

THE EYE IN LERMONTOV'S *A HERO OF OUR TIME*:
PERCEPTION, VISUALITY, AND
GENDER RELATIONS

by

IRYNA IEVGENIIVNA ZAGORUYKO

A THESIS

Presented to the Russian, East European, and Eurasian Studies Program
and the Graduate School of the University of Oregon
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Arts

June 2016

THESIS APPROVAL PAGE

Student: Iryna Ievgeniivna Zagoruyko

Title: The Eye in Lermontov's *A Hero of Our Time*: Perception, Visuality, and Gender Relations

This thesis has been accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in the Russian, East European, and Eurasian Studies Program by:

Katya Hokanson	Chairperson
Jenifer Presto	Member
Yelaina Kripkov	Member

and

Scott L. Pratt	Dean of the Graduate School
----------------	-----------------------------

Original approval signatures are on file with the University of Oregon Graduate School.

Degree awarded June 2016

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THESIS ABSTRACT

Iryna Ievgeniivna Zagoruyko

Master of Arts

Russian, East European, and Eurasian Studies Program

June 2016

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This thesis views Lermontov's novel *A Hero of Our Time* as centered on images, glances and vision. In his text Lermontov conveys a persistent fascination with visual perception. The attentive reader can read this language of the eye—the eye can be seen as a mirror of the soul, a fetish, a means of control, and a metaphor for knowledge. The texts that form the novel are linked together by a shared preoccupation with the eye. At the same time, these texts explore the theme of visual perception from different angles, and even present us with different attitudes towards vision. Some are guided by literature, some—by science and physiognomy, and some—by spiritualism and imagination. Since imagination—the lack of it and more often an excess of it—is a persistent motif of the novel, this thesis also explores metaphorical blindness in *A Hero of Our Time*.

CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME OF AUTHOR: Iryna Ievgeniivna Zagoruyko

GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOLS ATTENDED:

University of Oregon, Eugene
Vinnytsia National Technical University, Ukraine

DEGREES AWARDED:

Master of Arts, Russian, East European, and Eurasian Studies Program, 2016,
University of Oregon
Master of Business Administration, 2009, Vinnytsia National Technical
University
Bachelor of Business Administration, 2008, Vinnytsia National Technical
University

AREAS OF SPECIAL INTEREST:

Slavic Literature and Language Teaching

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

GTF Teaching Assistant, Russian, East European, and Eurasian Studies Program
University of Oregon, Eugene, September 2014–June 2016

GRANTS, AWARDS, AND HONORS:

Graduate Teaching Fellowship, Russian, 2014–2016

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to express sincere appreciation to Professors Katya Hokanson, Jenifer Presto, and Yelaina Kripkov for their critical input and assistance in the preparation of this manuscript. In addition, special thanks are due to Heghine Hakobyan, the Slavic librarian, for her help in researching the materials for this work.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In Lermontov's *A Hero of Our Time* the eye can be seen as a mirror of the soul, a fetish, a means of control, and a metaphor for knowledge. In virtually every possible way Lermontov stresses in his text the capacity of the eye to project, signal, and emit emotions. In such a way the able person, or more precisely, the attentive reader can read this language of the eye. This thesis views *A Hero of Our Time* as a controversial discussion of visuality and its relation to imagination and knowledge.

The first chapter of this thesis deals with physiognomy. Of the best Russian writers of the early nineteenth century, none proved so consistently receptive to the theories of physiognomy as Lermontov. The use of physiognomy as a mode of characterization enabled Lermontov to create more life-like characters. Lermontov's keen sense of observation and, in turn, his detailed description resulted in regular portraits with distinct individual character traits. In this manner Lermontov introduced greater verisimilitude and bridged the transition from Romanticism to Realism. Moreover, the physiognomic device of characterization enabled him to reveal stock character traits within a minimum narrative time. As a consequence, Lermontov's characters, on the whole, are static; they merely disclose further what they are or confirm what the reader was led to expect from them.

In the second chapter, the relation of power and gaze is discussed. I argue that the Romantic thematization of the relationship of gender and the gaze is reversed in *A Hero*

of Our Time: men appropriate women's "to-be-look-at-ness," and the person who is being gazed at shows characteristics regarded as unmanly, or typical of a woman. In other words, that character is feminized.

The third chapter examines the eye as fetish. It deals with Pechorin's voyeuristic glancing as described in the novel. Also, the fetishization of femininity in the example of the Undine is analyzed.

The fourth chapter explores metaphorical blindness in *A Hero of Our Time*. Imagination—the lack of it and more often an excess of it—is a persistent motif of the novel. The impulse to imagine can be considered an anthropological constant, it defines the space of possibility relying on the principle of similarity. The imaginary turns here into a potential, into something that could be realized.

Finally, the last chapter of the thesis deals with landscapes as visual images in *A Hero Of Our Time*. Lermontov, a gifted artist, himself painted several of the locations he describes in his novel, and the visual images of the canvases are matched by the visual impact of his verbal landscapes. Landscapes, developed by Lermontov, serve the function of structuring the novel, as well as giving a strong Romantic coloring to it. They also, retard the narrative, as well as interrupt the time sequences. Landscapes play the role of static contemplative moments for the observer to reveal himself to the reader. Attitudes to nature as expressed in the landscapes help the reader to distinguish between Pechorin, the fictional author, and Maksim Maksimych. Finally, landscapes reveal the hero as a child of nature sharing all nature's inconsistencies of behavior, and its disregard of a moral code.

CHAPTER II

PHYSIOGNOMY AS A MODE OF CHARACTERIZATION IN *A HERO OF OUR TIME*

As previously addressed in this paper, of all the methods of characterization utilized by Lermontov, one of most intriguing is that based on a system of physiognomy. The careful reader might have noticed the author's extraordinary abilities of observation and the detailed description of his main characters. Edmund Heier in his essay "Lavater's System as a Mode of Characterization in Lermontov's Prose" concludes that "... in the novel *A Hero of Our Time*, Lermontov's use of physiognomy becomes one of the main techniques of characterization."¹ Heier claims that Lermontov invented a device—"a display of the art of judging character on the part of the author and of his penetrating insight into human nature, long before the character has been given a chance to reveal himself through his actions and behavior in the course of the novel."²

Belief that man's exterior discloses aspects of his invisible world was held by such ancients as Aristotle³ and Galen,⁴ and it was revived in the Renaissance, but at no

¹ See Edmund Heier, "Lavater's System of Physiognomy as a Mode of Characterization in Lermontov's Prose," *Arcadia—International Journal for Literary Studies* 6.1–3 (1971): 278.

² Heier, "Lavater's System of Physiognomy," 267.

³ Aristotle wrote the earliest known systematic treatise on physiognomy. The chief basis of his work was analogical: people with facial features resembling particular animals were thought to have analogous temperaments, e.g., a bulldog jaw signified tenacity. See Richard Cresswell and Johann Gottlob Schneider, *Aristotle's History of Animals: In Ten Books* (London: H.G. Bohn, 1862).

⁴ Claudius Galenus (c. 130–c. 200) was a Greek physician and writer on medicine.

junction in literary history was that association so crucial as in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Aristotle's unscientific, as it only might have seemed, theory formed solid ground for all subsequent physiognomists. As an illustration, in his study of the noses, Aristotle claims that those noses with thick bulbous ends belong to persons who are insensitive; sharptipped ones belong to the irascible, those easily provoked, like dogs; rounded, large, obtuse noses to the magnanimous, the lion-like; slender, hooked noses to the eagle-like, the noble but grasping; round-tipped noses to the luxurious; open nostrils are signs of passion, etc.⁵

Much of modern literary technique in the sphere of characterization unquestioningly assumes that physical traits are a literal and symbolic reflection of psychological states and temperament. The conviction that a direct connection exists between the inner and outer man is so entrenched in readers and writers alike that one is apt to forget that until the late eighteenth century, fictional descriptions of individuals' looks had no extrinsic significance.⁶ In the novels of Richardson, Defoe, and Fielding, for instance, details of characters' appearance more often than not are withheld, or else supplied very sketchily; and what information is given offers scant clue to the person's inner identity, except in the most general terms. Helena Goscilo in her essay "Lermontov's Debt to Lavater and Gall" cites a typical example: "Sophia Weston's beauty in *Tom Jones* is little more than physical beauty; it complements her virtuous nobility, but Fielding does not intend us to deduce any specific moral or spiritual qualities

⁵ See Aristotle, "Physiognomics," in *Minor Works*, ed. by Aristotle (Harvard Univ. Press, 1955), 121.

⁶ More on this see Helena Goscilo, "Lermontov's Debt to Lavater and Gall," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 59.4 (1981): 500–15.

on its basis.”⁷ The same holds true for Moll Flanders and for Smollett’s heroes and heroines.

Physiognomy’s dramatic invasion into the realm of fiction wed literary strategy to pseudo-scientific theory in a marriage that bred a minor revolution in novelistic technique. Curiously enough, the union resulted largely from the popularization of physiognomy and phrenology by two men whose chief area of expertise was not belles-lettres: the Swiss theologian and poet Johann Kaspar Lavater (1741–1801) and the Baden-born doctor Franz Josef Gall (1758–1828).⁸

Physiognomy is defined as “the art of judging character and disposition from the features of the face or from the form and lineaments of the body generally.”⁹ Lavater conceived of it, however, as “the science or knowledge of the correspondence between the external and internal man, the visible superficies and the invisible contents.” Lavater’s terminology is telling: his choice of the words “science” and “knowledge” testify to his faith in the empirical existence of a connection between man’s physical and temperamental identity that has only to be diagnosed by the trained observer (“scientist”). Interestingly enough, Lavater thought that appearance was reality, for God’s creation is free of deception.¹⁰ The objective of Lavater’s publications was to promote love among

⁷ Goscilo, “Lermontov’s Debt,” 500.

⁸ Ibid., 501. Phrenology (from Greek φρήν (phrēn), meaning “mind”, and λόγος (logos), meaning “knowledge”) is a pseudo medicine primarily focused on measurements of the human skull, based on the concept that the brain is the organ of the mind, and that certain brain areas have localized, specific functions or modules. Phrenology was developed by a German physician named Franz Joseph Gall in the late 1700s. Phrenology is not the subject and is mentioned anecdotally in this paper.

⁹ As to the Oxford English Dictionary.

¹⁰ John Leggett, *The Human Face* (London, 1974), 196.

people through the realization of the beauty of everyone's mind and spirit. He was thinking that beauty given by God is visible in the face, if only men were willing to see it.

Goscilo notes that “to a present-day reader, many of Lavater's specific “rules” seem naive, even ludicrous, e.g., ‘Oblique wrinkles in the forehead, especially when they are nearly parallel, or appear so, are certainly signs of a poor, oblique, suspicious mind’¹¹; ‘Blue eyes are, generally, more significant of weakness, effeminacy, and yielding, than brown or black’.”¹² According to Goscilo, “one of Lavater's most serious and persistent errors was that of ‘metaphorical generalization’—the argument from ‘straightness’ of feature to ‘straightness’ of character—a reductive association that is without foundation.”¹³ Goscilo continues that later physiognomists criticized Lavater for his ignorance of anatomy and physiology, “without a thorough knowledge of... [which] it is impossible to found a system of physiognomy.”¹⁴ Though Lavater's work as a systematic treatise did not go beyond any other work of the medieval or Renaissance period, the heyday of physiognomy, it revived physiognomy and placed it on the European platform for the next sixty years.

In spite of all opposition, Lavater's physiognomy became the topic of the day. His work was reprinted, pirated, imitated, and edited in abbreviated form, so that by 1810 there existed some sixteen German, fifteen French, and twenty English editions. As physiognomy became more popular, it was inevitable that it should become a device for

¹¹ Goscilo, “Lermontov's Debt,” 465.

¹² *Ibid.*, 500.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 502.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

the creative writer. Particularly with the advent of the novel which began to examine man as a whole, and with it the search for meaning behind the physical, physiognomy became part of character analysis in literature. With the shift of technique in the novel, i. e., from the description of the exterior to that of the interior, or the psychological make-up of the character, the novelist was compelled to use all possible devices and sources in his character presentation. Physiognomy, for the description and interpretation of the physical appearance of their characters, became one such additional source of information. While the new mode of characterization was utilized by many writers, only a few seemed to employ it consistently. In England it was employed by Charlotte Smith in her novels *Desmond* (1792) and *Marchmont* (1796), and by Matthew Gregory Lewis in *The Monk* (1796); in Germany only E. T. A. Hoffmann seems to have made use of it. But Lavater's physiognomy made the greatest impact on literature among the French novelists at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Stendhal, George Sand, Alfred de Vigny, and especially Balzac not only used physiognomy as a standard technique in the creation of their characters, but defended and praised Lavater's efforts. By the middle of the following century, physiognomy had become sufficiently assimilated into narrative method to be considered a standard part of characterization in Europe and the United States.¹⁵

¹⁵ On literature's use of physiognomy, see Edmund Heier, "The Literary Portrait as a Device of Characterization," *Neophilologus* 60 (1976): 321–33.

Impact of the Theory of Physiognomy on Russian Literature

The impact of the new theory of physiognomy was perceptible not only in American and West European, but also in Russian fiction.¹⁶ In Russia ideas of Lavater were not only transplanted by foreign publications, but also by three Russian editions in 1781, 1809 and 1817.¹⁷ Few Russian men of letters in the period 1780–1830 were unfamiliar with the new theory. In his essay “Elements of Physiognomy and Pathognomy in the Works of I. S. Turgenev (Turgenev and Lavater)” Edmund Heier notes that “the Russian reading public had access to Lavater’s works in foreign editions, and the periodicals devoted considerable attention to his theories.”¹⁸ In the last quarter of the eighteenth century Lavater in particular was highly esteemed by the circles of Freemasons in Moscow, which kept abreast of all West European trends. Under the influence of his Freemason friend Petrov, Nikolai Karamzin became so enamored of Lavater’s philosophy that in 1787 he launched into a lively correspondence with the Swiss thinker that culminated two years later in a personal visit to Lavater in Zurich, a meeting that Karamzin’s *Pis’ma rossiiskogo puteshestvennika* (*Letters of a Russian Traveller*) capture in some detail. Karamzin’s works are studded with references to Lavater, and several of the notions advanced in his prose are directly traceable to the noted physiognomist. The interpretation of a man’s long eagle-like nose as an indisputable sign of an observant spirit in *Rytsar’ nashego vremeni* (*A Knight of Our*

¹⁶ Goscilo, “Lermontov’s Debt,” 505.

¹⁷ More on this see Graham, John Lavater, “Physiognomy: A Checklist,” in: *The Papers of the Bibliogr. Soc. of America* 15 (1961): 308.

¹⁸ Heier, “Lavater’s System of Physiognomy,” 267.

Time) (1803), for example, is quintessential Lavater.

A contemporary of Karamzin's who also came under the sway of Lavaterian theory was Radishchev. On at least two occasions in his *Puteshestvie iz Peterburga v Moskvu* (*Journey from Petersburg to Moscow*) (1790) he invokes the Swiss physiognomist. In the section entitled "Novgorod," Radishchev prefaces a lengthy description of a group of people he has encountered with the remark: "If I do not give you exact portraits, I shall content myself with silhouettes. Lavater has taught us to tell from them who is clever and who is stupid."¹⁹ And two divisions further, in "Zaitsovo," he confides: "If I were able, with Lavater's penetration, to read a man's innermost thoughts in his features, then I would make the picture of the assessor's family worthy of attention."²⁰ What is peculiar about the first comment, of course, is its claim that Lavater reads from "silhouettes" rather than from specifics of a given face or form, for often the very preciseness of Lavater's readings, the strict equations he sets up between color, shape, etc., and the characteristic that it supposedly reveals, is what challenges our sense of credulity and makes his more plausible general ideas seem to ring false or verge on the nonsensical. It is one thing to be persuaded that a man's appearance reflects some aspects of his temperament, but quite another to be told that noses with a broad back are the exclusive property of extraordinary men.

¹⁹ A.V. Radishchev and Leo Wiener, *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958), 79.

²⁰ Radishchev and Wiener, *Journey*, 85.

Lermontov's Exploitation of Concepts of Physiognomy in *A Hero of Our Time*

Among first-ranking Russian writers of the early nineteenth century, none proved so consistently receptive to both Lavater and Gall as Lermontov. It is inconceivable that someone with such a broad knowledge of literature, philosophy, and contemporary currents would have been ignorant of Lavater and Gall. As a prosaist Lermontov apparently saw much to be gained from their doctrines; his fictional characters manifest their true natures through eloquent facial features. Pushkin's prose, for instance, is devoid of the physiognomical and phrenological drama that abounds in Lermontov's fiction. As a matter of fact, Pushkin scorned the exaggerated external show of strong feeling that passed for expressiveness in the prose of Marlinskii and others of his school, finding their attempts to convey inner states through blushes, blanching, and flashing eyes immature and ineffectual. Lermontov, by contrast, obviously believed that literature could benefit from the "discoveries" of Lavater and Gall. Perhaps his talent as a painter inclined him to embrace a philosophy that credited the visible with transcendent meaning. Goscilo claims that "physiognomy and phrenology offer a writer three advantages: the option of delineating personality inconspicuously by association or implication; a means of accentuating character traits indirectly; and perhaps most importantly, an additional standard by which to evaluate an individual's gifts of human perception, gifts which are an index of the range and value of his experience, and the lessons that he can derive from that experience."²¹

When and how Lermontov became fascinated with their writings and whether he

²¹ Goscilo, "Lermontov's Debt," 512.

came to them directly or through Karamzin or possibly even Balzac is difficult to tell. He not only makes direct references in his literary works to Lavater and Gall, but confirms his interest in these men in a letter to a friend in 1841, saying, “I’m buying Lavater and Gall and many other books for our mutual use.”²² Goscilo thinks that “this was not Lermontov’s first contact with the two thinkers, as may be inferred from his three novels *Vadim* (1833–34), *Princess Ligovskaia* (1836–37), and *A Hero of Our Time* (1840), which all presuppose the reader’s knowledge of Lavaterian principles.”²³ We think that in Lermontov’s *A Hero of Our Time* the literary potential of Lavater’s hypothesis is explored even more fully than in *Vadim*, and *Princess Ligovskaia*.

Heier finds a similarity between Lermontov’s novel *A Hero of Our Time* and the novels produced by Balzac—“*La Femme de trente ans* among others.”²⁴ Heier claims that all events in the novel, all characters in it, and all devices of characterization are skillfully manipulated in pursuing the ultimate aim, the presentation of a detailed character analysis of Lermontov’s Pechorin, or, to use Lermontov’s own words, to draw “a portrait, composed of all the vices of our generation in the fullness of their development.”²⁵

Even though the concept of physiognomy is never mentioned in Lermontov’s *A*

²² See Mikhail Lermontov, *Sobranie sochinenii v VI tomakh* (Moscow–Leningrad, 1957): 458. As Udodov notes, Lermontov’s interest in Lavater and Gall was especially strong when he was working on “Kavkazets,” which is logical, given that physiognomy and phrenology were central to the genre of the physiological sketch to which “Kavkazets” belongs. B. T. Udodov, *M. Lermontov*, Voronezh, 1973.

²³ Goscilo, “Lermontov’s Debt,” 507.

²⁴ Heier, “Lavater’s System of Physiognomy,” 278.

²⁵ See Mikhail Lermontov, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v IX tomakh* (Moskva; Москва: Voskresen’ie; Воскресенье), 1999.

Hero of Our Time, it is, definitely, one of the strongest interests that Pechorin is pursuing in his journal. Heier claims that “In its structure, i. e., five independent narratives joined by a single dominant character, the novel is reminiscent of Balzac’s *La Femme de trente ans* among others. All events in the novel, all characters in it, and all devices of characterization are skillfully manipulated in pursuing the ultimate aim, the presentation of a detailed character analysis of the main hero, Pechorin.”²⁶

The general notion of physiognomy forms a subtext of Pechorin’s ideas on visibility. As a true physiognomist he is convinced that everything can be deduced from facial, i.e. visual data. Lermontov, elaborating on the concept of physiognomy, makes use of it in different ways. Much of Pechorin’s “strange character” can be seen in the first narrative “Bela,” but none of it was based on the interpretation of his physical appearance. The reason for this is that the professional soldier, the army captain Maksim Maksimych is telling the exterior narrator the story while travelling through the Caucasus. It would have been unrealistic to endow the simple army captain with the art of character reading from the delineations of the body. Maksim Maksimych expresses only amazement at the strange behavior of this young aristocrat. He only hints at the dichotomy in Pechorin’s character, but cannot explain it when he says: “He was a splendid fellow, I’ll make so bold as to assure you—only a bit strange. I mean, for example, in the rain, in the cold, hunting all day long; everyone’ll be frozen through, tired—but he’s alright... Yes, there were some very strange things about him...” (10).²⁷

Just how vital Lermontov considers details of appearance for a nuanced character

²⁶ Heier, “Lavater’s System of Physiognomy,” 278.

²⁷ All citations referring to the novel are taken from Mikhail Lermontov, and Aplin, Hugh, *A Hero of Our Time* (London: Hesperus Press, 2005).

portrayal is obvious from the second story, “Maksim Maksimych”; its main purpose is to bring the narrator and reader into direct visual contact with Pechorin. Such a detailed portrayal is possible only after the author accidentally met Pechorin who was travelling on the same road. In fact, the second tale seems to have as its major function the task of bringing the author face to face with Pechorin in order to observe him. Pechorin’s portrait reveals a complex character which is not easily deciphered. The inconsistencies and oddities hinted at by Maksim Maksimych find their reflection in his physical appearance: “He was of medium height and his slender waist and broad shoulders were proof of a sturdy constitution which was capable of bearing the hardship of a roving life, the depraved city life and, no less, the tempest of his soul. His half-open jacket permitted one to see his clean linen which testified to the habits of a gentleman” (44). The author points out his small, aristocratic hands but he was surprised, when Pechorin took off his glove, to notice how thin his pale fingers were. He continues: “His walk was careless and lazy, but I noticed he did not swing his arms—a sure sign of a certain reticence in character” (44). To complete the account of Pechorin’s general appearance, he adds: “...the position of his entire body portrayed some sort of a nervous weakness” (44). Edmund Heier points out again that “the allusion here is to Balzac's *La Femme de trente ans*.”²⁸

From general observations the author passes on to a more detailed description of Pechorin’s countenance: “His skin had a sort of feminine delicacy; his blond hair, naturally wavy, provided such a picturesque outline for his pale, noble brow, on which only after long observation was it possible to spot traces of the wrinkles that criss-crossed one another and were probably revealed much more clearly in moments of anger of

²⁸ Heier, “Lavater’s System of Physiognomy,” 279.

spiritual disquiet. Despite the light color of his hair, his whiskers and brows were black—a sign of breeding in a man, just as a black mane and a black tail are in a white horse. To finish off the portrait I shall say that he had a slightly snub nose, teeth of blinding whiteness, and brown eyes...” (45).

The inconsistencies we notice in Pechorin’s description, i. e., the sturdy constitution and then the nervous debility and feminine features²⁹, seem to reflect on Lermontov’s ability to draw a portrait with definite character traits. But it is precisely the disharmony—elegance and brutality, delicacy and ruthlessness—of Pechorin’s character which the reader was to discover in his facial expression. This account, then, is in keeping with Lermontov’s intention—to reveal the inner dichotomy in the appearance of his hero. Even more revealing are Pechorin’s eyes. As always the eyes receive special attention, for they reflect the feelings of the soul and Pechorin’s disharmonious personality: “Firstly, they did not laugh when he laughed! Have you happened to notice an oddity of this sort in some people?... It is a sign either of a malicious disposition, or of a profound, constant sadness. From behind partly lowered lashes they shone with a kind of phosphoric brilliance, if one can put it like that. This was not a reflection of spiritual ardor, nor of imagination at play: this was a brilliance similar to the brilliance of smooth steel, blinding, but cold; his gaze—not prolonged, but piercing and uncomfortable, left after it the unpleasant impression of an immodest question, and might have seemed impertinent, had it not been so indifferently calm...I shall say in conclusion that he was in all rather good-looking and had one of those original physiognomies that society women particularly like” (45).

²⁹ More on Pechorin’s femininity see Chapter III of this paper.

With this depiction of Pechorin's personality, the travelling author and physiognomist has completed his task. The remainder of the novel constitutes Pechorin's own journal which merely further confirms and accents, by means of self-confession, what had already been made known of his character traits. Now it is Pechorin, as the author of the journal, who displays the skill in delineating character on the basis of the physical aspect. Indeed, not a single character escapes his judgment.

In "Taman" Lermontov first shows a Pechorin who is not the master of the physiognomic discourse but its slave.³⁰ Pechorin appears to be an adept of the previously mentioned Lavater and Gall who is unable to observe his object and if he does succeed at taking in someone's face he is not capable of drawing the right conclusions from what he sees. It is telling that he is able to see neither the boy nor the girl clearly, which would be a prerequisite of any physiognomic analysis. In "Taman'," the third story of the novel but chronologically first in terms of the novel's own timeline, Pechorin relates how on his travels he was forced to seek lodging in a miserable hut, the inhabitants of which were engaged in smuggling. Upon entering he met a boy: "I lit a sulphur match and lifted it up to the boy's nose: it illuminated two white eyes. He was blind, totally blind from birth. He stood motionless before me, and I began examining the features of his face. I confess, I have a strong prejudice against those who are blind, one-eyed, deaf, dumb, legless, armless, hunchbacked and so on. I've noticed that there's always some strange relationship between a man's appearance and his soul: it's as if with the loss of a limb the soul loses one feeling or another. And so I began examining the blind boy's face; but

³⁰ See Anja Trippner, "Vision and Its Discontents: Paradoxes of Perception in M. Ju. Lermontov's *Geroi Nashogo Vremeni*," *Russian, Croatian and Serbian, Czech and Slovak, Polish Literature* 51, no. 4 (2002): 448.

what can you read in a face that has no eyes?" (54).

While this passage is self-explanatory, it is interesting to note that the author who is, after all, Lermontov himself, seems once again to advance the hypothesis of organic unity which is the basis of Lavater's and Balzac's physiognomy. Pechorin's prejudice against those who have lost a limb make us think that nothing can be added or removed from an organic unity without causing deformity and disharmony.

Especially the mermaid-like young maiden is associated mostly with hearing, disposing of a voice that seems to be everywhere around him. This quality of voice prefigures the conflict between Pechorin and the girl. When he finally locates her on the top of the roof what he sees is not just a girl but an Undine, since his imagination has already formed an image of the girl. In the next few scenes physiognomic knowledge and literary education prove to be counteractive to one another and to perception.

In "Taman" another lengthy physiognomic description is devoted to the girl. But more intriguing in this connection is the author's reference to "Young France," a French literary school of young writers of the 1830's: "I had certainly never seen such a woman. She was far from being a beauty, but I also have my prejudices regarding beauty. There was a lot of breeding in her... Breeding in women, as in horses too, is a great thing; this discovery belongs to Young France. It [i. e., breeding] shows for the most in the walk, the hands and feet; the nose in particular means a lot" (59). Though Pechorin does make an attempt at physiognomic analysis in "Taman'," he fails at drawing the right conclusions because his attempts at observing the girl and the blind boy are always aborted in some way or other. Another difficulty for his attempts in physiognomy is the volatility of the

girl. The physiognomic face and body should be static in order to be analyzed.³¹ The girl, who is always in motion, circling around Pechorin, does not lend herself easily to a physiognomist's examination. As in Lavater's essay on physiognomy, seeing is reading and, consequently, words that denote acts of seeing and words denoting acts of literary perception become interchangeable in the journal. This holds even truer in Pechorin's narrative since what Pechorin sees is pure literature.

Lermontov seems to proceed in *A Hero of Our Time* from an incompetent and misleading use of physiognomy in "Taman" to a competent and successful one in "Princess Mary." Here, physiognomic knowledge is most prominent. Pechorin's plotting works out so very well because of his superior knowledge of Lavater's science of character analysis. His physiognomic perceptions allow him to observe his counterpart Grushnitskii as well as Mary acutely and read their faces like a book. Attesting to his belief in physiognomy are the numerous descriptions of other people's faces in the story. When he first encounters Mary he cannot see her face properly because it is hidden by her hat, but he can see her figure and her dress which gives him enough material to comment on: "Her light, but noble tread had something virginal about it, something eluding definition, but comprehensible to the eye" (68). In "Princess Mary," Pechorin not only figures as the physiognomist, but uses his skill in character reading to manipulate others. Only Dr. Verner, who "has studied all the live strings of the human heart" (72), emerges as an equal to Pechorin. Verner was of small stature, thin and frail like a child. One of his legs was shorter than the other.³² In proportion to his body, his head seemed

³¹ Trippner, "Vision and Its Discontents," 449.

³² Byron famously had a clubfoot and walked with a limp.

enormous: “the bumps of his skull ... would have amazed a phrenologist by their strange combination of contrasting inclinations” (72). In spite of these physical contradictions, there is a correlation with his psychological portrayal. He was a materialist and poet, who possessed enormous knowledge but could not use it to his advantage; he had a sharp tongue and poked fun at his patients, but yet he could cry at the bedside of a dying soldier. In describing Verner, Pechorin admits that appearance may be deceitful, for he says of him: “His appearance was one of those that strike you unpleasantly at first glance, but which you subsequently like, once your eye has learnt to read in the irregular features the imprint of a well-trying and elevated soul” (72). With his physiognomic and psychological expertise, Pechorin is able to manipulate others, since he can read what they want to hide: “The princess held her horse back; I remained beside her; it was clear that my silence was troubling her, but I swore not to utter a word—out of curiosity. I wanted to see how she’d extricate herself from this difficult situation” (111). Pechorin observes Mary and her behavior like a scientist observes an insect under the microscope. Reading the signs of confusion and distress on her face gives him a twisted pleasure. He abstains from the usual choreography of glances, touches and whispered vows that usually follow with a kiss like the one he has given Mary just in order to watch her.

In adhering to the cult of physiognomy, the physiognomist invariably accepts also a measure of determinism or fatalism. As such, Pechorin, the physiognomist is able to go beyond ordinary character reading and enter the realm of predicting the destiny of others. In “Fatalist” Pechorin has refined the art of physiognomy up to a point where he can not only read Vulich’s face like a book but also deduce his character since there is a complete correspondence between appearance and character. Pechorin relates an episode in which

the problem of determinism is discussed. He seems to notice the imprint of an early death in the facial expression of a young officer. Here is what Pechorin said when he saw him: “Lieutenant Vulich’s appearance corresponded perfectly to his character. A tall stature, a swarthy complexion, black hair, black penetrating eyes, a large but regular nose...and a sad chill smile perpetually wandering on his lips...” (138). Having depicted his personality by description, Pechorin editorializes with the following comment: “I looked him intently in the eye; but he met my searching glance with a calm and unmoving gaze, and his pale lips smiled; yet in spite of his sangfroid, I seemed to read the stamp of death on his pale face. I have observed, and many old warriors have confirmed my observation, that on the face of a man who must die in a few hours’ time there is often a strange sort of imprint of inevitable fate, and so it is hard for the accustomed eye to mistake it” (140). Pechorin thus proves that a capable physiognomist becomes a “moral gypsy,” someone who reads the faces of other people like a clairvoyant reads someone’s palm.

Consequently, in “Fatalist” the circumstances under which Pechorin makes his perceptions are not related to us at all. It seems as if questions of lighting or the position of the observer are insignificant. What is suppressed in Pechorin’s rendering of the events in the last two stories is the contingency of perception. Rather than supplementing one person’s view with that of another, a device that can be found in the first two parts of the novel, Pechorin’s journal is characterized by a constant focalization through Pechorin’s eye and leading to the “I” of the narrative. Questions of focus and angle that come up in “Princess Mary” or “Fatalist” thus never include the possibility of a different view but only a kind of technical improvement on the position of the observer. Pechorin’s stance on visibility in fact comes very close to the nineteenth century belief in the technical

perfectibility of any visual apparatus. This is “Taman” in which Pechorin admits to a wrong perception he later defies the notion of ambiguity or a personal bias with regard to the visual. Lermontov thus is demonstrating the limits of a one-dimensional approach to perception. To the eyes of Pechorin there are no blanks and no indeterminate zones that do not lend themselves to his scrutiny; he adheres to the notion of an “impartial spectator” who can see it all. Although Pechorin’s observations proved to be correct, since on the same day Vulich was killed by a drunken cossack, the entire problem of predetermination remained unsolved. It is interesting to note, however, that the problem of fatalism emanated primarily from France at the beginning of the nineteenth century and that Pechorin’s ideas on predetermination are reminiscent of those of Balzac. It would be presumptuous to speak here of Balzac’s direct influence, for the idea of fatalism was a widely discussed topic of the time. But fatalism in our context is intimately connected with the physiognomic concept of Pechorin, and it is no accident that Lermontov had his hero recognize the imprint of death on the young officer’s face, after a physiognomic diagnosis of him.

Edmund Heier thinks that “the use of physiognomy as a mode of characterization enabled Lermontov to create more life-like characters” (282). Lermontov’s keen sense of observation and, in turn, the detailed description resulted in regular portraits with distinct individual character traits. In this manner Lermontov introduced greater verisimilitude and bridged the transition from Romanticism to Realism. Moreover, the physiognomic device of characterization enabled him to reveal stock character traits within a minimum amount of narrative time. As a consequence, Lermontov’s characters, on the whole, are static; they merely disclose further what they are or confirm what the reader was led to

expect from them. This is in contrast to the developmental characterization in the long novels of Tolstoi, where one may observe over a period of time a progression or disintegration in consequence of certain causes. Goscilo notes, “As the first Russian writer to grapple with complex psychological issues in a contemporary context, Lermontov naturally sought inspiration from two authorities whose doctrines made the prospect of attaining objective knowledge of our fellow men seem real. Time may have proved those doctrines erroneous, but it has not erased their impact on literature.”³³

To conclude, with the possible exception of the story “Taman’,” Pechorin dominates all the narratives of *A Hero of Our Time*; he not only monopolizes the reader’s attention, but also exercises emotional and psychological control over practically everyone in his orbit. An interesting observation was made by Vinogradov, who pointed out that the interest in physiognomics is a trait that links Pechorin’s diary with the other parts of the novel, thus adding a unifying touch to the assembled texts.³⁴ In many cases Pechorin’s keen physiognomist’s eyes are what enables him to acquire a hold over others and to manipulate all the characters at will. Because he can “read the signs” which those he meets cannot disguise, Pechorin is invulnerable. Maksim Maksimych, Bela, Kazbich, Grushnitskii, Vera, Princess Mary, her mother, and even Verner all fall victim to Pechorin’s machinations in part because they cannot match him in physiognomical expertise. In short, Pechorin is the most accomplished physiological psychologist in the novel, and that advantage is what gives him the upper hand in all his encounters.

³³ Goscilo, “Lermontov’s Debt,” 515.

³⁴ V.V. Vinogradov, *Stil’ prozy Lermontova* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1986), 586–587.

CHAPTER III

THE RELATION OF POWER AND THE GAZE IN *A HERO OF OUR TIME*: GENDER AND VISUALITY

Woman as Image, Man as Bearer of the Look

The relationship between power and the gaze was well researched by Laura Mulvey in her study “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.”³⁵ Mulvey’s notion of the male gaze made waves not just in film studies—but also across much of humanities. Mulvey’s work has become the point of reference for any work that deals with gender and visibility. She draws our attention to the fact that the pleasures of watching are divided between a male subject and a female object. According to Mulvey, there is a lot of possible pleasures. One is scopophilia.³⁶ There are circumstances in which looking itself is a source of pleasure, just as, in the reverse formation, there is pleasure in being looked at. Originally, in his *Three Essays on Sexuality*, Freud isolated scopophilia as one of the component instincts of sexuality which exist as drives quite independently of the erotogenic zones. Freud associated scopophilia with taking other people as objects, subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze.

³⁵ Laura Mulvey (1975), “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, ed. Julie Rivkin, Michael Ryan (Oxford, 1998), 585–596.

³⁶ Scopophilia or scoptophilia (from Greek σκοπέω skopeō, “look to, examine” and φιλία philia, “tendency toward”), is deriving pleasure from looking. As an expression of sexuality, it refers to sexual pleasure derived from looking at erotic objects: erotic photographs, pornography, naked bodies, etc.

There have been a lot of debates about whether or not the gaze is male. Nancy Miller, for instance, in her essay “The Heroines’ Text. Reading in the French and English Novel 1722–1782” stresses that gaze is exclusively the male’s declaration:

The dialogue of meaningful looks is a necessary preliminary to the verbal exchange. In accordance with the canons of masculine and feminine behavior which presuppose naïveté on the part of the woman and experience on the part of the man), the man’s gaze is a declaration, a communication that disconcerts; the woman’s timorous [...] but compelled.³⁷

Others argue that gaze is not necessarily male. Janet Seyers, for instance, writes:

Similarly, and despite the cultural association of scopophilia with masculinity expressed in stories of Peeping Toms [...] girls also seek to repeat the voyeuristic pleasure.³⁸

Mulvey notes that “in a world ordered by a sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female”.³⁹ The determining male gaze projects its phantasy onto the female figure which is styled accordingly.⁴⁰ Mulvey stresses that “in their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*.”⁴¹ Man is reluctant to gaze in his exhibitionist like nature and can not bear the burden of sexual objectification. Mulvey’s argument is based on psychoanalytic background in that women as representation

³⁷ See Nancy K. Miller, *The Heroine’s Text: Readings in the French and English Novel, 1722–1782* (New York: Columbia UP, 1980).

³⁸ More on this see Joe Andrew, “‘The Blind Will See’: Narrative and Gender in ‘Taman’,” *Russian Literature* 31.–4 (1992): 464.

³⁹ Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure,” 589.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

signifies castration, inducing voyeuristic or fetishistic mechanisms to circumvent her threat.

The Struggle for Visual Control: the Relationship of Gender to the Gaze in *A Hero of Our Time*

Lermontov reversed Mulvey's Romantic thematization of the relationship of gender to the gaze. In *A Hero of Our Time* Mulvey's announcement that women imply "to-be-look-at-ness" is turned around. It gets to be clear that in *A Hero of Our Time* the person who is being gazed at is showing characteristics regarded as unmanly, or typical of a woman. In other words, that character is feminized. In particular, Pechorin not only targets one of the women with his gaze but he himself becomes the object of examination. Pechorin's portrayal in "Maksim Maksimych" reminds one of a woman or a child: "...He sat in the way that Balzac's thirty-year-old coquette sits in her downy armchair after an exhausting ball...In his smile there was something childlike. His skin had a sort of feminine delicacy..." (44). Pechorin's look is, undoubtedly, that of a Petersburg dandy. Part of the dandy's *habitus* is a certain feminization and another part is made up of his constant wish to be looked at, to be admired and envied by those who are not in command of fashion and style the way he is.⁴² In his essay "Rule-Following in Dandyism: "Style" as an Overcoming of "Rule" and "Structure"" Thorsten Botz-Bornstein poses an interesting argument: "The dandy is not even a man of style but he is

⁴² Trippner, "Vision and Its Discontents," 452.

style: is he really a MAN? Is he not only an idea produced through an artistic act of stylization or even a philosophical act of abstraction which never has the right to claim real presence or being?”⁴³

This wish to be looked at is basically autoerotic, since it is not directed at an object but redirects desire at the subject and mainly the eye. The autoerotic quality of Pechorin’s visual desire is accentuated after his first meeting with Vera in Piatigorsk. This encounter triggers a moment of heightened awareness in Pechorin and results in the following self-description: “[...]I’m still a boy: my face, albeit pale, is still fresh; my limbs are supple and slim; my hair curls thickly, my eyes shine, my blood’s on the boil [...]” (83). He then goes on to reflect how much more satisfying it is for him to look into the eyes of nature than to look into the eye of a woman: “There is not a woman’s gaze I wouldn’t forget at the sight of the curly-headed mountains lit by the southern sun, at the sight of the blue sky, or harking to the roar of a torrent tumbling from crag to crag” (83). The truth is hidden in the phonemes and sememes of this description of a wild and delightful mountain landscape. What Pechorin sees when he looks into the eyes of nature is himself—the anthropomorphizing of the landscape with its “curly-headed mountains” that gleam in the sunlight resembles the “curls” and the burning eyes of the I-narrator, Pechorin. This narcissistic urge to be mirrored in everything that surrounds him and to be the center of attraction for the others is belied by Pechorin when he comments: “I’m used to those glances; but there was a time when they constituted bliss for me. [...]” (92) after he has caught a loving look of Vera.

⁴³ Ibid., 286.

As it was previously mentioned, the politics of the gaze imply that the one who is gazed at is also the one who is in the subaltern position, the one who is dominated. There is a struggle over the gaze: one gets to look, to be master of the gaze; the other (or Other) is looked at. Therefore, the power of the gaze extends beyond the struggle between the sexes. The subject-turned-object sees itself as the other sees it: it internalizes the gaze.⁴⁴

Though the I-narrator in “Taman” never states this explicitly—Pechorin only relates his numerous attempts at getting a visual hold of the girl to us—we can assume that he also is watched and thus controlled by a gaze, that of the girl. It is she who sees him fully and clearly, as one can presume from her superior position on the top of the roof. Not only does he fail to gain true insight into the situation, he is unable to interpret correctly what he sees as the girl tells him: “You’ve seen a lot, but don’t know much; and what you do know, keep it under lock and key” (60). That the struggle for visual control is also a struggle for power, and is confirmed by the text. In the end the struggle for power takes on a literal meaning when they wrestle with each other on the boat.

Returning home, he realizes that he not only nearly lost his life, but that the boy stole all his belongings of any worth because the soldier he ordered to be on guard had fallen asleep. Only after this last incident is he able to realize that the blind boy and the girl registered his goings about, that it was they who controlled him and not vice versa.

When Mary looks at him this has a completely different quality—since he is watching her gazing at him and ever so often inducing that gaze by some provoking deed or look himself: “Meanwhile, my indifference was annoying Princess Mary, as I was able

⁴⁴ More on this see Margaret Olin, “Gaze,” in *Critical Terms for Art History*, ed. Robert S. Nelson, Richard Schiff (Chicago/London, 1996), 215.

to guess from one angry, flashing glance [...] Oh, I have an astonishing understanding of this conversation, dumb yet expressive, brief yet powerful!" (92). He never loses control over the exchange of glances in the way that is characteristic of his relationship to the girl in "Taman'." Mary does not gain anything from glancing at Pechorin, neither control nor love. Like Grushnitskii she is deluded by literature, lead on by the dynamics of the sentimental novel in which love expresses itself through the reciprocity of glances and ultimately feelings. If she were not blinded by an ideology of love she would see a manipulative use of the very device that is supposed to expose true feelings. But since she is committed to the ideology of Romantic love she is led to believe that an encounter as dramatic as hers and Pechorin's is the expression of the utmost love. Instead what is brought on by her gazing is what turns to be a mutually destructive relation between the persons involved. This is made explicit by Pechorin when he comments on Mary's uncertain attitude towards him: "But I've worked you out, dear Princess, beware! You want to pay me back in my own coin, prick my vanity—you won't succeed! And if you declare war on me, I'll be merciless" (93). So whereas the struggle over power is never openly declared, or resolved in "Taman'" and ends in a stalemate, Pechorin leaves behind him in Piatigorsk two destroyed women and a dead man.

The reifying power of Pechorin's gaze finds its ultimate and lasting expression in the picture of the dead Vulich's body. In comparing the corpse to the slaughtered pig Pechorin finally reduces Vulich, the object of his desire and his rival, to a thing. Before it comes to this, "Fatalist" shapes the question of dominance through a different kind of relation between the protagonists. In a group that is governed by male bonding the dispute between Vulich and Pechorin takes on a sadomasochistic strain. Vulich is

metonymically linked to the erotic subtext of the novel by his look; he shares the same “perfect nose” that was already singled out and graced the girl in “Taman’.” The homoerotic undercurrent of the text is underlined by Pechorin’s remark that Vulich takes no interest at all in the beautiful girls of the Caucasus or in Pechorin’s words “[...] he never ran after the young Cossack girls” (138). We are told that his character conforms to his outward appearance, which corresponds to standards of masculine good looks. He is tall, has black eyes and black hair, and he sports a sad smile. In contrast to Pechorin himself there is not a hint of effeminacy to be detected in Vulich’s face. The single, but significant trait he shares with Pechorin is the “piercing look” of his eyes. Very often images of beautiful and idealized masculinity operate as much on the psychic level as they do on the level of homosocial desire. Pechorin’s description of Vulich can be read as the expression of both—narcissistic identification and homosocial desire, that is, a form of male bonding not entirely void of erotic undercurrents.⁴⁵ In “Fatalist” this desire is not only directed towards Vulich but also towards the group of officers. The text stages Pechorin’s struggle for superiority in a male environment through the medium of visibility. The extension of the realm of the visible is also an attempt at stretching Pechorin’s sphere of control. This is a struggle which in the beginning it seems Vulich has won: “[...] At that moment he had acquired a mysterious sort of power over us” (140). But the course of events favors Pechorin who becomes the addressee of Vulich’s last words as well as the subject of the congratulations of his fellow officers when he defeats the Cossack that has killed the Serb. Here again, as in “Princess Mary” death turns out to be the most intimate link that can be envisaged between two men.

⁴⁵ Trippner, “Vision and Its Discontents,” 455.

In “Taman” the narrator is repetitious in his emphasis on the voyeuristic activity. Joe Andrew stresses in his article “The Blind Will See” that the gaze is predominantly the male’s activity in *A Hero of Our Time*.⁴⁶ Thus, when the narrator encounters the first of the other significant characters (the blind boy) in “Taman” he notes: “I began examining the features of his face” (54). A little later we read: “I’d been gazing at him for a long time” (54). And, of course, given the boy’s blindness, he can exert the power of his gaze with absolutely no fear of its being reciprocated, still less challenged.

Soon the action of the narrative begins, and it is the narrator’s looking which sets it off. He cannot fall asleep. A shadow passes his window: “...I half rose and glanced out of the window...” (55). He follows the boy, at such a distance “as not to let him out of sight” (55). Loss of sight would mean loss of control, and of the narrative itself. He goes down the cliff after the boy saying: “and then I saw” (55). Eventually the boy stops and the narrator mentions: “...I observed his movements...” (55). The next day he fails to exert the physical mastery over the boy and the old woman, and so he takes refuge in the only pleasure/power he has: he sits outside “gazing into the distance” (58). Thus, as in the rest of the narrator’s character, there is a deep tension and anxiety. His gaze drives the action and is insisted upon. His perception is two-fold: without his looking there would be no story. At the same time, he is persistently afraid of losing control over others.

⁴⁶ Andrew, “The Blind Will See,” 451.

CHAPTER IV

SCOPOPHILIA AND FETISHISM IN *A HERO OF OUR TIME*

Pechorin's Voyeuristic Glancing in *A Hero of Our Time*

In "Taman" Lermontov accentuates an additional aspect of fetishistic glancing. The second sentence of the narrative states that the narrator not only nearly drowned but also "[...]I very nearly died of hunger there [...]" (53). Some critics have reproached Lermontov for introducing a motif that he does not pursue any further. When one reads "Taman" as a text that centers around perception and visuality as well as gender relations, then the hunger mentioned in the beginning becomes a metaphor for Pechorin's unfulfilled sexual appetite and his unsatisfied voyeuristic wishes. When one keeps in mind that the (voyeuristic) curiosity of the child has a strong oral aspect, this sentence loses its enigmatic and random quality. The narrator never hides his fantasies from us, they almost coincide with the perceptions he makes. As we have noted, Pechorin's gratification lies much more in the act of seeing than in actual consummation. Pechorin formulates the oral orientation of his desires in "Princess Mary," when he reflects upon his relation to Mary and Grushnitskii: "I sense in myself that insatiable greed⁴⁷ which absorbs everything encountered on my way [...]" (95). In the ensuing reflection on his character and the nature of his sadistic drive to make others suffer he goes on to employ

⁴⁷ I, personally, like how this sounds in Russian—"nenasytnuju zhadnost'." See Mikhail Lermontov, *Geroi Nashego Vremeni* (Moskva; Москва: Izd-vo Akademii Nauk SSSR; Изд-во Академии наук СССР, 1962), 76.

metaphors from the field of nature and eating, linking sexuality, visuality and orality. Pechorin's lust for incorporation and his visual hunger are taken up again later in the narrative and transformed into a literary motif—that of the vampire. His delight in Mary's suffering after he has stolen a kiss from her and then refused to accompany this with a declaration of love culminates in the exclamation: "This thought gives me an unbounded pleasure: there are minutes when I understand the Vampyre..." (111). The preceding scene on the excursion has completely satisfied his visual appetite since he has seen the pain he has inflicted on Mary. More than this, his manipulative desire has been gratified as well since his plan to force her to declare her love to him has worked out as well.

Fetishization of Femininity: the Example of the Undine

Joe Andrew raises the question of the fetishization of the femininity in the example of the girl in his essay "The Blind Will See: Narrative and Gender in *Taman*".⁴⁸ He notes that in "*Taman*" the girl certainly is central. Moreover, in his opinion, the girl is a manifestation of the narrator's scopophilia. She emerges as a blank screen onto which the male unconscious can project anything, or, in this case, everything. On one level, the narrator is aware that this is precisely what he is doing. While he is gazing upon her and anatomizing her appearance he remarks: "... in her sidelong glances I read something

⁴⁸ See Andrew, "The Blind Will See," 462.

wild and suspicious...” (59); and later: “I imagined I have found Goethe’s Mignon⁴⁹...” (59).

As one attempts to define the image of the girl, one is left with the impression that the conflicting elements just do not add up. It is a mistake to say that “there can be no mistaking the overt flaunting of her femininity by the ‘undine’.”⁵⁰ Surely the point is that this “flaunting” is simply *the way he sees her*. First she is seen as the wild, free Romantic heroine, standing on the roof, physically striking, staring into the distance and signing.⁵¹ Here she is a cliché of Romanticism, but this is because the narrator deals in clichés. Another cliché of the period is the male narrator’s apprehension of the heroine in the sensualized poses seemingly entirely for his appreciation. This topos is repeated here, with the usual accompanying fetishization, “that familiar mystification or fetishization of femininity which makes the woman something both perfect and dangerous or obscene.”⁵²

Such a tendency is mostly prominent in “Taman” in the almost page-long anatomization of the girl. The narrator comments first on her nose: “A regular nose is rarer in Russian than a small foot” (59). In itself this fetishizes one part of her physiognomy: the implicit reference to *Evgenii Onegin* (“feet”, or “nozhki”) doubles the

⁴⁹ Mignon (from French “cute”, “darling”) has become the most successful heroine of German literature with a European-wide echo in fiction, music, and painting since her appearance as an enigmatic character in Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* [*Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship*, 1795–96] and the first separate publication of her four songs in 1815.

⁵⁰ More on this see Joe Andrew, *Women in Russian Literature, 1780–1863* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan, 1988), 56.

⁵¹ Joe Andrew points out that the girls lack of the “civilized” restraint recalls the similar imagery by Pushkin for his Zarema, and, especially, Zemfira. More on this see Joe Andrew, “‘Not Daring to Desire’: Male/Female and Desire in Narrative in Pushkin’s ‘Bachchisaraiskii Fontan’,” *Russian Literature* 24.3 (1988): 259–74. Also see Joe Andrew, and Mark Conliffe, “Narrative, Space and Gender in Russian Fiction: 1846–1903,” *Canadian Slavonic Papers* XIX 3–4 (2007): 416–17.

⁵² See Jacqueline Rose, *Sexuality in the Field of Vision* (London: Verso, 1986), 127.

process. He then comments on the “unusual suppleness of her body” (59): the suppleness suggests sexual availability. In turn her hair, neck, shoulders are picked out so that she emerges not as a composite physical portrait, but as a collection of bits, each to be mentally caressed.⁵³ Everything about her seems to be displayed *for him*. In this regard, too, the narrator shows a risible tendency to repetitiousness. Twice more his gaze apprehends her in sexually “enticing” positions, and the same detail is picked out. As the girl waits for him, she seems dressed for him: “... her clothing was light, to say the least; a little shawl was wrapped around her supple body” (61). This fetishization of her figure is taken one stage further, as she emerges from the sea: “She was wringing the sea foam out of her long hair; the wet shirt outlined her supple body and high breasts” (63).⁵⁴

Andrew states that “for much of the story, the girl conforms to a series of clichés and stereotypes. A further level of this imbrication of disparate images, one upon another, is to be found in the scene where she visits the narrator on the second night. Here she becomes another person. She comes into his room and reminds a suffering icon.”⁵⁵ According to Andrew, these last two words, are “a product of what the narrator sees and thinks on the basis of the signs before him.”⁵⁶ But this misunderstanding of signs, as well as the narrator’s willful reading of them the way he wants to, is precisely the point about his entire story, and about his creation of this deeply and impossibly confused image of the girl.

⁵³ Andrew, “The Blind Will See,” 462.

⁵⁴ Joe Andrew in states that “this fetishization is taken to verge on the pornographic”. Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 463.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

CHAPTER V

CREATING AN IMAGE RATHER THAN SEEING— METAPHORICAL BLINDNESS IN *A HERO OF OUR TIME*

The first two texts of *A Hero of Our Time* present us with an external view of Pechorin who remains thus even more unfathomable, but the concluding parts, all presented as part of Pechorin's journal, provide us with an internal view of his thoughts and perceptions. The fragmentary character of the novel as a whole is not mirrored in the internal structure of the journal texts. Every one of them is a complete story with a definite beginning and a marked ending. Only "Princess Mary" vaguely corresponds to the aesthetics of diary prose with its dated entries. Still they pretend to represent the unmediated, private thoughts and experiences of their hero: "...I am writing this journal for myself..." (96). This assertion is also stressed by the editor in his foreword to the journal. There exists an intrinsic tie between the theme of perception and the question of (literary) imagination. Imagination—the lack of it and more often an excess of it—is a persistent motif of the journal. The impulse to imagine can be considered an anthropological constant; it defines the space of possibility relying on the principle of similarity.⁵⁷ The imaginary turns here into a potential, into something that could be realized, as when Pechorin muses about the possibility of his falling in love with Mary. These thoughts appear to be an effect of his pursuing her and wooing her, of his imaginary relationship with her. The imaginary, rather than being a representation, turns

⁵⁷ Trippner, "Vision and Its Discontents," 457.

into a presentation of a creation that in turn influences reality. Very often the products of imagination are an articulation of something lacking as well as scenario of mistaken self-aggrandizement.

Demonic Elements of the “Taman” Setting as a Projection of the Narrator’s Literature-Fed Imagination

The third story, “Taman’,” opens with “entry into enclosed space”: it begins “late at night” (53) and the night/day alternation is to be both the proof of the space’s liminality as well as to organize the themes of the tale. To say it another way, the hero has crossed the boundary into another world, the kingdom of darkness, where he will be temporarily blinded.⁵⁸ In the course of the story he passes two further sleepless nights: one effect of this prolonged waking is to lend the whole tale the air of a dream. Joe Andrew asks, “Is the hero walking or sleeping as all this occurs?”⁵⁹

The first five pages of the “Taman” narrative take place on the night of arrival, while the last five pages offer a nice framing device, in that they delineate the even more dramatic events of the second night spent in Taman’.⁶⁰ In turn, the central section (also about five pages) takes place during the day and entails his unavailing attempts, first to

⁵⁸ In this regard the use of darkness and light by Lermontov harks back to his much more thorough-going Gothic work, the unfinished *Vadim*.

⁵⁹ Andrew, “The Blind Will See,” 454.

⁶⁰ The final paragraph is set in a day time.

obtain a safe passage from the town, and then to find out from its weird residents what is going on. All significant action, then, occurs at night.

Many commentators have considered the importance of the nocturnal setting, although the general view, formulated by Gilroy, for instance, is that the use of darkness (and other “dark elements”) is either deceptive or even parodic. For Gilroy “Taman” represents “a parody of the supernatural tale.”⁶¹ Andrew sees the demonism of the story as a projection of the overdeveloped, literature-fed imagination of the narrator.⁶²

That the hero has entered the kingdom of darkness is signaled almost at once. A Charon-like figure, “A Black Sea Cossack” (53) who stands at the very gates to the town, meets him as he enters the town. The hero, figuratively at least, enters the underworld in a kind of symbolic death. He has entered *the other world*. He even asks to be taken anywhere at all: “Take me anywhere, you scoundrel! To the devil, if you like, but take me somewhere!” (53). More purely demonic elements are further elaborated as the tale unfolds. The house has no icons, “a bad sign” (54) as the narrator notes. All the residents of this “world” have supernatural powers. The blind boy seems to be able to see, the old woman may be a witch, while the girl later struggles in the boat “with a supernatural effort” (62) and is called an “undine.”

As has been previously mentioned, all of that is conveyed to the reader by an impressionable young man who may be imagining things and there is certainly some play with his (and the reader’s) Gothic expectations. However (assuming we can believe the

⁶¹ See Marie Gilroy, *The Ironic Vision in Lermontov's A Hero of Our Time* (Birmingham: U of Birmingham, 1989), 4-45.

⁶² Andrew, “The Blind Will See,” 454.

narrator at all),⁶³ he is not alone in his feelings. His Cossack orderly at the least, shares his view. “This place is unclean!” (57) he informs his master and proceeds to conduct a conversation with a Black Sea sergeant (the one by the gates) who has also commented that “...that place is unclean, old fellow; the people are bad!...” (57). In the end, of course, we cannot know to what extent this is parodic. At the same time, it is significant that the narrator arms himself, as it were, against these dark forces. When departing from this place he remarks: “Thank God, in the morning the opportunity arose to go, and I left Taman” (64). He enters this strange world and does eventually leave it, but was this world real or just the product of the authors’ imagination?

Phantasmagoric and Romantic Conception of the Undine

Both previously mentioned aspects of something lacking as well as a scenario of mistaken self-aggrandizement are enacted in *A Hero of Our Time* by different protagonists at various stages of the novel. In “Taman” the hero is haunted by his phantasmagoric and Romantic conception of an exotic woman whom he desires and whom he needs to assert himself. The smuggler girl conjoins both femininity and Caucasian exoticism. We will never know what she is like because her image is distorted by Pechorin’s literary fantasies of nymphs, *rusalki*, and Goethean Mignons and his own dream of power. The displacement from the cultural center, from Russia, which Pechorin experiences in “Taman” does not result in a heightening of the senses, a sharper vision. Instead the narrator, bereft of the orientational system that helps him around in St.

⁶³ Ibid., 455.

Petersburg, clings to literature as a guide and does not look at all.

As Andrew notes, “Throughout the story the narrator needs to look, to attempt to see clearly, to struggle to overcome the blindness that has beset him.”⁶⁴ Indeed, the narrator looks at the girl, hears her words, but cannot see her as she is. In reality she can not possibly be all he suggests she is, but then she does not exist “in reality,” but only on the level of his projected desire.⁶⁵ As E. Ann Kaplan has observed:

Women [...] do not function as signifiers for a signified (a real woman) [...] but signifier and signified have been elided into a sign that represents something in the male unconscious.⁶⁶

Deluded by his self-love and literary imagination Pechorin cannot conceive of the girl’s interest in him differently than in a romantic, amorous way. When she looks at him he thinks infallibly her look is “wonderfully tender.” Additionally, he views the girl as weak and powerless. When he later holds the girl in his arms for a moment his senses leave him completely and he nearly blacks out: “My eyes grew dim, my head spun [...]” (61). She once again turns into a black screen onto which he can project his desires and fantasies. Only when it is almost too late does he realize his mistake: “Oh, at this point a terrible suspicion crept into my soul, the blood rushed to my head! I looked around—we were about a hundred meters from the shore, and I can’t swim!” (62).

The delusion he has suffered from is not a visual delusion (though his view is obstructed by the missing light or great distance), it is an intellectual delusion. These two

⁶⁴ Andrew, “The Blind Will See,” 463.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 463.

⁶⁶ E. Ann. Kaplan, *Looking for the Other: Feminism, Film, and the Imperial Gaze* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 322.

aspects sometimes combine in the text but, as becomes evident here, first the spell of imagination has to be broken by “suspicion” which is then confirmed by perceiving reality (“I looked around”).

On one level, the narrator is aware that this is precisely what he is doing. For instance, in the scene where she is presented as confirming to the Sentimentalist icon, certain slips reveal that this icon may only exist in his imagination. If the narrator is dimly aware of what he is doing in this area, then he lets drop further clues to this semiotic process in that, on a number of occasions, he allows his imagery to fade, to permit the girl to appropriate the gaze. Toril Moi has remarked: “As long as the master’s scopophilia remains satisfied, his domination is secure.”⁶⁷ That the girl is allowed to look at him is one of the many indicators that the narrator’s domination of his creations is far from secure. The very first time he sees her poorly (during the day), she is singing on the roof where she also “...was peering fixedly into the distance...” (58). Later, this challenge to his authority becomes even more explicit. Soon “...her eyes... stopped on me...” (60) and later she repeats the process, even while seeming to conform to the most vulnerable, Sentimentalist aspects of her iconography. Thus, the girl, as a literary character, is hopelessly doomed to be a series of clichés and stereotypes which do not add up. At the same time, the unconscious of the narrator allows her, from time to time, to be real, just as from time to time, he lets slip that she is presented to us as figment of his imagination. But these hints at self-awareness, of consciousness that he is creating an image rather than seeing properly are only hints: his propensity for fetishizing and mythologizing of the woman remain to the end. In this sense, the narrator “fails to

⁶⁷ See Toril Moi, *Sexual/textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London and New York: Methuen, 1985), 134.

change, to be reborn.”⁶⁸

Mary as a Fantasy in the “Pechorin–Grushnitskii–Mary” Love Triangle

“Princess Mary”, as well as “Taman’,” rely for their dynamics on the concept of a “mediator of desire”: in “Taman’” it is Ianko, the lover of the young girl, in “Princess Mary” it is Grushnitskii who makes Mary attractive for Pechorin. Rene Girard has pointed out that very often, literary works base their love relations on a triangular structure, where there is someone who points out to the subject what or whom to desire.⁶⁹ The mediator must not always take on the form of an actual person, it can also appear in the *gestalt* of literature as is the case with Grushnitskii. The young officer desires Mary not only because she is rich and beautiful but also because his desire for her conforms to the Romantic script of the poor, but heroic soldier who wins the heart of the princess. Once the mechanism of triangular desire has started it is of no importance whatsoever if the mediator is real or not.⁷⁰ In the same way the interest others take in one’s own love interest heightens its worth for us. It is the fact that Grushnitskii has already chosen Mary, that he has singled her out with his looks among many others that arouses Pechorin much more than her charm.⁷¹ At this point Mary turns into a fantasy, an imaginary object

⁶⁸ Andrew, “The Blind Will See,” 463.

⁶⁹ See René Girard, *Mensonge Romantique Et Vérité Romanesque* (Paris: Grasset, 1961), 12, 18.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁷¹ Here the same is true for the arousal of Pechorin’s interest in Bela. Here it is Kazbich who first desires the girl and thereby incites Pechorin’s feelings.

rather than a real person: what Pechorin sees when he looks in her eyes is not only beauty but also a reflection of Grushnitskii's desire.

In "Princess Mary" the reader is confronted with a sensuality and perceptions that are misguided by literature. Not only Pechorin but also Grushnitskii aspires to live the life of a Romantic hero: "His aim is to make himself the hero of a novel" (67). Ironically enough it is Pechorin who is transformed by Mary's imagination into the hero of a novel: "In her imagination you've been made into the hero of a novel in the modern taste..." (75). In the course of the action he knows perfectly how to make use of Mary's and Grushnitskii's literary fantasies for his scheme against Grushnitskii. He handles them so well because he has gone through a phase of literary delusion himself. In fact, he conceives his life in literary terms, e.g. when he comments on the Romantic image Mary has formed of Grushnitskii and of course himself: "There's the opening! [...] and we'll do what we can about the comedy's denouement..." (73). But his use of literature is deliberate and well calculated. When Vera reproaches him for his flirting with Mary he seduces her with his literary talents, retelling their own love-story: "I told the whole dramatic story of our acquaintance, of our love... I depicted my tenderness, my anxieties and raptures so vividly, I represented her conduct and character in such an advantageous light that, like it or not, she had to forgive me my flirting with the Princess" (101). In this instance as before, he makes use of imagination rather than being its slave. The story he is telling is aimed at Vera as well as at Mary—it is a subtle example of his capacity to double-talk and to employ his literary talent. His self-conception is framed by the laws of literature and imagination, as is expressed in the famous line: "There are two men inside me: one lives in the full sense of the word, the other ponders and judges him [...]" (124).

The journal as a literary artifact is the material expression of this personality split. What is more, it is the verbal equivalent of his obsession with control since it leaves him in absolute command over his opponents and gives him the opportunity to always have the last word. Not only does he occlude our image of Grushnitskii but he also forces a certain image of himself on us. In transforming his life into literature he makes use of the productive force of the imagination, confronting us with an imaginary portrait of himself which hides its projective character under the mask of realist story-telling.

CHAPTER VI

LANDSCAPES AS VISUAL IMAGES IN *A HERO OF OUR TIME*

The role of Lermontov's interests as a painter has hardly been taken into account. Lermontov was a gifted artist, as the publication in 1980 of Lermontov's paintings has shown. His debt to Romanticism in the sphere of painting is clearest in his portraits and landscapes. For *A Hero of Our Time* Lermontov painted several of the locations he describes (in "Bela," for instance) and the visual images of the canvases are matched by the visual impact of the verbal landscapes.⁷²

All Lermontov's landscapes in *A Hero of Our Time* possess the characteristics required of painting. As Cynthia Marsh notes, "Lermontov's sensitivity to the aesthetic process of the appreciation of painting, coupled with his talents as a prose writer, enabled him to provide the reader, in a non-painterly medium, with the conditions essential for the aesthetic appreciation of a painted landscape."⁷³ In this way he offers a rich synesthetic experience. At the same time, the role of the landscapes is even more fundamental: they are used in narrative structuring and ensure a strong Romantic coloring to the novel. This coloring affects, in particular, the reader's perception of the hero, Pechorin, and is part of

⁷² Cynthia Marsh thinks that such a conjunction of theme and perception is at odds with the general relationship between painting and literature in this period. Painting was still orientated towards the West, and stands apart from literary Romanticism. Literature was currently addressing itself to Russian issues. Painting was to reflect these concerns at a later date. Consideration of the painterly in Lermontov's prose goes the heart of the debate over where Lermontov stands in relation to Romanticism and Realism. See Cynthia Marsh, "Lermontov and the Romantic Tradition: The Function of Landscape in 'A Hero of Our Time'," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 66, no. 1 (1988): 35.

⁷³ Marsh, "Lermontov and the Romantic Tradition," 36.

the tension between Romanticism and Realism which the work as a whole displays.⁷⁴

What justification is there for seeing Lermontov's talents as a painter at work in the verbal landscapes? And what different aesthetic experiences is the reader offered?

“Bela” and “Maksim Maksimych”

In the sections “Bela” and “Maksim Maksimych” the narrator travels from Tiflis to Vladikavkaz. It was easy for Lermontov to create recognizable pictures of the scenery, since he knew this route well enough. The travelogue begins with descriptions of the Koishaur valley, and the ascent of the Koishaur mountain to the first posting station. The next day in the company of Maksim Maksimych, he travels over Gud-gora, is caught in a snow storm on the redoubtable Krestovaia mountain and is prevented from reaching the next station at Kobi. Certain characteristics link these descriptions which serve to frame them or separate them from the surrounding text.⁷⁵ In each description the fictional author adopts a particular perspective on the scene very similar to painting a canvas. The journey momentarily ceases and he becomes a static point of reference. In the first description of the Koishaur plain, for example, he has chosen a central position for himself: he is able to look up to the mountains towering above and to see the river far below which was “...stretching out and glistening like the scaly skin of a snake” (5). It is already dark by the time they reach the top. He still, though, adopts a similar perspective, casting a fearful glance into the dark abyss below and raising his vertical gaze

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ More on the theory of framing see Mary Ann Caws, *Reading Frames in Modern Fiction* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985), 33.

proportionately higher to the stars. On the summit of Gud-gora they have a panorama of the Koishaur plain, this time the rivers appearing as “threads,” and still the view is taken vertically to the surrounding peaks. There is always balance in the composition of Lermontov’s landscapes. Similarly, when they reach the Krestovaia mountain, the eye is drawn from the observer’s midway vantage point to the frozen gully below and the towering cross above.

“Princess Mary”

“Princess Mary” opens with an attitude to nature very like that of the narrator of the travel notes.⁷⁶ Pechorin chooses the highest location in the village for his rooms. A terrific view to three sides opens to him: on two sides tower high peaks. The images used to describe them add a Romantic isolationist and exotic coloring. The first peak is like the “last of the clouds of the scattering tempest” (65), the second like a “shaggy Persian cap” (65). To the remaining side lies the small town of Piatigorsk. In the middle ground of this “picture” are hazy hills, and beyond them a silver chain of snow-capped mountains. This landscape also has emotional coloring. He feels glad and joyful in such surroundings and willingly discards the difficult, passionate experiences of everyday life. Nature is regarded as desirable for its ability to stimulate positive feelings and also because of its remoteness from daily existence.

On the basis of this attitude of love for nature and appreciation of its beauty, it has been suggested by Angeloff and Klingenburg that Pechorin, at first glance a socially and

⁷⁶ Marsh, 44.

morally unattractive person, is, in reality, a tragically stunted human being of gifted potential.⁷⁷ He seems to have much in common with the attractive personality of the narrator of the travel notes. There is, however, some inconsistency between the attitudes to nature shown here and those which come later in the story, which seems to suggest a rather different role for the landscapes in the delineation of Pechorin's personality.⁷⁸

There are more instances when landscapes are inserted into the text to capture moments when Pechorin turns to nature for comfort: after Pechorin's refusal to respond to Mary's declaration of love, for instance, Pechorin is refreshed by a brief gallop into the hills. He gains comfort from nature. Just before the duel he experiences an unforgettable morning. A picture of sunlight gilding the tops of the rocks which hang over them, as he and Verner make their way to the appointed place, is complemented by the rainbows seen through the dew on the vine-leaves. Pechorin's response is one of love for nature as ever before. Such an attitude seems ironic when death or at least a killing is near. Is nature playing a joke of her own at such a decisive moment for Pechorin? After the duel he is offered no comfort when he needs it most: "The sun seemed dim to me, its rays didn't warm me" (131). So nature comforts the unworthy, when Pechorin has been manipulative and cruel to Mary; nature is capricious, stimulating feelings of love and life in the face of death; and she is cruel, denying comfort to Pechorin in moments of need.⁷⁹ Nature operates according to her own laws, unbound by any human moral code or need. And in many ways the hero is not dissimilar. Nature appeals to the Romantic mind as the

⁷⁷ A. Angeloff, Pr. Klingenburg, "Lermontov's Uses of Nature in the Novel *A Hero of Our Time*," *Russian Language Journal*, vol. XXIV, 88, East Lansing MI (July 1970): 3-12.

⁷⁸ Marsh, 44.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 45.

untamed and untamable. These notions also lie at the core of the later Romantic hero's rebellious personality. These three vignettes in "Princess Mary" also have a structural function. The first, after Mary's declaration of love, is a device for masking the passage of time. The second has a retardation effect: its silence and static, observant quality contrast profoundly with the tension of the approaching duel. The third provides a sense of place as well as a channel for Pechorin's reactions to the duel. On other occasions nature description is used in a more traditional literary manner: one- or two-line insertions of description are used to create the mood for what is to follow. For example, there is reference to a coming storm as a prelude to Pechorin's chance meeting with Vera, and Pechorin's gloom at finding himself once more in the fortress is matched by the cloud-decked landscape. The picture is again framed by his window. "Princess Mary" closes with a famous visual image which is also constructed as a canvas: the white sail in a grey sea drawing near to the shore to collect the brigand mariner, thirsting to be outcontending with the storms again" (137). This final moment of static contemplation recalls the beginning of the story and Pechorin's admiration of the three-sided view from his window. The story is thus framed by these two contemplative visual experiences. The contrast between the desire for the peace of withdrawal to nature in the first, and the yearning for the storm in the second, reflects the polarity of Pechorin's personality. There is also an unmistakable visual rapport with the backdrop to Taman,' and with the assertive hero of "Fatalist." This memorable seascape continues the Romantic tapestry against which Lermontov has projected his hero.

“Fatalist”

A picture of nature, this time a moonscape, slows the narrative of “Fatalist” and gives Pechorin the opportunity to philosophize about predetermination. An ominously red moon foregrounds the dark shadows of the roof tops, and stars shine in a darkened sky. Pechorin recalls that man’s ancestors believed the heavenly bodies controlled their destiny. But he, Pechorin, knows of the disjunction between nature and human affairs. During the previous static moments of contemplation, he has sought to be part of nature and far from the affairs of men. The events of that evening, however, have for the time being persuaded him that the opposite may be true. The issue remains undecided but this final cosmic image of nature, majestic, inaccessible and remote, complements the Romantic visual stance taken throughout.

To sum up, landscape in Lermontov’s *A Hero of Our Time* plays a much deeper role than just setting the scene and providing aesthetic pleasure. Texts of landscapes, separated from the surrounding text, are used to retard the narrative, as well as to interrupt the time sequence. Landscapes serve as static contemplative moments for the observer, whether the fictional author or Pechorin, to reveal himself to the reader. The pictures of nature also anchor the work in the travelogue genre which may easily slip from view when other genres such as the diary are employed.⁸⁰ The form of travel notes was crucial to the essential ambiguity of the work, to the important masking of the actual author, and his dissociation from his hero. Finally, the landscapes enhance the Romantic aspect of the novel and of Pechorin. Attitudes to nature as expressed in the landscapes

⁸⁰ Marsh, 46.

help the reader to identify between Pechorin, the fictional author, and Maksim Maksimych. Set in a remote, exotic area of the Empire, the novel presents a hero who communes with nature not to demonstrate his stifled, innate goodness, but to show himself a child of nature sharing all her inconsistencies of behavior, and her disregard of a moral code.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

A Hero of Our Time is informed by Romantic literary discourse and contemporary popular science, but it also improves on them, and reworks common concepts of visuality and Romantic perception.

Lermontov's novel confronts us with perception in a twofold way. In "Taman'," for instance, Lermontov's text enacts Pechorin's stubborn adherence to common knowledge, stating that the blind are deficient and weak. Another subsidiary paradox concerns our position as the reader—we too have to learn not to trust our eyes (the printed word) or our ears (the voice of the narrator), but to look closely at the internal logic of the events represented. Paradox plays a lesser role in "Princess Mary," but it is a central device of "Fatalist." "Fatalist" works on the basis of a mode of perception that is of much importance to Romantic thought—the supernatural, the marvelous and ultimately the uncanny. The text centers around the act of perceiving that which cannot be seen.

Many argue that *A Hero of Our Time* is a Romantic *fabula* which is transformed into a realistic *siuzhet*.⁸¹ On the other hand, Lermontov's novel cannot be called realistic either, since Lermontov does not supply the reader with all the details that the eye can grasp and presents us instead only what is important now or gains importance in the course of the action. What links "Taman'," "Princess Mary," and "Fatalist" is their

⁸¹ See A. K. Zholkovskii, "Semiotika Tamani," in *Bluzhdaiushchiie sny i drugie raboty*, ed. A.K. Zholkovskii (Moskva, 1994), 276–283.

semiotic approach to reality. Every one of these texts is concerned with the reading of physiognomic, psychological or textual signs. Consequently, the text does not presuppose a reality behind appearances—it rather states that it is all there, laid out in front of us if we are able to see. Seeing itself turns into a challenge in Lermontov's text. Lermontov in a sense rules the reader and decides for him what is to be seen at each new place, in each new situation. Thus, I argue that Lermontov's novel is at the very border between Romanticism and Realism. This forms the basis for its modernity.

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