

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

Literary culture: Polish

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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.)

Adam Mickiewicz (1798–1855)

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”).

Jan Kochanowski (1530–1584) [4.5]

Juliusz Słowacki (1809–1849) [4.5]

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.”)

Adam Mickiewicz (1798–1855) [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.)

Juliusz Słowacki (1809–1849): 1890s; marginalized at the beginning;

Zygmunt Krasiński (1812–1859): 1880s; only slightly marginalized in the late twentieth century. Together with Mickiewicz, “the first and the greatest,” they are considered to be the “three bards” (*trzej wieszczowie*).

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”).

1870–1890s: Proliferation of secondary literature about Mickiewicz, both scholarly and popular;

1890: Reburial in the Royal Cathedral at Wawel (Krakow);

1898: Centennial of birth (with erection of monuments in Warsaw and Krakow).

Current stature could be assessed as [3].

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).*

1860s–1890s: Poles in emigration (Paris);

Władysław Mickiewicz (1838–1926); the poet's son and biographer; "keeper of the family flame";

Prussian Partition (1855–1859);

Polish citizens; the committee for the Mickiewicz monument in Poznań (1859).

Austrian Partition (1870s–1890s):

Józef Ignacy Kraszewski (1812–1887); writer;

Count Stanisław Tarnowski (1837–1917); literary scholar, representative of conservatives;

Józef Treściak (1841–1923); literary scholar;

Józef Kallenbach (1861–1921); literary scholar;

Stanisław Wyspiański (1869–1907); playwright;

Mikołaj Zyblikiewicz (1823–1887); mayor of Krakow;

Father Stanisław Stojałowski (1845–1911); Catholic populist;

Czytelnia Akademicka (the Academic Reading Room, a student organization);

Galician Conservatives, Galician Socialists, Galician Democrats, Galician Populists.

Russian partition (1890s):

Socialists (PPS);

National Democrats;

Henryk Sienkiewicz (1846–1916); writer;

Maria Konopnicka (1842–1910); writer.

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.*

Mickiewicz's works became fully integrated into the educational system of all three partitions as early as the 1830s. Henceforth, those of his works that were to be privileged or suppressed depended on the vagaries of censorship in the respective partitions (the Russian one being the most restrictive, and the Austrian the least). In addition, the period after 1863 was also marked by a reassessment of the canon as a consequence of changes in both politics and aesthetic sensibility [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").*

Aleksander Fredro (1793–1876); playwright [4]

Henryk Sienkiewicz (1846–1916); novelist; Nobel laureate (1905) [4.9]

Stanisław Wyspiański (1869–1907); playwright [4]

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”).

Frederyk Chopin (1810–1849); composer [4,5]

Jan Matejko (1838–1893); historical painter [3]

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”).

Casimir the Great (1310–1370); king [3]

Nicholas Copernicus (1473–1543); astronomer [4]

Tadeusz Kościuszko (1746–1817); military leader [6]

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

Mickiewicz is the voice of modern Polish national consciousness. He is the author of a number of works in which he addresses the fate of his nation through transformation in his own symbolic autobiography as lover, political exile, and émigré. As the author of *Dziady* (Forefathers' Eve), part 3 (1832), he in effect “sacralized” (compensated for) Poland's trauma after the last partition (1795) and the failed uprising of 1830 by projecting its predicament as a pivotal moment in God's plan: Poland was crucified (martyred) by the partitioning powers in order to rise again as the embodiment of freedom for the salvation of Europe (messianism); in doing so, Mickiewicz spoke with the voice of a bard, a poet-prophet (*wieszcz*). Two years later, he authored *Pan Tadeusz* (Sir Thaddeus), considered to be Poland's national epic, a work that articulates the transition of old gentry Poland into a modern national collective and, by the same token, chronicles (and thus preserves a record of) a vanishing way of life while offering a subjunctive glimpse of its future.

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

It was because the disappearance of Poland as a political nation, together with the institutions that constituted it, coincided with, on the one hand, the emergence of the Herderian notion of the nation, wherein the role of language and linguistic artefacts is decisive; and, on the other, with the image of the poet as one that transforms word (imagination) into deed (Byron-cum-Napoleon).

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.

As Poland's first Romantic poet, and then as the author of a series of symbolically resonant works, Mickiewicz was recognized as “the first and the greatest.” As such, he assumed pride of place in a “trinity” of romantic poets (the *trzej wieszcz* ‘three bards’) that also consisted of Juliusz Słowacki (1809–1849) and Zygmunt Krasiński (1812–1859).

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.

There are a number of posthumous poems that depict Mickiewicz as a martyr and plead for his intercession on behalf of his nation. One critic (1866) imagines him as the Christ-figure in Raphael's *Transfiguration* (with Słowacki and Krasiński as the two apostles). In 1890, his remains (relics) were translated with great ceremony from Paris to Krakow, where he was interred in a crypt in the Royal Cathedral at Wawel. These are just a few among many.