Name, Hero, Icon

Approaches to Semiotics
105

Mouton de Gruyter
Berlin · New York

Name, Hero, Icon

Semiotics of Nationalism
through Heroic Biography

by
Anna Makolkin

To the memory of my father, Vasily Makolkin

Contents

The effects which are produced by Names on the imagination is one of the most extraordinary illusions of mankind. Favour or disappointment has been conceded as the name of the claimant has affected us; and the accidental affinity of coincidence of a name, connected with ridicule or hatred, with pleasure or disgust, have evaporated like magic. But the facts connected with this subject will show how this prejudice branches out, and what variety of forms it assumes.

Benjamin Disraeli, *Influence of Names*.

Preface

The main focus of this project, when it was undertaken in 1987, was on **name** as **sign** and **hero** as an **icon**. Although the study was in the area of social semiotics it then seemed of little relevance to the popular production of signs.

Since the completion of the work in 1988, dramatic changes have occurred in the world, particularly in Eastern Europe. Through them one may observe the unpredictable power of signs and symbols and their profound impact on the collective psyche. Masses of people are involved in the destruction of the old icons and the formation of the new ones. The old are swept away by the diabolic power of the name-signs and their magic. Politicians and economists, historians and social analysts will have to determine later the extent of meaning in this not purely onomastic development.

Here our semiotic lenses are focussed on the role of the symbolic, on the power of the **name-sign**, and on the display of its semiotic constant. In this respect all recent events may be viewed as a semiotic parade where signs manifest their semiotic power and stability. To paraphrase Paul Bouissac, if historians are interested in variables, semioticians, as much as anthropologists "are concerned with constants" (Bouissac, 1976: 152).

The worship of heroes, their names and their biographies are such "constants," universal signs manifesting similar semiotic qualities regardless of geography, history, politics or desired myth.

Therefore, the study of a particular Ukrainian sign, Taras Shevchenko (1814-1861), is as meaningful as any other in the "Empire of signs", using Roland Barthes' expression. Shevchenko, the subject of this study, is a sign of **high semiotic intensity** by which we may reexamine the underestimated power of the heroic and symbolic.

Another semiotic constant is the paradoxical genre of biography, the universally loved and hated. Biography is present in all traditions, known to all readers, used and abused equally by heroes and victims, but as a form of discourse and its constant it remains unexplored. The biographical imperative of most discursive efforts poses numerous questions. We have attempted to address some of them by applying some of the familiar signs and symbols to the no less familiar genre.

Toronto, Ontario, 1991
A. Makolkin

Acknowledgments

Note on Translation and Transliteration

Quotations are presented in their original script and wording. Unless indicated other-wise, the author translated all: Russian, Ukrainian, French and Italian quotations.

Very few cases of transliteration followed accepted types. Transliteration of Russian words was done according to J. Thomas Shaw's System II (Shaw, 1967). To Ukrainian material Modified Library of Congress type was applied. Transliterations by other authors have preserved other versions.

Chapter One

Introducing a name-sign

> Signs are things which stand for other
> things, or to add a different dimension to
> the matter, anything that can be made to
> stand for something.
>
> Arthur Asa Berger,
> *Signs in Contemporary Culture.*

1. 1. Shevchenko as a Ukrainian Sign

Much as Shakespeare is the symbol of English culture, and Molière is recognized as
the French sign and Dante as Italian, Shevchenko is the Ukrainian sign. He is the sym-
bol of Ukrainian national cohesiveness that binds together all Ukrainians, as well as
introducing them to all non-Ukrainians. 'Shevchenko' is the name-metaphor which
encodes the entire history of the nation for all Ukrainians in past, present and future. It
also means the Ukraine, Ukrainians and as the name abbreviates, simplifies and
reduces the notion of Ukraine and Ukrainian culture to a single sign.

Clarence Manning believes that in "every land and every literature there is an
author who is the outstanding incarnation of the national genius".[1] This one man, cho-
sen by the people, is entrusted with the mission of elevating his nation among other
nations or becoming a national sign. In the case of the Ukrainian nation, such a man is
Taras Shevchenko who became a national symbol.

George Grabowicz views Shevchenko not only as a national poet-symbol, but as a
myth-maker as well, and the inspiration for collective myth-making of which only a
national poet is capable:[2]

> The impact of Taras Shevchenko on modern Ukrainian con-
> sciousness can hardly be overstated: he is Bard and Prophet, the
> inspired voice of his people, and the spiritual father of the reborn
> Ukrainian nation (1).

It is not just Shevchenko's poetry, but also his popularity and especially the myth around his name that attracts the community. The deeds of the hero are long forgotten but his name is remembered. It means various things to various Ukrainians and non-Ukrainians. Christians want to see Shevchenko as another prophet, another Christ or a model Christian. The dreamers of an independent Ukrainian state saw Shevchenko as a fighter for a free and independent Ukraine, Marxists regarded him as an ally, a revolutionary, and a representative of the oppressed. The poet's name acquired different meanings in the process of the evolution of the name-metaphor.

George Luckyj summarizes this thought:[3]

> He has been acclaimed as a prophet of national liberation, a
> rebel in the cause of social justice, a peasant seeker for God's
> truth, an atheist, and many other things, so that often his signifi-
> cance as a poet has been lost in the ideological struggle about
> him (X)

In pre-1917 Russia Shevchenko was a symbol of a "natural genius", a raw peasant talent, and a Russian cultural product. After 1917 and the formation of the Ukrainian Socialist Republic, the Soviet critics adjusted Shevchenko's name and works to the propagandistic needs of the new utopian state. Leonid Novychenko gives a portrait-cliche which exemplifies the popular cultural stereotype that is associated with Shevchenko's name in Soviet critical literature:[4]

> The national poet of the Ukraine, a revolutionary fighter and
> thinker, he was an associate and friend of many leading figures
> in the country's liberation movement. Through his voice the
> Ukrainian people began to speak, for in the rich Ukrainian lan-
> guage Shevchenko was able to reflect his people's character, his-
> tory, traditions, and aspirations for the future(8).

Leonid Pliushch, a former Soviet citizen and a Ukrainian cultural figure in exile, provides a critical view of the established Soviet stereotype around Shevchenko's name:[5]

> In contemporary Soviet scholarship Shevchenko is portrayed
> 'simply' as an atheist, a revolutionary democrat, an internation-

alist Russophile. Whatever does not fit into this scheme is either passed over in silence, interpreted, or falsified 'in the Party spirit,' indulgently overlooked as error deriving from the lack of education which he, a peasant, received or from his romantic idealization of the Ukrainian past, errors, which, as it were, his nationalist friends inspired and his Russian friends of the revolutionary democratic persuasion helped him to overcome (454-5).

As the onomastic anti-thesis Western scholars created other names around Shevchenko, the Ukrainian national poet. The names "atheist" and "revolutionary democrat" were discarded, "Russophile" was vehemently denounced; the naming process continued and still is going on. The critic Bohdan Rubchak describes the intensity of this naming process and the popularity Shevchenko's name has acquired:[6]

There is hardly another poet in world literature with more monuments to his honor (in every major city of the Ukraine, in Moscow, Leningrad, Paris, Rome, Washington, Cleveland, Winnipeg, Toronto, Buenos Aires, two in the State of New York, or with more towns, streets, city squares, schools, and museums named after him (4).

Rubchak illustrates how the name of a national hero has to be reintroduced periodically in order to be saved from oblivion. To stay popular a name must be constantly recalled. Each street or town in Shevchenko's name is another reminder of the hero's name, as well of the onomastic anxiety of the group who fears that it may be forgotten otherwise. With the ever increasing distance from the poet's lifetime (1814-61), Shevchenko's name has to be constantly reintroduced to each new generation of Ukrainians and non-Ukrainians. Each new generation has to be re-acquainted with the national hero. Mere naming after the poet intensifies his popularity, but is semiotically less effective than a heroic biography or panegyric which becomes increasingly helpful in remembering not only the heroic name, but also the hero himself. If naming a street or a city after a hero reminds us of a person, the heroic biography of an individual explains why he is to be remembered. Thus, maintaining the name-symbol in the collective memory of a group becomes the function of any heroic biography.

The heroic biography of a poet-national symbol, which re-introduces the name-icon by redescribing his life and work in every new biographical text, is a cultural

institution in itself worthy of an independent examination. The purpose of the present study lies only in analyzing the problem of the name-symbol in the course of rewriting the heroic biography of a major national poet. Shevchenko's status as a national Ukrainian poet, his enormous popularity and cultural significance, makes him a classical national hero and his name a classical example of a name-symbol, name-sign and heroic icon.

Shevchenko, the Ukrainian national writer, became a special field of literary criticism, a separate branch called Shevchenkoniana. Shevchenko, the biographical subject, contributed to an entire new epoch in the history of Ukrainian biography and added another chapter to the general history of heroic biography. He entered the pantheon of national heroes next to other heroes and saints. His name would never have become a common metaphor and part of a special shared code without the deliberate technique of transforming the real concrete name of a real historical figure into a **name-symbol**. Thus, the theme of the present study is the close analysis of the **naming technique** or the **phenomenon of onomopoesis** in heroic biography. The central and permanent motif of the ongoing biographical discourse about Shevchenko is the name of the hero-poet and his role for national unity. In creating the name-metaphor, authors, throughout more than a century of rewriting the poet's life, anticipated the collective desire of the national group and prevalent group mythologies. There is a nearly organic unity between the myth, mythical power and the heroic name. The national myth nourishes the **onomopoesis** while persistent naming of the hero supports and reinforces group feelings about him. However, the name of a hero has to undergo a process of gradual semantic intensification in order to erect the **name-monument**. What are the means of this gradual onomopoesis and how is this name-icon created? These are the main theoretical questions of this study. To answer these questions the present author has established a diachronical field of observation following the progression of Shevchenko's name in the earlier biographies written immediately after his death, and up to the most recent reinterpretations of the poet's life and work. Rewriting the subject's life for nearly two centuries, biographers had to repeat not only the same biographical plot from the moment of birth to death, but also to follow the same progression of a name from an ordinary one to the heroic name-symbol.[7] The space between the name "Taras Shevchenko" and the name-sign "Shevchenko – Ukrainian Shakespeare" has proven to be filled with a large variety of onomastic choices.

Considering the role of the subject as a poet and national Ukrainian hero, it would have been an unrealistic task to examine the entire biographical legacy about Shevchenko. Nonetheless, the biographical diachrony from V. Maslov (1874) to L.

Novychenko (1983) is filled with numerous elaborate onomastic structures which all sufficiently explain how onomopoetic language functions and how the name of a man is transformed into a name-icon.[8] The name has to pass a certain test in heroic acclamation to be unconditionally accepted as iconic; it must undergo several stages prior to its final heroic transformation. Initially, when the name of a hero is introduced as an emulative model, a biographer has to convince his readers of the subject's heroic worth. The strategy is always the same, that is, the onomopoesis or name-construction has a constant specific quality. It gradually intensifies the name: the sign acquires its gradual semiotic strength, gradually achieving the highest degree of semiotic expression through an elaborately arranged process. A biographer builds gradually the onomastic pyramid as the monument to his hero. All these verbal monuments created at various times by different biographers do preserve their particular visions of the heroic subject while sharing numerous common discursive features.

For instance, a non-Ukrainian author perceives a Ukrainian national hero in a slightly different fashion: Émile Durand (1876), William Morfill (1880), Alfred Jensen (1916) Lauro Mainardi (1933) and Clarence Manning (1945). Some of them, contributing mere biographical sketches, nonetheless mediate the view of the "Other".[9] The heroic pathos of a panegyric written from the "outside" differs in intensity and quality from a heroic portrayal written from "inside" the group, that is by a Ukrainian biographer writing about a Ukrainian national hero. An extreme panegyric may be expected only from a fellow compatriot sharing the same cultural heritage. Nonetheless, the panegyric of the "Other" equally contributes to the construction of the onomastic pyramid or monument to the hero.

The time span (1874-1983) between all these various biographies permits one to capture various points of view and different popular beliefs which influenced the establishing of the name-symbol. His name was repeated in English, French, German, Russian and Italian versions of his life-story. It was being methodically drilled into the collective memory of various national groups for nearly two centuries. The corpus of selected texts permits the reader to follow the progression of the heroic name-icon in the time and cultural space of the 19th and 20th centuries. Thus, biographies by M. Chaly (1882), V. Maslov (1874), O. Ohonovs'ky (1889) contrast with the later redescriptions of Shevchenko's life undertaken by V. Kranikhfeld (1914), and D. Doroshenko (1936).[10] Natalia Kholodna's version of the same heroic life (1955) represents an original feminine vision of the poet-symbol, as well as summarizing some popular attitudes towards the national hero-poet.[11] Her biography complements P. Zaitsev's (1955), also written outside the Ukraine, but differs in style and degree of

praise.[12] Biographies by Maxim Ryl's'kyi and Alexander Deutch (1964) and L. Novychenko (1983) exemplify the treatment of the Ukrainian national hero in the Soviet period.[13] Konstantin Paustovsky's biographical attempt dating back to 1938 represents a very sophisticated narration in Aesopian language, and is the best artistic production despite ruthless censorship and persecutions during the Stalin era.[14] The biographical texts analyzed do not claim to be the complete corpus of Shevchenko's biographies. Neither does this author intend to evaluate their historical merits. Selected in diachronical fashion, from 1874 till 1983, they merely serve as discursive data for the examination of onomopoesis in biography.

1. 2. Names, heroes and onomastic mythology

Names and the process of naming have mystified people from time immemorial. People were always puzzled or frightened by various names. The ancient Greek philosophers recognized the semiotic power of names and, even then, already viewed them as cognitive tools in mastering reality and obtaining further knowledge. Through Plato modern readers may find that Socrates presumably regarded a name "as an instrument of teaching and of separating reality, as a shuttle is an instrument of separating the web" (23).[15] It becomes obvious that even ancient thinkers agreed on the ubiquity of onomastic power. They recognized names as phenomena important both to Greeks and other nations. In Plato's *Cratylus* Socrates is quoted as having said that there is a kind of inherent correctness in names, which is the same for all men, 'both Greeks and barbarians' (7).[16] By "inherent correctness" he may have meant the power of names to distinguish objects, people and ideas, as well as to measure and compare them with one another, and to provoke certain emotional states.

   Socrates, for example, was fascinated by the collective traditional admiration of heroes and tried to uncover the etymology of the name "hero". He traced it to the original "love" (eros), giving the following semantic explanation to Hermogenes:

> Why, they were all born because a god fell in love with mortal
> woman, or a mortal man with a goddess. Now if you consider
> the word "hero" also in the old Attic pronunciation, you will
> understand better; for that will show you that it has been only
> slightly altered from the name of love (Eros), the source from
> which the heroes spring; to make a name for them (57).

Thus, even the ancient thinkers tried connecting the name "hero" with the emotional state "love", summarizing the traditional psychological impact of a name upon individuals and entire groups. Their, a somewhat naive semantics registers the semiotic effect of the name "hero" which is usually associated with communal worshipping, ideal behavior and the ultimate heroic goal. For the ancient philosophers, "hero" was a name that carried clear and powerful etymological exegesis in itself; "hero" was a sign of an exceptional status:

$$Hero = Eros + God$$

The name was a sign of a special social role. An individual who was named "hero" was naturally loved and revered like a god. Since gods were immortal and eternally loved, anybody ultimately named a "hero" was worthy of eternal remembrance and reverence. The ancient Greeks acknowledged the semi-human and semi-legendary qualities of their heroes and demystified the very process of naming. At various times different people deserved the name "hero". If initially it was a warrior, or a ruler, later it became a philosopher, an artist or a musician. In Plato's time the "race of orators and sophists" were already named "heroes" (57). Montaigne would later expose the falsehood of names and denounce onomastic mythology. For him, a name was a mere arbitrary sign. "Is it Peter or William? And what is that but a word for all mouths? or three or four dashes of a pen (316)."[17] He mocked the onomastic obsession of his countrymen, as well as their custom of giving names by using the name of one's "Towne, Mannor, Hamlet or Lordship". Nonetheless, despite his attitude to names, Montaigne acknowledged the mystic power of a heroic name and recognized its onomastic tyranny, even long after the death of the hero whose name is not only remembered, but still may have the most powerful impact upon the living:[18]

> Those that survive are tickled with the pleasure of these words, and by them solicited with jealousie and desire, do presently without consideration transmit by fantasie this their proper motion of revenge unto the deceased (317).

The French philosopher ends his essay on names by quoting Juvenal and implicitly acknowledging the "desire for a heroic name, and the overpowerful thirst to be praised". Montaigne agrees with the ancient poet that heroic names do indeed possess mysterious power to alter human behavior.

John Stuart Mill was very skeptical about the power of names. He regarded them as discursive auxiliaries or markers that help the speaker to distinguish individuals:[19]

> When we name a child by the name Paul, or a dog by the name
> Caesar, these names are simply marks used to enable those indi-
> viduals to be made subjects of discourse (3).

Mill overlooked the possibility of onomastic subversion in the very name "Caesar". In the case of a dog, there could have been a definite ironic statement made by the own-ers whose pet, perhaps, shares some qualities of the deceased Roman Emperor. If the animal's intelligence was to be emphasized then the name "Caesar" could be regarded as a heroic pet's name. On the other hand, the act of naming could become a carniva-lesque gesture of giving the opposite name to the unintelligent dog. In any case, Mill fails to notice the metaphoric quality of a name which has more than a purely func-tional role of a signal. In other instances, Mill contradicts his own theory of names and admits that names are not pure communicative signals, but they also carry the atti-tudes of the name-giver. Much like his predecessors, Mill records the other function of a name. Names are more than signals, forms of addressing a person or designating a place; they may carry many other associations. Mill comes to understand that various circumstances require different names. For instance, a man could be named "Sophroniscus" and could be called by other names, such as "a man, a Greek, an Athenian, a sculptor, an old man, an honest man, a brave man" (38). Consequently, Mill comes to the conclusion that a name may express the belief and attitude of one or many individuals and thus be connotative and denotative as well. Mill's theory of names largely echoes Thomas Hobbes's ideas expressed in *Leviathan*, but is more advanced than Hobbes's onomastic theory which fails to acknowledge the onomastic context.[20]

> For names are not intended only to make the hearer conceive
> what we conceive, but also to inform him what we believe (24).

Twentieth-century scholars would later draw attention to the onomastic context and power of a name. Otto Jespersen and John Carroll revived the ancient concept of ono-mastic power and pointed out the drawbacks of Mill's and Hobbes's arguments.[21] Arguing with Locke and Hobbes, the two linguists maintain that names are to be treat-ed beyond their isolated dictionary designation. They indicate that even place names

can be metaphorical, for instance, Rome: Rome in Italy, and Rome in North America. Jespersen pays attention to the manner of using names, the reaction to a name. The most convincing argument against Hobbes' simplified onomastics is found when Jespersen presents the phenomenon of a proper name being transformed into a common name or **onomastic metamorphosis**. Quoting Oscar Wilde, he writes that: "Every great man nowadays has his disciples, and it is always Judas who writes the biography," aiming at a "transition to speaking of a Judas" (66).[22] This example illustrates the transformation of a proper name - marker into a common name-symbol which derives its origins from the Biblical plot, but owes its onomastic progression to the collective experience which causes the name to evolve further.

Francois Rigolot reports that the stability of a proper name is a rather recent phenomenon, dating back to the civic and religious laws of the 16th century.[23] He indicates that prior to that period even proper names were subject to changes, names were unstable and dependent upon numerous social factors. He regards names as indicators of the social vicissitudes. For instance, the phenomenon of the elevation of so-called humble names was intertwined with societal changes, or the onomastic shift could record a historically significant transformation. He regards names as indicators of changing beliefs and firmly believes in their ideological deconstructive power:[24]

> L'onomastique se présente comme déconstruction idéologique
> dans la mesure où elle permet de mettre en relief un renverse-
> ment des valeurs tenues (93).

> [Onomastics appears similar to ideological deconstruction in
> terms of emphasizing the debunking of cherished values.]

All in all, the onomastic authorities suggest taking into account the social implications of a given proper name and examining the process of naming and renaming, since name, hero and myth may exert such enormous power in any culture and at any time.

1. 3. Freudian onomastic mythology

Freud, with his peculiar fascination with pathology, paid attention to a less common attitude regarding names.[25] He focussed on forgetting rather than remembering proper names. The inability to recall a proper name was viewed by him as a sign of mental

distress, a physical illness or a manifestation of neurosis. Freud distinguished forget-
fulness brought on by fatigue or distraction from the intentional blocking of certain
proper names. Occasionally this **onomastic amnesia** would be partial or a mere slip
of the tongue, and, describing it not without a sense of humor, Freud would bring in a
literary example:[26]

> Lichtenberg writes in his witty and satirical *Notes*, "He always
> read 'Agamemnon' for "angenommen" (verb meaning to take
> for granted), so deeply versed was he in Homer (37).

Aside from ignorance, Freud would explain the phenomenon of forgetting a name as
an intentional action:[27]

> If anyone forgets an otherwise familiar proper name and has dif-
> ficulty retaining it in his memory - even with an effort - it is not
> hard to guess that he has something against the owner of the
> name and does not like to think of him (48).

The intentional forgetting of proper names was attributed to an aversion on the part
of memory against recalling the pain if it were recalled (67).

This attempt to block unpleasant memories and associations was perceived as a
defence mechanism, a protective "flight of the mind towards avoidance of pain". And
ultimately, Freud connected some cases of forgetting names or **onomastic amnesia**
with "the chain of associations of a more intimate nature"(67).[28] He also dealt with
name distortion which he regarded as a form of psychological abuse (40).[29]

It remains a paradoxical fact that Freud, whose own name became legendary and
will, perhaps, always be remembered, never devoted any attention to a much more
prevalent state of common attachment to certain names. The onomastic neurosis or
obsession with some heroic names was never explained by the modern "god of psy-
chology and psychiatry". People, in fact, would prefer rather to remember than forget
names. By the end of the 20th century, all that we now call culture may be symbolical-
ly represented by a series of names which embody art, science, politics, music, litera-
ture or philosophy: Pythagoras and Sappho, Socrates and Homer, Plato and Aristotle,
Christ and Confucius, Dante and Shakespeare, Darwin and Marx, Napoleon and Peter
the Great, Columbus and Freud. The collective human memory attempts to store all
this multitude of heroic names, each day adding more and more new names to the

endless list of names to be remembered.

1. 4. Names as graphic signs

Throughout history, names established themselves as an auxiliary code when they began to function as additional transcribers of the natural language. All that natural language expresses through the complexity of grammar, syntax, and extensive discursive means, the names-signs, or the **onomastic code**, reduce to simple, clear and graphic signals which effortlessly and most effectively translate reality. Names have become passwords to other words, special bridges connecting multitudes of linguistic structures. London and Thames, Paris and Seine, Moscow and Kremlin, Rome and Vatican immediately introduce the variety of cultures, places, histories and people in the most economical and graphic way. They summarize geographical, economic, political and historical reality to a large segment of Europeans and non-Europeans. They symbolize the Western World.

As the Eiffel Tower is a universal symbol of Paris, a "strictly Parisian statement" "Shakespeare" is a symbol of English culture (Barthes, 1982:34).[30] It signifies exactly in the same way as Dante or Confucius, Alexander of Macedon or Napoleon, Homer or Omar Khayyam, Hammurabi or Christ. All of these names stand for much larger worlds which could eventually become less familiar than the names describing them. With the flow of time, names acquire even more semiotic significance since they provide continuity in time and space. Even without having read Shakespeare, anybody in any country will always perceive his name as a sign of English culture. Dante will be always associated with Italy. Plato and Aristotle will always represent Greece. Pyramids and the Great Wall, the Kremlin and the Vatican possess exactly the same semiotic power to signal reality. Names of places and famous people or heroes belong to the graphic or "major signs" which are universally understood. They are signs which stand for more complex worlds that are simplified and made familiar through the effective **onomastic code**.

Along with place-names the names of people possess the same onomastic effectiveness or **semiotic valence**. Much like place-names the names of famous· people may be divided into two major groups: **names of limited circulation**, and **names of universal circulation**. **Names of limited circulation** are those remembered by the educated elite, the property of so-called high culture, while **names of universal circulation** may be regarded as the common property of high and popular culture. If names

of Agamemnon or Sappho, Virgil or Juvenal, Copernicus or Chaucer, Sofia Kovalewsky or Pasteur, Adam Smith or Mendeleev are well-known to historians of literature and science, they are not the most familiar signs for large masses of people.[31] In fact, major brand names of consumer goods are more familiar in popular culture. Thanks to mass advertising and mass media, Coca-Cola or Maxwell House, Ford or Hershey, Chanel or Levi, Macdonald or Kodak nowadays signify more than the cultural icons of the past, and are universal graphic signs as opposed to the names of 16th or 19th century writers or scientists.

Nonetheless, the names of the producers of national culture or national heroes have remained the **universal signs of high semiotic power**. All the icons of national cultures have ousted most of new names. All signs that carry national specificity, mythology and uniqueness happen to be the most iconic signs. They possess extreme semiotic power as the most visible and familiar signals of reality. Some national symbols never leave national boundaries, remaining locked inside geographical national frontiers while others transgress them, becoming universal graphic signs. Such are Shakespeare and Molière, Cervantes and Dante, Garcia Lorca and Dostoevsky, Mickiewicz and Ibsen, Tolstoy and Shevchenko along with numerous other names of national heroes-writers who are associated with a particular nation, language and tradition, and who became their singular symbols, their national signs. Names of writers and poets are relatively recent signs which established themselves in the universal "empire of signs". They appeared only after the formation of national literary languages and literatures, that is, after the writers and poets had become the national heroes.