

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

Literary culture: Dutch

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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.)

Joost van den Vondel (1587–1679)

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”).

Pieter Corneliszoon Hooft (1580–1647) [3]

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.”)

Joost van den Vondel (1587–1679) [2]. The notion of “national poet” is not widespread. Vondel is traditionally known as “The Prince of Poets”. His canonicity is more a matter of celebrity and fame because Baroque poetry is no longer really read, enjoyed, or even taught in schools.

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.)

Pieter Corneliszoon Hooft (1580–1647), very prominent in the seventeenth century

Jacob Cats (1577–1660), very prominent in the eighteenth century, overtaken by Vondel around 1800

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”)

Vondel was always canonical as a city playwright of Amsterdam. His history play *Gijsbrecht van Amstel* was annually performed in the city theatre from the mid-seventeenth century on. His canonicity as a poet was fixed in the period 1850–1870. Current state vis-à-vis heyday: [1].

1850-1859: new multi-volume edition of his complete works by the prominent man of letters Jacob van Lennep;

1867: major monument in the Amsterdam park named after him;

Twentieth century: repeatedly placed on Dutch banknotes and postage stamps.

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).*

Vondel in the course of his life converted from Protestantism to Catholicism. He was a figure of religious consensus but most fervently claimed and cherished by the Catholic part of the population.

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.*

When literary history came to be taught in Dutch schools, at the Gymnasium level, Vondel was a large part of it, in particular portions of his Amsterdam city play *Gijsbrecht van Amstel*, and certain choruses extolling marital fidelity became declamation pieces known to all. This was mainly so in the period 1890–1950 [4]; he became outmoded afterwards [2].

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”).*

Anne Frank (1929–1945), diarist, war martyr [9]

Johan Huizinga (1872–1945), historian, cultural critic [8]

Desiderius Erasmus (1469–1536), philosopher, humanist [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”).*

Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–1669), painter [9]

Johannes Vermeer (1632–1675), painter [9]

Vincent van Gogh (1853–1890), painter [8]

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”).*

Willem “the Silent”, Prince of Orange (1533–1584), leader of the revolt against Spain [9]

Michiel de Ruyter (1607–1676), admiral, naval hero [9]

Hugo Grotius (1583–1645), statesman, legal philosopher [5]

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

His international stature, as a baroque playwright; his importance in Amsterdam city culture later

upgraded to the level of the national capital; the nineteenth-century rediscovery and cult of the “Golden Age” (the mid-seventeenth century period).

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

Poets do not “articulate” the nation in the Dutch literary tradition, which antedates modern nation-formation. Those that do in the nineteenth or early twentieth century are considered epigonal and only of limited historical interest. The literary themes that are important for success are moral, not national-political. Also, poetry is not the paramount literary genre since Romanticism was an unimportant period. The Baroque (drama) and Realism (novel) were more prominent.

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.*

Amsterdam in the mid-seventeenth century was going through a period of intellectual ferment (“Golden Age”) with many talents inspiring each other.

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.*

More so in the obvious case of Anne Frank – virgin martyr, pilgrimages to her shrine (the Anne Frank House), reliques, moral mission named after her (Anne Frank Foundation against antisemitism and racism), exegetic quarrels over her writings. But here her cult is that of a person as documented in her diary, not so much in the literary achievement of merit of the diary.