

How nationality,  
social status, and  
gender affect  
pechorin's  
interactions with in...



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During the 1830's, the cultural movement of Russian Romanticism evoked a multitude of intense feelings amongst the Russians, in particular a fervent sense of nationalism. This inspiration occurred incongruence with an enormous Russian victory. At this time, Russia triumphed in the first half of a tenacious war with the tribal people of the northern Caucasus Mountains. The Russian nationalism includes a strong sense of superiority, as seen in many works of Romanticism during this time period. In the Russian novel *A Hero of Our Time*, gender and status trigger Pechorin's Byronic quality of superiority towards those around him. Lermontov highlights the protagonist's arrogant attitude specifically through his interactions with mountain tribes, women, and peers.

In the beginning of the novel, Lermontov Pechorin's superiority over the Caucasian mountain people arises due to the popular belief among Russians during the 1830's. In order to protect routes to new Trans-Caucasian possessions, Russia desires to assimilate the region into their own territory holdings. Upon winning the first half of the war, "the widespread attitude towards the mountain tribes was the same as that towards savages, who they saw as either outside culture altogether or at its lowest level" (Durylin 127-128). This attitude appears exceedingly prevalent amongst Russian army, including Pechorin. His racist mindset presents itself in his relationship with the tribal princess Bela. Since Pechorin considers her people inferior, he believes that his kidnapping of the princess seems justifiable, "... that wild Circassian girl should be happy to have such a sweet husband..." (Lermontov 21). Due to his notable status, Pechorin reasons that Bela should feel grateful that she can live an ameliorate life as opposed to one she might live

back in her village. Moreover, Pechorin's superiority translates into a feeling of ownership over Bela. In his mind, his supremacy asserts his right over the princess and confirms his ability to control her. Pechorin explains to Maxim Maximich, "[The innkeeper's wife] knows Tatar and is going to look after [Bela] and accustom her to the idea that she is mine, because she will never belong to anyone else" (24). Since Pechorin believes he possesses supremacy over Bela, he refuses to give the "savage king" his daughter back since he no longer controls her. Ultimately, the superior attitude that Pechorin exhibits within the novel *A Hero of Our Time* reflects the typical attitude held by most during the time of the Russo-Circassian War.

Additionally, within the novel, Lermontov depicts Pechorin as a male chauvinist throughout his exchanges with women. Pechorin insinuates that women serve only as objects for conquering, as opposed to actual human beings. His mindset originates from a prophecy he receives during his childhood, which predicts "death at the hands of an evil wife..." (127). From that point on, Pechorin refuses to allow any woman to overtake him as he describes in his journal, "One thing I have always found strange: I have never become the slave of a woman I loved. On the contrary, I have always acquired over them, through my will and hear, invincible power, without the slightest effort" (93). Pechorin enhances his overall sense of superiority by dominating women before they discover an opportunity to overtake him. His most notably conquest of a woman appears in his interactions with Princess Mary. Throughout their time together in Pyatigorsk, Pechorin believes that his relationship with the princess seems like nothing other than a game he tries to win, "But I have guessed your secret, dear princess so take care!

You wish to repay me in the same coin, to prick my vanity. You shall not succeed! And if you declare war on me, then I shall be merciless" (105).

Pechorin does not appear to possess any feelings for Princess Mary; instead, he attempts to get the upper hand in their relationship before she does.

Furthermore, every milestone that Pechorin accomplishes in his game to win Princess Mary seems like an emotionless victory, " She is displeased with herself. She is accusing herself of coldness! Oh, this is the first, the main triumph. Tomorrow she will want to make it up to me. I know all this by heart already, and that is what is so boring" (111). Pechorin does not feel any love as his relationship with Mary develops. Dominance and boredom seem like the only sensations he notices. All in all, the male chauvinistic behavior that Lermontov utilizes to depict his protagonist's interactions with women stem from Pechorin's childhood prophecy as well as his desire to surmount them.

Moreover, the author demonstrates that Pechorin tends to gravitate towards superiority over those around him because he enjoys the feeling of dominance. In a journal entry, the protagonist confesses that " If I considered myself to be better, mightier than anyone else on earth, I would be happy..." (107). The attitude that Pechorin embodies in this quotation appears in a specific relationship with one of his army colleague, Grushnitsky. Once Pechorin recognizes his peer's feelings for Princess Mary, he immediately attempts to win the princess for himself, just to prove his superiority. He finds pleasure in watching Grushnitsky lose the affections of Mary as she begins to fall in love with Pechorin, " I look at others' sufferings and joys only with respect to myself, as on food sustaining my emotional strength... my principle satisfaction lies in bending to my will all that surrounds me" (107).

Pechorin recognizes his colleague's love for the princess, thereby making his suffering exceedingly enjoyable to the protagonist. Additionally, the desire for superiority justifies why Pechorin does not possess any true friendships. Even in a relationship with only one other person, the protagonist believes that an opportunity for inferiority presents itself, "... I am incapable of friendship: of two friends, one is always the other's slave, although often neither will admit to this. I cannot be a slave..." (83). Instead of friendships, Pechorin prefers to have enemies since they offer him a chance for superiority and dominance. After uncovering Grushnitsky's plan for revenge, Pechorin admits that, "[Enemies] amuse me, stir my blood. To be always on guard, to catch every glance and the meaning of every word, to guess intentions, spoil plots, pretend to be deceived...that's what I call life!" (117). The rush of adrenaline that Pechorin senses after victoriously conquering those around him prevents him from engaging in conventional friendships. Ultimately, the enjoyment of a superior status elucidates Pechorin's interactions with those around him, specifically his relationship with Grushnitsky, and also explains why he never engages in any normal friendships.

As seen in Lermontov's novel *A Hero of Our Time*, the gender and status of those Pechorin encounters greatly influences how he chooses to interact with them. The Caucasus mountain tribes, women, as well as peers, in particular, suffer the consequences of the protagonist's desire for superiority. Pechorin acquires a pleasurable sensation of supremacy by inflicting racist, chauvinistic, or dominant feelings on those he meets. The concept of superiority appeared frequently during the time of the novel's publishing,

1830. Russian Romanticism often incorporated that feeling because of the events occurring at the time.