

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

Literary culture: Serbian

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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)?

Petar Petrović Njegoš (1813–1851)

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”).

Jovan Dučić (1871–1943) [3]

Miloš Crnjanski (1893–1977) [3]

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”)?

Petar Petrović Njegoš (1813–1851) [3.5]

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.)

Branko Radičević (1824–1853); second half of the nineteenth century

Jovan Jovanović Zmaj (1833–1904); end of the nineteenth century

Lazar “Laza” Kostić (1841–1910); first decades of the nineteenth century

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”).

After the founding of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (Yugoslavia) in 1918, Njegoš was twice declared Yugoslavia’s national poet: in the 1920s by the royal government and by the communist authorities following the Second World War. His re-burials on Mount Lovćen, first in the chapel in 1925 and second in the mausoleum officially inaugurated in 1974, were also important canonization events.

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).

First, Njegoš was promoted by supporters of the Serbian and Yugoslav struggle for liberation from the Ottoman Empire and, after the creation of a united Yugoslav state, by its authorities—that is, centralists

and integralists: by the royal family in the 1920s, and by the communists in the second half of the twentieth century. Njegoš's historical role and literary work was crucial for promoting the renewal of Montenegrin national and cultural independence at the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first century.

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.*

Njegoš's works were fully integrated into the Yugoslav education system in the first half of the twentieth century. After the breakup of the country in the 1990s, they remained present in both Serbia's and Montenegro's education in a significant way. Njegoš's works have been removed from school curricula in Bosnia and Herzegovina so as not to incite ethnic tensions, given the divisive nature of some of his works.

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”).*

Rastko Nemanjić (Saint Sava) (1174–1236) [9]
Dobrica Ćosić (1921–2013) [3,5]

Saint Sava is regarded as the father of Serbian education and literature; he authored the *Life of Saint Simeon* (i.e., Stefan Nemanja, his father), the first Serbian hagiography. He has been given various honorific titles, such as “Father” and “the Enlightener.” The Serb people built the cult of Saint Sava based on the religious cult; many songs, tales, and legends were created about his life, work, merit, goodness, fairness, and wisdom.

After the Second World War, Ćosić, a prolific prose writer, intellectual, and politician, was often considered to be a modern father of the nation due to his numerous novels, his influence on modern Serbian politics, and the national revival movement in the late 1980s. Even though his role as a public figure is controversial, his main literary accomplishments are regarded as works of high aesthetic quality.

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”).*

Stevan Stojanović Mokranjac (1856–1914), composer [4]

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”).*

Vuk Stefanović Karadžić (1787–1864) philologist, ethnographer [7]
Nikola Pašić, politician (1845–1926) [5]

Vuk Stefanović Karadžić, a Serbian philologist and linguist, was the major reformer of the Serbian language. For his collections of songs, fairy tales, and riddles, he is considered the father of the study of

Serbian folklore. He was also the author of the first Serbian dictionary in his new reformed language. In addition, he translated the New Testament into reformed Serbian (with revised spelling and grammar).

Nikola Pašić was a Serbian and Yugoslav politician and diplomat, and he was the most important Serbian political figure for almost four decades. He was the leader of the People's Radical Party and, among other positions, served twice as mayor of Belgrade (1890–91 and 1897) and several times as prime minister of the Kingdom of Serbia and later of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. He managed to strengthen Serbia, a still-emerging nation-state, against strong foreign influences, most notably those of Austria-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire, and the Russian Empire.

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

Petar Petrović Njegoš was a poet and a philosopher as well as a political and cultural leader. His best and most popular work, *Gorski vijenac* (The Mountain Wreath), has had a success unmatched by any other product of Serbo-Croatian literature, both at home and abroad. Njegoš's works, particularly *Gorski vijenac*, have been sources of collective identity for Serbs, Montenegrins, and Yugoslavs. Njegoš's influence parallels that of Shakespeare in the English-speaking world, and his language, although somewhat archaic, has supplied modern Serbian with several well-known quotations.

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

Inherited from European Romantic nationalism, the concept of NP is critical for the formation of the awareness of Serbian national belonging and unity, the historical circumstances of the fate of the Serbian people and its state, and the model of the quality of literary accomplishments. As much as international literary recognition is significant, it is not of primary importance.

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.*

Pure aesthetic quality is not sufficient to be considered a NP in Serbian tradition. In a rare combination of characteristics, Njegoš accomplishes the unity of a great poet, politician, and religious leader. He is remembered for being one of the most acclaimed South Slavic poets of his time, as well as for laying the foundation for the modern Montenegrin state. After his death, he remained a Serbian political and cultural father and classic. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a variety of political factions (Serbian supporters of independence and union, Yugoslavs, and communists) drew inspiration from his works. In the twenty-first century, his role and significance is subjected to a critical evaluation, primarily due to political correctness.

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.

In September 1925, in the course of a three-day ceremony sponsored and attended by Yugoslavia's King Alexander and Queen Maria, Njegoš's remains were reburied in the chapel atop Mount Lovćen, dedicated to his predecessor. The tone of the event, which was described extensively in the Yugoslav press, bordered on a piety more appropriate for the treatment of a saint than a writer. King Aleksandar stated that Njegoš is "the immortal apostle and herald of the unity of our people."

Saint Sava is factually a saint: the Serbian Orthodox Church venerates him on January 27th. His feast day is also observed by Greeks, Bulgarians, Romanians, and Russians. Numerous toponyms and other testimonies, preserved to this day, convincingly speak of the prevalence of the cult of Saint Sava. Saint Sava is the protector of the Serb people: he is venerated as a protector of churches, families, schools, and artisans. The largest Orthodox church in Serbia and the region, in Belgrade, is named after Saint Sava.