

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

Literary culture: Slovak

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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.)

Pavol Országh (pen name Hviezdoslav; 1849–1921)

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”).

Ján Hollý (1785–1849) [3]

Ján Kollár (1793–1852) [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.”)

Pavol Országh (pen name Hviezdoslav; 1849–1921). 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.)

Svetozár Hurban (pen name Vajanský; 1847–1916); 1890s; he was involved in the conflict with the circle around the magazine *Hlas* (The Voice), which promoted the new national program and criticized the passive policy of the *Slovenská národná strana* (Slovak National Party, also represented by Hurban).

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”).

1880–1890s: Editions of Hviezdoslav’s most famous works that became part of Slovak heritage [5]

1918: Hviezdoslav leads the Slovak delegation in Prague at the celebrations of the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the Czech National Theater [1]

1919: Hviezdoslav becomes a member of the “revolutionary” National Assembly (i.e., parliament), a symbol of Czechoslovak cultural policy [4]

1892–1931: Complete edition of his poetic work in fifteen volumes [5]

1921: Hviezdoslav’s funeral has a nationwide response [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).*

1919: Hviezdoslav becomes one of the honorary presidents of *Matica slovenská* (the Slovak Cultural Society) in Martin

1919: Czechoslovak president Tomáš G. Masaryk appoints him a member of the National Assembly (i.e., parliament)

1937: A large memorial of Hviezdoslav is erected on *Hviezdoslavovo náměstí* (Hviezdoslav Square) in Bratislava

1949: *Hviezdoslavova knižnica* (the Hviezdoslav Library) is published to mark the hundredth anniversary of the poet's birth

1954: The Hviezdoslav Literary Museum is established in Dolní Kubín

1955–2007: The Hviezdoslav Theater in Bratislava serves as the seat of the Slovak National Theater

1973: Stanislav Šmatlák publishes a four-volume selection of Hviezdoslav's works in *Zlatý fond slovenské literatury* (the Golden Fund of Slovak Literature)

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.*

Hviezdoslav's literary work became widely accepted in literature textbooks, especially after the birth of Czechoslovakia in 1918, and in Czech readers compiled by the Czech literary historians Jaroslav Vlček and Albert Pražák. As one of the key authors of Slovak literature, Hviezdoslav has been constantly present in Slovak readers 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”).*

Martin Kukučín (1860–1928), prose writer [8]

Jozef Gregor Tajovský (1874–1940), playwright and prose writer [8]

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”).*

Martin Benka (1888–1971), painter [5]

Eugen Suchoň (1908–1993), composer [4]

Dušan Samuel Jurkovič (1868–1847), architect [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”).*

Ludovít Štúr (1815–1856), national awakener, politician, codifier of written Slovak [9]
Milan Rastislav Štefánik (1880–1919), astronomer, politician, aviator [9]
Alexander Dubček (1921–1992), politician [8]

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

By the end of his life, Hviezdoslav had become a classic of Slovak poetry, creating an aesthetic canon of his generation that was later followed by other authors. He ideally embodied the type of a socially engaged poet that, through his work, promotes social and moral “renewal of the nation” in the spiritual sense. His works linked national problems with the individual sphere of the lyrical subject. With Hviezdoslav’s work, Slovak literature met the standards of world literature, and the “high” style of his poetry has cultivated Slovak poetic language. With his translations of Shakespeare, Goethe, Schiller, Pushkin, Lermontov, Mickiewicz, Petőfi, and others, he enriched the system of Slovak literature. Hviezdoslav is now regarded as the “most universal” spirit of Slovak literature and a symbol of national culture. In his work, he completed two basic developmental lines of Slovak literature, Romantic and Realistic, which he synthesized into an autonomous whole.

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

Hviezdoslav retained his role as a national poet after his death and never became a subject of severe poetic or political criticism by the following generations. The reasons can be found in the “high” style of his language, the wide variety of genres, and the versatility of his artistic ideas, which, through his democratic and humanistic subtext, captured the social and cultural mobility of Slovak national society.

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.*

The position of the national poet in the Slovak cultural tradition was essentially and unanimously occupied by Hviezdoslav. The reasons can be found in his linguistic, stylistic, and genre originality, his unique poetics (harmonic unity of idea and artistic expression), and his fertile thinking (respect for nature as well as for the social and moral problems of his epoch). The timeless value of his work rests in the thematic connection of intimate and family motifs with national and global issues.

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.*

Hviezdoslav and his key works were highly appreciated during the poet’s lifetime (regardless of generational differences) and he was becoming a living “bard” of contemporary Slovak literature. The proofs of this are the publication of his collected works already in 1892 and the fact that the first Czechoslovak president, Tomáš G. Masaryk, highlighted him as a Slovak symbol of joint Czechoslovak culture.