It began because of his humanitarian activities and very strong religious profile, the fact that he built a monastery in Krushevo, his birthplace, and other activities.