



Mikhail Lermontov
A Hero of Our Time

A new translation by Nicolas Pasternak Slater

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Translated by

NICOLAS PASTERNAK SLATER

With an Introduction and Notes by



OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

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Great Clarendon Street, Oxford OX2 6DP
United Kingdom

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First published as an Oxford World's Classics paperback 2013

Impression: 1

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
Data available

ISBN 978-0-19-965268-6

Printed in Great Britain by
Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

A HERO OF OUR TIME

MIKHAIL YUREVICH LERMONTOV was born in Moscow in 1814 into the provincial nobility. His early years were spent on his wealthy grandmother's country estate, where he was tutored in English, French, and German. Although Lermontov revealed a precocious literary ability, fluently writing lyric and narrative poetry from his early teens, he chose to pursue a military career after a short period of study at Moscow University. In 1837 his elegy on the death of Alexander Pushkin, the victim of a duel, circulated in manuscript. It brought him notoriety and a period of exile in Transcaucasia, where he remained on active service and acquitted himself with distinction. Despite official disfavour, his poems continued to appear in literary journals, and in 1839 and 1840 he published three of the five prose tales that formed the core of *A Hero of Our Time*. The novel itself appeared in 1840, and was an instant classic that has never gone out of fashion. Lermontov was allowed to return to St Petersburg, but his prickly behaviour in society drew unfavourable attention and prolonged his ostracism to the Caucasus. In his last two years he composed a handful of lyrics and narrative verse that are among the indisputable masterpieces of Russian poetry, including *The Demon*, which was banned for its questionable religious views until 1860 and later became the subject of Anton Rubinstein's opera of 1871. A true Romantic in the Byronic manner, Lermontov maintained aristocratic ideals of artistic and personal liberty that brought him repeatedly into collision with the authorities and individuals who offended his codes of behaviour. In July 1841 he quarrelled with a fellow army officer, N. S. Martynov, and was killed in the subsequent duel. He was buried in Pyatigorsk, and his remains were reburied in 1842 on the family estate at Tarkhany in the province of Penza in the Russian heartland.

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INTRODUCTION

Readers who do not wish to learn details of the plot are advised to treat the Introduction as an Afterword.

A Hero of Our Time is a novel for a frustrated age. Contemporary hopes for reform of Russia's autocracy and serf economy, originally conceived in the 'beautiful beginning' of Alexander I's reign in the early 1800s, were never realized. In the 1810s the Napoleonic Wars saw a nation resurgent but heroic ideals shattered. If the colossus of the age could self-destruct, who could possibly believe that Great Men made history? In the Russian capital St Petersburg, the belief that brave individuals might implement constitutional reform was exposed as futile on Senate Square in 1825 when the Decembrist revolt failed. Nicholas I, the new Tsar whose regime had been contested, investigated hundreds of well-born young members of the educated gentry, leading to the exile of many and execution of five prominent figures, among them the poet Konstantin Ryleev, author of stirring historical poems based on national themes. Further harsh constraints on liberties of expression and thought ensued, enforcing a social compact between bourgeois conventionality and political compliance. Writers such as Alexander Pushkin, Petr Viazemsky, Evgeny Baratynsky, and Nikolai Gogol, having assimilated ideals of artistic creativity from Germany, France, and England, brought to their national literature a new spirit of innovation and freedom that encountered stiff social and political resistance. Pushkin, the most gifted man of letters in the period, had made strides in establishing the professional status of the writer in Russia, yet censorship and state surveillance dogged him. Writers and rulers would coexist uneasily over the course of the nineteenth century in Russia.

By the time Mikhail Lermontov (1814-41) began his short adult life, frustrated political and social ideals were sublimated into lofty conceptualizing about Nature and History. Writers, philosophers, and most especially poets, while not expected to change the political reality, were credited with special powers of insight into the workings of these processes and intuitive knowledge of Russia's eventual destiny. In Russia, the Hegelians and Schellingians who set the tone

in the 1840s saw History as an abstract scheme played out on an in-human plane. Nikolai Stankevich (1813–41), a philosopher and leading light among Muscovite intellectuals including the critic Vissarion Belinsky, the socialist thinker and memoirist Alexander Herzen, and the political theorist Mikhail Bakunin, had created a circle of thinkers at least temporarily persuaded and comforted by his vision of aesthetic humanism in which beauty and love offered the keys to self-perfection. In the world of Lermontov's writings, however, the metaphysical is the personal. While the workings of the same History may underpin Lermontov's universe, the reality he represents focuses on the vivid response of individuals alienated from nature, nation, family, and one another. Lermontov embraced the hopeful illusions and disenchantments at the heart of Romanticism. The heroes of his narrative verse and the exquisitely melodious lyrics he wrote in his final year are inspired by a lofty ideal of absolute freedom, and regularly suffer defeat as they struggle to become one with the larger forces of history, society, and nature and find themselves cast out, often fatally. *A Hero of Our Time* creates situations in which accident, convention, and human spite continually mock individual efforts to manage their world, and unplanned outcomes strip away pretensions to heroism, a heroism that can be laudable but also uncomfortably close to cruelty and unfeeling. The novel pleased Vissarion Belinsky, the philosophically minded literary critic, because he felt it penetrated the ordered appearance of Russian life. The close representation of manners and speech was only incidental, since realism, in his view, aimed to capture an essential truth of the spirit of the age—in this case a spirit defined by individual paralysis and loss of self-belief caused by absolutism and surrender to an inexorable History. Critics across the political spectrum, and well into the 1890s, were both baffled and galvanized by the hero's unspoken but conceivable role as a symbol of political revolt. To some radicals, Lermontov and his hero, Pechorin, looked like close ancestors and kindred spirits. In the 1860s the radical critic N. A. Dobroliubov, impatient about Russian despotism, famously asked, 'When will the real day come?' The yearning for change experienced by the so-called 'men of the 1860s' grew out of the frustration felt by the previous generation. A number of prominent pundits responded to Pechorin's nihilism and fatalism by parodying him as the sort of anti-hero Russian fiction could do better without if literature were to change minds and hearts.

More generally, and outside the ranks of the radical and populist critics, the novel quickly achieved the status of a true classic of Russian prose. Novelists of the calibre of Turgenev and Goncharov cast some of their characters in the mould of Pechorin and paid tribute to Lermontov's mastery of shorter forms of fiction. In his critical notes 'Better Late than Never' (1879), Goncharov placed Lermontov on a par with Gogol as true heirs to Pushkin, praising him for the 'boldness' and 'novelty' of his ideas and flair—praise mirroring Gogol's own pronouncement that with Lermontov the spirit of the Pushkinian age survived. Tolstoy deemed the novel in its entirety to be perfect, and emulated the orientalist subject matter in works he wrote in the 1850s about the Caucasus. Dostoevsky seized on the psychological profile of Pechorin, identifying in him a prototype for Stavrogin, the haunting and terrifying hero of *The Devils* (1872), whose brooding mentality looks back to Pechorin's obsessive psychology. At the same time, the ethnographic richness of *A Hero of Our Time*, its critique of colonialism, its appreciation of indigenous custom and celebration of tribal bravery (as opposed to the cruelty of soldiering), continue to reverberate in later fictions, from Tolstoy's late unexpected masterpiece 'Hadji Murat' (1910) to Andrei Bitov's *The Caucasian Captive* or Vladimir Makanin's *Underground, or A Hero of Our Time*, a finalist for the Russian Booker prize in 1999. Lermontov's narrative ambiguity, intricate structure, and biting wit made him look modern in his time and compellingly post-modern in our own.

Exile and the Cult of the South

In 1838, when Lermontov began *A Hero of Our Time*, his only completed novel, he was not quite twenty-four. An age intolerant of dissent was made for outcasts and exiles, groups to which Lermontov himself belonged. An immensely productive poet even from his earliest youth, Lermontov cultivated the themes of lovelorn isolation, metaphysical yearning, disillusion, and transcendent hope, melodiously expressed, albeit with little of Pushkin's self-irony. His youthful obsession with the figure of the fallen angel, whether Milton's Lucifer or Lord Byron's Cain, haunted him through multiple revisions of his poetic masterpiece *The Demon*, first drafted in 1828 and completed in 1840. He discovered his voice in the great elegy he wrote on the news

that Pushkin had died in a duel. 'The Death of the Poet', seventy-two lines of iambs, the metre of political diatribe, excoriated the regime as worthless, and accused society of hypocrisy for holding Pushkin 'a prisoner of honour'. Pushkin had been an unwilling courtier, and Lermontov's aim may have been narrowly to castigate a section of high society that reacted with indifference to the tragedy and even questioned whether Pushkin's assailant could be tried in Russia since he was a foreigner. Within days after Lermontov incautiously recited the poem in his army barracks, tens of thousands of handwritten copies were in circulation. This work has come to be regarded historically as a declaration of the abiding civic mission of the poet to speak the truth and defend what Pushkin called 'mercy for the fallen'. Circumstance dictated that Lermontov's poem could only be read as a subversive political statement.

Lermontov's exile in 1837 to the Caucasus, a sentence extended for bad behaviour in 1840, suited him perfectly. Accidents of biography—his mother's early death, separation from a beloved father, an isolated upbringing at the hands of a wealthy and doting grandmother—shaped a personality marked from an early age by contradictory urges to belong and to remain aloof, to feel love and to scorn; and his early letters bear witness to a susceptibility to disillusion that he poured into a vast amount of juvenile verse. With the examples of Byron and Pushkin behind him, Lermontov viewed his period in Transcaucasia as a necessary price to pay for defending literature as the right of the poet, and privilege of the aristocrat, to speak one's mind. Exile might break a man, but it could also make his reputation for posterity. Exile meant a chance to outdo Pushkin at least in one respect: the older poet witnessed combat only as observer, as he recorded in his *Journey to Arzrum* (1836; also translated in this edition), whereas Lermontov was on active duty despite his demotion. And exile to the south, whether it took the form of Lord Byron's Greek freedom-fighting or Pushkin's years in the Crimean peninsula (1821–4), was proven to be a fruitful rite of passage. Fond memories of a boyhood trip to the region coalesced in Lermontov with a larger spirit of escapism that gripped educated society in the period. In his mature poetry and self-mythology, the theme of childhood as an ideal realm of innocence and security achieved a near-Wordsworthian status. Exile gave Lermontov the opportunity to match a literary and metaphysical vision with experience and achieve authenticity, that

essential Romantic touchstone. Yet notwithstanding the irresistible allure, Lermontov understood the pitfalls, to reputation and talent, of Byronic emulation. In 1830 Pushkin wittily but defensively brushed off detractors who saw him as a Byronic clone, and repositioned himself with his readership by repudiating Byron's blatant autobiographical exhibitionism. Lermontov took a leaf out of Pushkin's book and asserted that readers would understand originality as an expression of unique feeling captured in words rather than as a transcript of lived experience. His short poem 'No, I am not Byron' (1832) identified the 'mysteries' of the soul and innermost thoughts as the source of genius. His early interest in the psychology of feeling, also treated in some of his narrative monologues, would find its optimal expression in the diary form he created in 1840 for Pechorin, the hero of his novel.

Military expansion southwards had been a Russian policy goal since the 1770s, when Catherine the Great's Crimean wars curtailed the Ottomans and secured access to ports on the Black Sea. From the reign of Alexander I in 1801, incursions escalated into a steady state of campaigning against local tribes, leading to open warfare in the 1820s. Thanks to its trading emporia and viticulture, and because of its position at a flashpoint of the Persian, Ottoman, and Russian empires, the region was the Russian equivalent of the fabled land of Cockaigne. The beauty of Transcaucasia was more awesome and sublime than that of the Crimea, readily absorbed by the Romantic imagination into a paradigm of primal civilization worthy of Rousseau. Poets during the reign of Catherine the Great dressed up imperialist policy in the tropes of a classical golden age. Viewed as the land of Colchis with its Golden Fleece, cradle of myriad peoples such as the Cimmerians, regarded as proto-Slavs, the Crimea captivated the popular imagination. From antiquity until the Enlightenment, cartographers regularly marked the boundary between Europe and Asia at the Don or Volga rivers. Empire had erased a distinct boundary between East and West, incorporating the region as part of Russia's political geography and therefore both European and 'other'. Orientalism was multidirectional and multicultural, and the Caucasus conjured up visions of eastern decadence and the wild freedom of the south. Resorts sprang up, attracting waves of tourists and adventurers to the mineral waters and spectacular landscapes located in thrilling proximity to the theatre of war.

Literature kept pace with reality. The cult of the south that developed in Russia from the early nineteenth century had given the Caucasus irresistible appeal to travellers and writers. In leaving behind the cities, lakes, and plains of the north travellers celebrated the awesome peaks, rivers and tribal settlements of the Caucasus. In the epilogue to *The Prisoner of the Caucasus*, a work that enjoyed continuous popularity in the 1820s, Pushkin's jingoistic rhetoric and praise of General Alexey Ermolov had shocked his more liberal-minded friends. On the young Pushkin's mental map, Russia represented a European civilizing presence pitted against the barbarism of the Ottoman East. He soon outgrew that view, and the *Journey to Arzrum* eschews imperial rhetoric, and de-romanticizes the landscape. By and large, however, Pushkin's contribution lay more in promoting a Romantic image rather than deflating the cult. From Pushkin to Tolstoy—at the beginning of his career in *The Cossacks* (1863), and in the story 'Hadji Murat' (1911) at the end—the Caucasus constituted a world of contradictions marked by resistance and colonization, the leisure of spa culture and the thrill of campaigning, the violence of warfare and tribal mores and the ritualized violence of the European duel. Over the 1830s the meaning of the Caucasus coalesced into a set of ideas, images, and motifs (a clear example of what Bakhtin calls a 'chronotope'), and Susan Layton has described the mutations of the idea over decades as tourist manuals, guidebooks, and ethnographic studies produced for the growing numbers of visitors inspired by the cult of the south.¹ No writer was more adept at selling the whole package of machismo, patriotic gore, tribal violence, and sublime landscapes than Alexander Bestuzhev, whose pen-name 'Marlinsky' became a byword for a literary craze in the 1830s. His fictions revelled in the drama and unbridled wildness of the landscape as much as in the violence of military conflict. 'Marlinskyism' crystallized a set of cultural trends to which Lermontov responded.

The State and Forms of Russian Fiction

In Russia of the 1830s, the gradual growth of an urban readership stimulated the production of popular fiction, leading to the serialization

¹ Susan Layton, *Russian Literature and Empire: Conquest of the Caucasus from Pushkin to Tolstoy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

of novels, translation of foreign fiction, and an explosive growth in literary journals. Home-grown writers of quality were slow to make a mark as novelists. Whilst Nikolai Gogol, in an article of 1836 ('On the Direction of our Journalistic Literature'), hailed a new wave of prose writers, the best, such as Pushkin, Gogol himself, Alexander Herzen ('The Notes of a Young Man'), and Prince Odoevsky excelled in shorter forms. The particular innovation of Pushkin and Gogol, as well as Marlinsky, was to create cycles of tales that were either inter-related through the presence of a single unifying narrator or common subject matter, precedents that informed Lermontov's approach to his own novel. Pushkin composed his first novel, *Eugene Onegin* (1831), in verse form, evidence of a playful sense that the genre was open to experimentation, and, secondarily, an ingenious concession to the fact that his poetic facility was greater than his stamina in prose. The reception of Pushkin's *Tales of Belkin* (1831), a cycle of separate stories allegedly told to a single copyist, illustrates how a generational sea-change in literary taste affected careers and reputation. Whilst this work flopped with a mass readership, it earned kudos from high-minded critics, who appreciated his brilliant use of irony and pastiche despite the lack of convincing plots, character development, and genuine psychology. The novelist Lermontov engaged dynamically with Pushkin's experiments in forms of storytelling.

A Hero of Our Time is constructed of five self-contained tales that form a loosely articulated plot around the protagonist, the ensign Grigory Pechorin, a figure who, according to the authorial preface, is so bad that his existence defies belief, even though, as the author then professes, he is all too real. This authorial preface sets the tone of disillusion by excoriating the falsity of society and insincere civility, casting Pechorin as a synthetic portrait of a rotten age but at the same time ridiculing a readership inclined to see literature as a form of moral instruction. Part I is set in the Caucasus. The opening story ('Bela'), containing some of Lermontov's finest pages of landscape description, is recounted from the perspective of an unnamed first-person narrator on military service in the region. This traveller befriends an old soldier named Maxim Maximich, who narrates in the first tale the tragic romance of Pechorin and the beautiful Tatar maiden Bela who, desired by the horse-smuggler Kazbich, is caught in a love triangle. To the devastation of Pechorin, who gives every appearance of being genuinely in love, her brother fatally betrays her.

The second tale is the story of Maxim Maximich, the charmingly old-bufferish storyteller of the previous chapter. An unspecified period, possibly about five years, has transpired since the narrator and old soldier parted when they meet again fortuitously—and are joined by Pechorin himself, who is journeying in the Caucasus on his way to Persia. For the first time the narrator observes Pechorin in the flesh. The portrait, a combination of glamour and epicene seediness, is a stunning example of Lermontov's ability to externalize character. In this episode Pechorin's callous treatment of the sentimental Maxim Maximich prompts the intense dislike of the narrator. His hostility spills over into the famous 'Foreword' of Part II, disclosing the news that Pechorin died in Persia. Having come into possession of the late Pechorin's papers, and to satisfy his own literary ambitions, he explains his decision to publish extracts from Pechorin's literary estate, the rest of which he has destroyed. In effect, he surrenders control of the story told in the first two instalments to secondary narrators, including Pechorin himself, who recounts his own story in the third and fourth instalments, 'Taman' and 'Princess Mary', while the fifth and final episode, 'The Fatalist', seemingly emanates from Pechorin and another unspecified speaker. In 'Taman' (named after a deserted spot on the Crimean coast) Pechorin becomes embroiled with a band of smugglers, including a temptress who tries to do him in. 'Princess Mary', the next episode, moves to the spa town of Pyatigorsk, a fashionable Caucasian destination for Russians in the period. Although in effect a society tale, the narrator is Pechorin himself, who records in his diary the history of his infatuation with Mary, a fashionable girl, that is complicated, on the one hand, by the reappearance of Pechorin's former lover, Vera, and on the other hand, by the officer Grushnitsky, another of Mary's suitors. The two soldiers settle their rivalry in a duel. More violence follows in the final episode of the novel, 'The Fatalist', which brings us back full circle to the Caucasian setting and world of the battalion in which listlessness leads to conflict, a hostage situation, and random death.

The structure of the novel, with its use of multiple viewpoints and editorial interpolation, artfully frames a hero whose enigmatic identity and possibly unfathomable motives have always invited intense speculation. Three of the stories, 'Bela' (the first in the completed novel), 'The Fatalist' (the final entry), and 'Taman' (the third), appeared in different issues of the literary journal *Notes of the*

Fatherland in 1839; their linkages of character and place follow the example of both Pushkin's fictional cycle and Gogol's acclaimed tales, *Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka*. When the full sequence appeared as a novel in May 1840, Lermontov created its final form by splitting the work into two parts differentiated by narrator. No contemporary reader would have failed to appreciate how much Lermontov's understanding of narrative and form owed to Pushkin, especially *Eugene Onegin*. This work begins with a flashback, omits stanzas, skips lines, disorders sequences, and generally follows the example of Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* out of a sense of fun and conviction that fictions do well to lay bare their own artificiality and that doses of unreality accentuate the *vraisemblable* when it occurs. Similarly, Lermontov disturbs the linear development of the hero by convoluting the order of the plot, since the five constituent episodes do not follow the chronological sequence. The unchronological ordering increases uncertainty, because readers might reassess Pechorin's behaviour based on information disclosed in later parts of the narrative about earlier events. By reason of deliberate inconsistencies and gaps, Pushkin's novel evades closure, suggesting that his characters will have rich afterlives beyond the artificial limits of the novel. Lermontov, by contrast, kills off the hero just before the second part in which, paradoxically, he comes to life as a narrator. The disclosure of Pechorin's death stands also as an ironic condition of how we understand the situation of a hero who meditates on accident and chance. And the fact that Pechorin's diary rehearses events before they happen, creating an ironic gap between expectation and outcome, deflates the drama much as Pushkin does in *The Tales of Belkin*, which skewers most Romantic conventions and posturing.

Characterization in *A Hero of Our Time* oscillates between the highly individual and stock representation. Without exception, the women conform to stereotypes that enable plot but remain devoid of nuance. The 'speaking names' of the three principal females are a case in point. Bela, evoking the Italian for 'beautiful', reprises the odalisque of harem fiction, first made popular in France; she is in the tradition of Thomas Moore's *Lalla Rookh* and the doomed, self-sacrificing beauty of Pushkin's *The Prisoner of the Caucasus*. Vera, named for fidelity to Pechorin, might be the twin of Donna Elvira from Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, a paragon of futile devotion to a seducer. The 'proper mermaid' of 'Taman', who emerges from the

sea, resembles the siren figure Undine or Loreley, who in the Slavic lands metamorphosed into the figure of the Rusalka. While Princess Mary is a more rounded characterization than Bela, partly because she comes to us as Pechorin describes her in his diary in 'real time', she bears a close kinship to the generic ingénue of the society tale, tempted by an illicit passion that brings on melodramatic symptoms of yearning only just restrained by respectability. Aglaya in Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* (1868) will be a mature example of the type nearly thirty years later. 'Princess Mary' also draws heavily on the conventions of the society tale, a popular sub-genre, for its love-intrigue and settings, and Lermontov injects elements of dramatic effect. In this vein, Lermontov reworks the topos of the song recital, following the example of Marlinsky, who was particularly adept at staging such interludes, and creates theatrical effects from exchanged looks and second-guessing, acts of appearance and dissembling analysed by Pechorin in a running commentary. He makes use of the figure of the cuckolded husband, a stock characterization held over from neoclassical comedy, which enables Vera and Pechorin to assume the roles of clandestine lovers as though scripted by theatrical convention. Male characters also conform to types. Grushnitsky's vanity, foppishness, and petty villainy make him a figure from contemporary farce or operetta, and understandably a target of Pechorin's mockery. Maxim Maximich combines the classic loyalty of servant figures, from Cervantes' Sancho Panza to Diderot's Jacques, and is treated with a condescension by Pechorin better suited to the servant-master relationship they live out in reality than to their actual military rank. Maxim, whose bluff decency and warmth have made him a foil to Pechorin and earned the affection of generations of readers, exceptionally defies typecasting.

Although Lermontov won immediate plaudits for his style—and many great writers, including Chekhov and Tolstoy, cite 'Taman' as a flawless example of literary prose—Pechorin has always polarized readers. Modern criticism continues to debate his merits and flaws, sometimes in extreme terms, and to speculate about aspects of his personality, wondering whether this contradictory figure adds up at all. What drives Pechorin is truly *the* question that galvanizes opinions both for and against, and has encouraged and frustrated conjecture since the novel's publication. Curiosity about Lermontov's intentions starts with the title. Traditionally, Russian novels fall into

two groups, named either for the hero or an event; or, alternatively, named by a topical opposition. Prominent examples of the first fashion include Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*, Goncharov's *Oblomov*, Turgenev's *Rudin*, and Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, while Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons*, Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, and Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* use the title to announce a novel of ideas. By employing a descriptive phrase instead of a name, Lermontov immediately implied a value-judgement that depends on whether readers gloss 'hero' to mean protagonist in a technical sense or conclude that Lermontov's novel itself asks us to adjust our expectations of the hero as a figure who uniquely embodies the spirit of an age, for good or ill.

The critic Northrop Frye long ago uncovered one basis of Romantic characterization in sacred typologies or master myths of biblical origin that shape the representation of good and evil in poetry and fiction. *A Hero of Our Time* is strewn with allusions to key figures of the Romantic pantheon such as Satan or Faust, Cain, the Giaour, and the Vampire. Unquestionably, these references have several functions. They set a tone, and contribute a sense of depth, amplifying in the reader's mind aspects of Pechorin's personality briskly implied by Lermontov's terse approach. Yet, as with all memorable heroes, Pechorin combines the larger-than-life features of a type—a type defined by the fatalism of the outcast Satan or Lucifer, the alienation of the Giaour, the weariness and yearning of Faust, the victimizing and wandering of the Vampire—with an individuality that makes him memorable in his own right and a prototype for later versions of the nihilistic hero.

Within the Russian context, Pechorin's closest affinity is with Onegin. The critic Belinsky, in a seminal essay of the 1840s about Lermontov that injected a social dimension into his literary criticism, supposed that Lermontov based his character's name on that of the Pechora river, by analogy with Onegin whose name ostensibly derives from the Onega river. Other similarities include their respective failures with women, poor management of friendship, awkwardness in society, and a class-conditioned sense of honour. In the second half of the nineteenth century, at a point when literary criticism in Russia injected political ideology into the discussion of fiction, essayists would point to these characters as prototypical 'superfluous men', incapable of the reform needed to modernize Russia. Why both Onegin and Pechorin fail to mature into positive heroes committed to

a liberal political agenda was a question that elicited much reaction in the 1860s when the radical critics advocated tendentious fictions.

Not all superfluous men are superfluous in the same way, however, and Lermontov's appreciation of *Eugene Onegin* involved change as well as imitation. Onegin makes it on to the title-page but, arguably, is a marginal figure; Pechorin does not get star billing on the cover, but his personality is larger than life. The reversals are deliberate. In the final book-form Pushkin eliminated passages about Onegin that were already known to readers from the serialized publication of chapters. He risked contradictions as he drafted later episodes, shifting emphasis onto the moral growth of his heroine Tatyana, and, moreover, increasing the role of the first-person narrator. Arguably, the rebalancing reflected Pushkin's witty dismantling of the Romantic hero more than any intention to lay down a sociological type for future novelists. While Onegin still lent his name to the title, he had become little more than a superfluous man within his own book, while Pechorin cuts a substantial figure as a profile of a superfluous man who comes into being in the course of the novel. In a further twist, Lermontov also inverts the role of the Pushkinian narrator. For while Pushkin's speaker befriends the reader conversationally, Lermontov's editor loathes Pechorin; and while Pushkin's narrator shares charming confidences about everything from the seasons to the sexes, Lermontov's editor belittles his readership. A decade after the final publication of *Eugene Onegin*, Lermontov substituted a bitter humour for the jocular charm of Pushkin's authorial voice, castigating the public for moral cowardice and failure to see through the hypocrisy of contemporary manners.

These revisions take us to the core of Lermontov's purpose. Imbued with a sense of literary play, Pushkin's works are stuffed with allusions, quotations, parody, and pastiche. Composed almost exactly a decade before Lermontov's fiction, their essential emphasis is on literature made from literature rather than on psychological exploration. By virtue of their high art, *Eugene Onegin* and the *Tales of Belkin* established a new benchmark for sophisticated literature, but only flattered a small segment of the public. For Lermontov, literary play was a means to a different goal. The purpose of writing, as practised by Pechorin and the editor of his journal, is to hold up a mirror to Russians and display behaviour as governed by convention, and freedom as frustrated by numerous limitations. At issue is the meaning of