

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

Literary culture: Montenegrin

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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.)

Petar II Petrović Njegoš (1813–1851)

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”).

No.

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.”)

Petar II Petrović Njegoš (1813–1851); 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.)

Nikola I Petrović Njegoš (1841–1921); 1880s.

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 Montenegrin–Ottoman War (1876–1878) to the Balkan wars (1911–1912): Njegoš becomes an unofficial “bible” for illiterate Montenegrin people; he teaches them how to fight for freedom; his verses are sung accompanied by the traditional instrument, the *gusle*;

1925: The chapel on Mount Lovćen, where he was buried, is erected;

1947: The centennial of *The Mountain Wreath* (*Gorski vijenac*);

1974: The opening of the mausoleum by the author Ivan Meštrović on Mount Lovćen, and a fiery controversy preceding the event;

1950s and 1960s: His collected and selected works are published;

1990s: Massive use and abuse in propaganda that accompanied the wars in the Balkans.

His current stature is [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).*

1920s: Posthumous proclamation of Njegoš as a prophet of Yugoslav national identity;

1950s: Canonization of Njegoš as a classic Yugoslav author;

1990s: Establishment of Njegoš as a symbol of the Serbs and Orthodoxy, and denial of his belonging to the Montenegrin people, which is denied as a nation if one reads his works as historical documents rather than literary fiction.

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.*

Since the 1950s; even before the disintegration of Yugoslavia, in some parts of the country rumors spread about Njegoš's inappropriateness for schools if the ideas of his poem *The Mountain Wreath (Gorski vijenac)* are interpreted outside the context of the circumstances in which the work was created.

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”).*

Mihailo Lalić (1914–1992); prose writer [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”).*

No.

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”).*

Petar I Petrović Njegoš (1748–1830); ruler and Orthodox saint [5]

Nikola Petrović Njegoš (1841–1921); ruler [5]

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

Njegoš encoded in his literary work the basic national characteristics and mentality of the Montenegrin people, and he founded their standard language and literature.

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

No relevant comments.

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.*

No relevant comments.

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.*

Among such events there is the failed attempt of the Serbian Orthodox Church to proclaim Njegoš a saint, the failed attempt of the government of Montenegro to proclaim Njegoš's birthday Montenegrin Culture Day, and misunderstandings about taking Njegoš out of the Montenegrin context and establishing him as a symbol of Serbian identity.