

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

Literary culture: Scottish

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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.)

Robert Burns (1759–1796)

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”).

George Gordon, Lord Byron (1788–1824) [5]

Many others at [2–3]

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.”)

Robert Burns (1759–1796); yes [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.)

No rival.

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”).

Possibly 1800–1820: first Burns Supper (1801); Haydn’s extensive settings of Burns’s songs (1802); Beethoven’s settings (1814); Suard’s entry of Burns in *La Bibliographie universelle* (1812); Burns Monument (1814–1818); but Pleyel and Kozeluh had set Burns in Austrian Empire prior to 1800 and he was already translated into German, Russian and Dutch by then.

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).

The development of Burns Country by the 1830s; the adoption of Burns by European patriots such as Kossuth and by Lincoln and others in the US; the 1000 centenary Burns Suppers ... the list is too long. Burns was a global figure by mid-nineteenth century and has now more statues across the world than any

secular figure except Queen Victoria and Christopher Columbus. The 1880 John Steill statue in Central Park in New York is only one piece of evidence for his reach. For his nineteenth-century canonization in statuary and material culture in more detail, see:

<https://www.gla.ac.uk/schools/critical/research/researchcentresandnetworks/robertburnsstudies/ourresearch/burns/>.

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.*

Possibly 1920s, but the lack of a national curriculum in Scotland makes it difficult to say. Begins to be forced out of curriculum in 1950s as Scottish literature in general suffers across the UK. Burns revival in universities begins ca. 2003–2007, following my ‘Robert Burns and British Poetry’ British Academy lecture, in schools still a work in progress.

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”).*

Sir Walter Scott (1771–1832), writer [6]

Adam Smith (1723–1790), philosopher, economist [6]

David Hume (1711–1776), philosopher [5]

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”).*

Robert Adam (1728–1792), architect [2]

Charles Rennie Mackintosh, (1868–1928), architect, designer [3]

Sir Henry Raeburn (1756–1823), painter [2]

There are quite a number of others at this level.

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”).*

William Wallace (1270–1305), knight, patriotic leader [5]

Robert I, the Bruce (1274–1329), king [7]

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

Burns appeared to be able to write Romantic progressive radical poetry and to be a voice for the autochthonous traditional song and music of Scotland; for the Germans, he combined the virtues of Goethe and the Grimm brothers; for Americans, he was a spiritual American in Europe; for Russian and Chinese Communists, a representative of the radicalized peasantry, a patriot kulak, who showed

advanced proletarian consciousness in a pre-industrial age; in the British Empire, he was the badge of Scotland abroad and a sign of the meritocracy of its education system and culture.

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

See 11.

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.*

See 11.

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.*

The early establishment of a commemorative meal which is now shared by nine million annually across dozens of countries is itself interesting; Burns memorabilia and faux authentic 'made from the wood of relics in the nineteenth century are in many respects such as to make him a 'saint' of Protestant Scotland. The cult of his lover 'Highland Mary' is also very suggestive in this regard in nineteenth century.