

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

Literary culture: Ukrainian

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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.)

Taras Shevchenko (1814–1861)

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”).

Ivan Kotliarevskyi (1769–1838) [2]

Ivan Franko (1856–1916) [4]

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.”)

Taras Shevchenko (1814–1861); the notion of national poet is very common [5].

Since the appearance of the collection *Kobzar* (The Bard; 1840), Shevchenko has been perceived as a “people’s poet,” and this concept dominated his reception during the nineteenth century, in particular in the estimations of leading critics that substantiated the notion of a “people’s poet”: Nikolay Kostomarov (1817–1885), Panteleimon Kulish (1819–1897), and Borys Hrinchenko (1863–1910). In the 1880s, Ivan Franko (1856–1916) and Mykhailo Drahomanov (1841–1895) emphasized the national content of creativity and the very figure of Shevchenko. The concept of “national poet” was established with the growth of national liberation struggles in the early twentieth century and it became widespread in the 1960s and during the period of independence starting in the 1990s.

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.)

Ivan Kotliarevsky (1769–1838); 1830s; 1900s;

Panteleimon Kulish (1819–1897) 1920s.

Recognition of Kotliarevsky as a popular poet was due to the popularity of the travesty poem *Eneida*, initially distributed as handwritten copies (the first three parts were published in St. Petersburg in 1798, the complete edition was posthumously published in 1842). In 1838, Taras Shevchenko wrote the poem “Na vichnu pam' yat' Kotlyarevs' komu” (To the Eternal Memory of Kotlyarevsky). In 1903, a monument to Kotlyarevsky (Leonid Pozen was the creator of the project) was opened in Poltava. The leading Ukrainian writers used this event to demonstrate national consciousness. In 1847, in the preface to the incomplete

edition of *Kobzar*, Taras Shevchenko redefined the role of Kotliarevsky and defined *Eneida* as “a laugh at the Moscow manner.”

Panteleimon Kulish, a colleague and coeval of Shevchenko, participated in consecrating him as a people's poet (in the article “Choho stoit Shevchenko, yak narodnyy poet” ‘How Does Shevchenko Stand as a People's Poet’, 1861). After the death of Shevchenko, Kulish sharply rethought the role of Shevchenko and called him a “peasants’ poet,” interpreting himself as a bearer of culture. In the 1920s, critics close to modernism (Mykhailo Rudnytsky and Mykola Zerov) tended to canonize Kulish as a national poet, decentering Shevchenko's role.

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”).*

1840: Release of the poetry collection *Kobzar* [5];

1857–1858: Shevchenko's return from exile [2];

1861: Death and burial of the poet, reburial of his remains in Ukraine [4];

1911–1914: Commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of Shevchenko's death and hundredth anniversary of his birth [1];

2014: Commemoration of the two-hundredth anniversary of Shevchenko's birth, confirmation of the cult of Shevchenko at the Maidan [4].

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).*

Panteleimon Kulish (1819–1897); 1860s;

Ivan Franko (1856–1916); writer and literary scholar; 1880s.

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.*

Sporadically, Shevchenko's works were included in school grammars and readings from the 1880s, but they were much more actively used after the revolution of 1905. Shevchenko's legacy began to be studied in schools systematically after the proclamation of the Ukrainian People's Republic in 1917.

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”).*

Ivan Kotliarevskyi (1769–1838) [2.5]

Ivan Franko (1856–1916), writer [4.5]

Lesya Ukrainka (1871–1913), writer [3]

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”).*

Mykola Lysenko (1842–1912), 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”).*

Yaroslav the Wise (c. 980–1054), grand prince [3]

Mykhailo Hrushevsky (1866–1934), historian and statesman [4]

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

The appearance of the poetry collection *Kobzar* in 1840 contained only eight works, some of which touched on the historical past of the Ukrainian people (e.g., the poems “Ivan Pidkova” ‘Ivan Horseshoe’ and “Tarasova nich” ‘Taras’s Night’), and made a huge impression on his Ukrainian audience. The subsistence of Ukrainian literature was largely discussed at that time. The prophetic tone of Shevchenko’s later poetry, especially the period of “three years” (1843–1845), convinced many of the inevitability of the coming rebirth of Ukraine. According to Nikolay Kostomarov (1817–1885), this poetry gave the impression of hearing real people from Ukraine, as though they were speaking through the poems. Although Shevchenko’s poetry seemed simple and accessible to the widest audience, it had a hidden symbolic depth at the same time. His works contain cultural and political symbols, Shevchenko appealed to national and world history in his poetry, and prompted an understanding of the tragic fate of Ukraine. Shevchenko’s poetry actually created its readers, the modern Ukrainian nation.

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

In the conditions of statelessness and enslavement of Ukraine, the understanding of Taras Shevchenko as a national poet was the key to the revival of the Ukrainian people and the foundation on which the national identity was built.

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.*

Taras Shevchenko’s work was clearly distinguished by its artistic level and innovation among his coevals and followers. Nikolay Kostomarov and Panteleimon Kulish did not equal Shevchenko in their artistic talent. The symbolic autobiography, reflected in the works of Shevchenko, in combination with the life of the poet in St. Petersburg and later in exile, intensified the romantic pathos and the national myth-making power of his work. The semi-colonial position of Ukraine in the Russian Empire and the ban on printing works in Ukrainian contributed to the fact that Ukrainian writers regarded themselves as one family, where the symbolic father played a central sacral role. This role was delegated to Shevchenko, although there were also attempts to desacralize the poet in the 1870s (by Kulish) and the 1910s (by the futurist Mikhail Semenko). Shevchenko’s poetry has gained enormous popularity among the broadest strata of the nation and has not yet diminished. His poetic work is most recognizable in Ukraine.

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.*

Shevchenko's figure in Ukraine and in the diaspora, especially in religious communities, is almost canonized, and some religious and public figures, and even scholars, literally interpret him as a saint, insisting on the absolute perfection of the poet. Accordingly, *Kobzar* (understood as the whole of his poetic creativity) is considered a prophecy, a spiritual message, a sort of holy text of the Ukrainians. There is an unwritten ban on addressing episodes from Shevchenko's life or features of his character that do not fit into the scheme of holiness.