

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

Literary culture: Russian

Contributor: Maya Kucherskaya, full professor

Institution: National Research University Higher School of Economics

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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.)

Alexander Pushkin (1799–1837)

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”).

Mikhail Lermontov (1814–1841) [4]

Nikolay Nekrasov (1821–1877) [3]

Sergei Yesenin (1895–1925) [2]

Joseph Brodsky (1940–1996) [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.”)

Alexander Pushkin (1799–1837). The notion of national poet was very common in the Soviet period; now this term is used less, but is still popular [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.)

Nikolay Nekrasov, the period of the struggle for the title of the greatest poet is 1850s–1870s.

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”).

Current stature: [5]. Key events in Pushkin’s canonization were the following:

1836: the publication of Pushkin’s poem “Monument” (“Ja pamiatnik sebe vozdvig nerukotvornyj...”);

1837: death; the poem by Lermontov “Pogib poet, nevol’nik chesti ...”, the note of Vladimir Odoyevsky “Solnce russkoj poezii zakatilos”;

1880: the Pushkin monument (by Alexander Opekushin) is unveiled in the center of Moscow; during the event, famous Russian writers such as Turgenev and Dostoevsky hold speeches in honor of Pushkin;

1937: 100th anniversary of Puškin's death; crucial textual edition; a huge number of events across the country (special editions, concerts, theater plays, films, pictures, monuments).

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).*

In the Soviet period, it was the state (Ministry of culture).

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.*

Pushkin's poetry was already included in school readers in the beginning of 1830s. In 1930s, his works were fully integrated into the education system.

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”).*

Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910), writer [5]

Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821–1881), writer [5]

Alexander Ostrovsky (1823–1886), playwright [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”).*

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840–1893), composer [5]

Dmitrii Shostakovich (1906–1975), composer [4]

Mikhail Glinka (1804–1857), composer [4]

Sergey Rahmaninov (1873–1843), composer [2]

Valentin Serov (1865–1911), painter [5]

Ilya Repin (1844–1930), painter [5]

Kazimir Malevich (1879–1935), painter [5]

Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1944), painter [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”).*

Joseph Stalin (1878–1953) [7]

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

Pushkin updated and largely created a new literary language which has been used till the present day. He also formulated important notions about poetry, logic of Russian history, and the role of mercy in history and society.

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

The concept of a national poet was useful in the formation of the Russian national and then Soviet national and then again Russian national myth – in other words, it helped the Russian people to represent themselves as a nation.

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.*

Russian national myth was connected with the imperial myth. The imperial myth usually operates with single concepts, such as “the greatest poet”, “the greatest composer” etc. For this reason, one single poet is more preferable.

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.*

Yes, of course, one can find portraits and busts of classical national poets in all schools. On the days of the memory of national poets, spontaneous readings of their poetry can be held near their monuments (for example, near Pushkin's and Mayakovsky's monuments in Moscow). However, the grave of Joseph Brodsky in Venice is covered by paper notes, letters to the poet, poems, little stones and his favorite cigarettes Camel.