

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

Literary culture: Bulgarian

Contributor: Dimitar Kambourov, associate professor

Institution: Sofia University / Trinity College Dublin

Date: September 28th, 2016

Place: Dublin

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.)

Hristo Botev (1848–1876)

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 Vazov (1850–1921) [3]

Peyo Yavorov (1878–1914) [3]

Nikola Vapzarov (1909–1942) [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.”)

Hristo Botev (1848–1876); the notion of national poet is very common [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.)

Ivan Vazov (1850–1921); he has been considered the “people’s poet” (*narodn poet*); 1890s.

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”).

1888: Critical text edition: Zahari Stoyanov, *Hristo Botyov, opit za biografiya* (Hristo Botyov, A Biographical Attempt) [5];

1881: Critical text edition: Ivan Vazov, *Neotdavna* (Recently) [4];

1891: Critical text edition: Ivan Vazov, *Hristo Botyov, A Critical Study* [3];

1910: Critical text edition: Krastyo Krastev, *Poeticheskite zaveti na Botyova* (Botev’s Poetic Covenants) [3];

1890, May 27th: the unveiling of Botev’s first monument in Vratza [5];

1884: Commemorating June 2nd as Botev Day, first in Vratza and Plovdiv, as an official national holiday since 1901 [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).*

1887–1894: Zahari Stoyanov, Stefan Stambolov, Ivan Vazov, Dimitar Blagoev, Pencho Slaveykov, Krastyo Krastev, Nikola Obretenov, Stambolov's government;

1934: Kimon Georgiev's quasi-fascist government after a successful coup d'état renamed Orhanie to Botevgrad;

1944–1989: The communist regime.

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.*

They entered the education system in the 1890s and have stayed there with an excessive presence up to the present day [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").*

Ivan Vazov (1850–1922); poet and outstanding fiction writer [4]

Elin Pelin (1877–1949); prose writer and poet [3]

Yordan Iovkov (1880–1937); prose writer and playwright [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").*

Pancho Vladigerov (1899–1978); composer [3]

Vladimir Dimitrov (a.k.a. Maistora; 1872–1960); painter [3]

Nikolay Gyaurov (1929–2004); opera singer [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").*

Vassil Levski (1832–1873); revolutionary [9]

Stefan Stambolov (1853–1894); revolutionary, politician, and statesman [4]

Georgi Rakovski (1821–1867); revolutionary and poet [3]

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

With only twenty poems, Botev managed to articulate through an ultimately original and unique, yet typical and intimate language the most fundamental issues of the time for the majority of the Bulgarian people. He was not only asking questions and formulating problems; he was pointing to solutions: revolutions that were national, social, and individual. He was extreme and radical, yet totally captivating. Still, he remained a pure ideal, and as ultimate transcendence he became an ethical and spiritual distant horizon through his poetry, a utopian other whose unachievable sublime is but an orientation, instance, gaze, and measure from beyond. Botev also died in a battle, and thus signed as authentic everything he had ever written and predicted.

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

Botev was the beginning of all beginnings and the end of all ends in Bulgarian literature, yet despite the attempts to tame and domesticate him he managed to become a transcendental instance of authority. Therefore he is not the people's poet as was Vazov, but the National Poet, the one and only—and all the other great poets after him were making their claims by addressing, exchanging replicas, and rewriting his poetry. In fact the only way to be recognized in the Bulgarian poetic canon has been to be in dialogue with Botev up to now. Perhaps only Atanas Dalchev, Boris Hristov, and Georgi Gospodinov have managed to avoid Botev's shadow.

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.*

Botev was such an exception as a voice, power, radicalism, extremism, moral rigor, non-compromise, and claim for clear awareness of what is to be done that there was no place for competitors. Botev was a small thinker but a huge poet and a visionary as such: he envisioned, and to some extent programmed, the national issues to come, up to the present times, his controversies included. In fact, his ambiguities, which he solved by arranging his heroic death, became the very epitome of what it is to be an absolute Bulgarian. Because most people do not want to be an example or a limit, Botev is a transcendental orientation, and a sublime horizon that does not mingle into our everyday routine, but has to do with our moral stature, dignity, honor, and self-respect. Whenever Bulgarians were able to overcome their provincial subservience and behave as immortal individuals or collective creatures, it was under the auspices of Botev.

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.*

No, I do not see such relations or associations. Bulgarians are generally Caesaropapists and have always treated the church as a state or national leverage rather than as an alternative. Attempts were made to recognize Levski as a saint, but the official church never recognized these acts. It would have been even more impossible with Botev, whose greatness has nothing to do with basic Christian values and ideals because his main agenda was the three modern freedoms: national, social, and individual. Bulgarian saints are predictable, non-controversial, simple-minded people that served the Church and a moral agenda. Botev's ethical stance is non-religious, emancipatory, modern, and secular to the utmost.