

Pečorin and Hamlet: Towards a Typology of Character

M. Ju Lermontov's novel, *A Hero of Our Time*, has often been compared to various works of Russian and, in particular, west European prose for the purpose of determining its literary sources. As a result of these comparative studies, separate motifs of a general nature were found, but they concerned primarily superficial coincidences little affecting the inner essence of Lermontov's novel. Among those noted were some thematic correspondences, a turning to an experiment in the autobiographical tale, and to the genre of travel notes and the confession, forms which had established themselves after Rousseau, first in sentimental prose and subsequently in Romantic literature. But in Lermontov, all these features were occasioned not so much by the force of tradition as by personal factors. The form of travel notes and the literary diary more than anything else correspond to the author's creative design. The genre of the lyric novel gave him more freedom, the right not to feel bound to a sequential plot line composed of chronological events and, at the same time, allowed him to subordinate the composition to the logic of psychological content. Thus, the organizing principle for the style and plot became 'the inner man,' his reflections, his 'struggling thoughts,' and his admissions and confessions.

With respect to its nature, to dramatic tension, to the tragic, and to the inclinations towards merciless self-analysis, the character in world literature closest to the Lermontovian type, of which Pečorin is the fullest expression, is Hamlet. Granted, they act in different epochs, on different social and national soils, in different situations; nevertheless, they, as psychological phenomena, represent varieties of one and the same type of thinking and suffering personality.

If in Lermontov's lyrics and poetry there is much in common with Byron and Puškin and in his dramas with Schiller, then in the novel, *A Hero of Our Time*, Lermontov closely followed Shakespeare.

Shakespeare's *Hamlet* was published for the first time in 1603; Lermontov's *A Hero of Our Time* appeared more than two centuries later, in

1840. Shakespeare's tragedy reflects the humanistic ideas of the Renaissance; Russian reality of the 1830s serves as the basis for Lermontov's novel. By genre, the first is a tragedy written half in prose, half in verse; the second is a lyrical novel written in prose. It would be possible to go on still further with these oppositions indicative of their differences.

All this is so. Nevertheless, to my mind, there is sufficient basis for contrastive-comparative studies of these two works, so dissimilar in plot and in a whole range of other features.

Let us point first of all to the facts that indicate Lermontov's close familiarity with the works of the English dramatist.

According to the evidence of the poet's biographer, P.A. Viskovatyj, Lermontov became acquainted with the works of Shakespeare and Byron in the original for the first time even before entering the Moscow University Gentry Boarding School; that is, before 1828.¹ In his mature years, Lermontov's interest in Shakespeare increased. In a letter from Pjatigorsk to E.A. Arsen'eva written a year before his tragic death, he asked to be sent 'the complete Shakespeare in English' ('polnogo Šekspira po anglijski').²

Of all the documentary evidence, of greatest interest is Lermontov's letter to his aunt, M.A. Šan-Girej. It has attracted the attention of scholars, but for a truly learned interpretation of this important document, in connection with the general problem of Lermontov's attitude towards the creative writings of Shakespeare, we must turn to the works of B.M. Ejxenbaum. In his comprehensive article, 'Dramaturgija Lermontova' ('Lermontov's Dramaturgy'), he made, first of all, a correct dating of the letter and showed convincingly that it was written not in 1830-2, as was assumed previously, but in 1829, when Lermontov was still at the Gentry Boarding School. In this same article, he found evidence that Lermontov was busy reading Shakespeare and he pointed out echoes and reminiscences of Shakespeare in the lyrics and dramas of the Russian poet.³

Ejxenbaum does not touch upon all the contents of the letter, intending to do that later,⁴ and so limits his task to an explanation, as he said, 'of one detail which has drawn the particular attention of Lermontov scholars' ('odnoj detali, privlekšej k sebe suguboe vnimanie lermontovedov').⁵ This

1 P.A. Viskovatyj, *M. Ju. Lermontov: Žizn' i tvorčestvo* (Moscow 1891) 37

2 Lermontov knew French and German from childhood. After his move to Moscow in 1827, he studied English with his English tutor, F.F. Windson.

3 B.M. Ejxenbaum, *Stat' i o Lermontove* (Moscow-Leningrad: Izd. AN SSSR 1961) 136-8, 143-4. See also B.M. Ejxenbaum, 'K istorii Gamleta v Rossii,' *Šekspirovskij sbornik* (Moscow 1967) 64-70; *Šekspir i russkaja kul'tura* (Moscow-Leningrad: Izd. 'Nauka' 1965) 241-4.

4 G. Fridlender, 'K stat'e B. Ejxenbauma "K istorii Gamleta v Rossii",' *Šekspirovskij sbornik* (Moscow 1967) 71

5 B.M. Ejxenbaum, *Stat' i o Lermontove* 138

'one detail' is the question of Lermontov's interpretation of the character of Hamlet.

B. V. Nejman uses the text of this letter and, in particular, Lermontov's own account of the scene of Hamlet's conversation with the king's messengers to whom he says, upon Guildenstern's refusal to play on the recorder, 'What, do you really expect to extract the secret thoughts of a man like me, a being endowed with a strong will?', as the bases for the following conclusion: 'On the whole, these words give the substance of Hamlet's remark, but Shakespeare does not have his hero maintain that he possesses 'a strong will.' This particular statement is *by Lermontov himself* [Nejman's italics] who, obviously, understood the hero of Shakespeare's tragedy in just that way.'⁶ Nejman then draws our attention to the closeness of Lermontov's understanding of Hamlet's nature to that of Vissarion Belinskij.

Not agreeing with Nejman's conclusions, Ejxenbaum specifies, above all, the factual aspects and points out that 'there were no articles about Hamlet in Goethe although there was Wilhelm Meister's reflection on the role of Hamlet in Goethe's novel, *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* [Book IV, Chapters 3 and 13], out of which the editors of the *Moskovskij vestnik* drew up a kind of article entitled "The Character of Hamlet".'⁷ Ejxenbaum examines in great detail the question of what Lermontov might have known about the widespread and, at that time, diverse interpretations of Hamlet's character in Russia and abroad (Goethe, A. W. Schlegel, F. Guizot). As a possible source for Lermontov's interpretation, he points out the article by Guizot published in Russian translation in 1828 in the first issue of the university journal *Atenej*. Returning to the inexact quotation from *Hamlet* on which Nejman constructs his conclusion (Shakespeare really wrote, 'You would pluck out the heart of my mystery ... 'Sblood, do you think I am easier to be played on than a pipe?'⁸), Ejxenbaum observes: 'Here, as on other occasions, Lermontov "quotes" very inaccurately; he does not quote, he re-tells. The words "a being endowed with a strong will," are not in Shakespeare. One would do

6 'Kak, xotite iz menja, suščestva, odarënnogo sil'noj voleju, istorgnut' tajnyje mysli? ... Eti slova v obščem peredajut soderžanie repliki Gamleta; no Ŗekspir ne zastavljaet svoego geroja utverždat' čto u nego "sil'naja volja." Eto utverždenie *samogo Lermontova* (podčerknuto B. V. Nejmanom, K. G.), kotoryj, očevidno, imenno tak vosprinimal obraz Ŗekspirovskoj tragedii.'

B. V. Nejman, 'Dramaturgija Lermontova,' in M. Ju. Lermontov: *Dramy* (Moscow-Leningrad: Izd. 'Iskusstvo' 1950) 100-3

7 'Nikakoj stat'i o Gamlete u Gete net, a est' razmyšlenija Vil'gel'ma Mejstera o roli Gamleta v romane Gete "Učeničeskije gody Vil' gel'ma Mejstera" (kn. IV, glava 3 i 13), otkuda i redakcija "Moskovskogo vestnika" sostavila nečto vrode stat'i, ozaglaviv eë "Xarakter Gamleta."' B. M. Ejxenbaum, *Stat'i o Lermontove* 138

8 William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (Cambridge: The Cambridge University Press 1969) 78. All further references to Hamlet are from this edition.

well not to give special significance to this fact. After all, it is simply a question of the difference between a thing (the recorder), and a man; that is, a being endowed not only with reason but with a will. Some Lermontov scholars saw in these words something much more.⁹

Ejxenbaum was undoubtedly right. After all, this phrase, as it is in Shakespeare, gives clear ground for an interpretation of Hamlet's character in exactly the same spirit as Lermontov understood it. Its sense becomes still clearer when taken in the context of the whole scheme, of the ironical (almost mocking), tone of Hamlet's unravelling of the king's intention in sending him his courtiers. Hamlet says to them:

Why do you go about to recover the wind of me, as if you would drive me into a toil?
... 'Sblood, do you think I am easier to be played on than a pipe? Call me what instrument you will, though you can fret me, yet you cannot play upon me. (III.ii.348–50,372–4)

So would speak a man endowed with a strong will. This passage can be interpreted in only one sense:

Do you really suppose that I am so spineless, such a pitiful milk-sop, and that you can so easily succeed in driving me into your net, in knowing what I have in my soul, and in guessing "the heart of my mystery"? It is a hopeless undertaking.

And in the eyes of the king, who can hardly be considered a weak man, Hamlet is a 'strong' and 'fearsome' personality. Alarmed by Hamlet's behaviour, he says, 'Madness in great ones must not unwatched go' (III.i.192) and 'For we will fetters put about this fear' (III.iii.26).

Lermontov's letter to Šan-Girej, in which he gives, almost from memory, the substance of a whole scene from *Hamlet*, demonstrates how well the fifteen-year-old poet knew the text of Shakespeare's tragedy. The text Ejxenbaum has established of Lermontov's free versification of the short poem Hamlet addressed to Ophelia is also proof of this very fact:

Zovi nadeždu snoviden'em
Nepravdu – istinoj zovi,

9 'Zdes' Lermontov, kak i v drugix slučajax, "citiruet" očen' netočno – ne citiruet, peres-kazyvaet. Podčerknutyx nami slov ("suščestva odarënnogo sil'noj voleju") u Šekspira net. Možno bylo by ne pridavat' etomu faktu nikakogo osobogo značenija: ved' reč idët prosto o raznice meždu veščju (dydkoj) i čelovekom, t.e. suščestvom, odarënnym ne tol'ko razumom, no i volej. Nekotorye lermontovedy uvideli v etix slovax nečto gorazdo bol'see.'
B.M. Ejxenbaum, *Stat'i o Lermontove* 138

Ne ver' xvalam i uveren'jam,
No ver', o, ver' moej ljubvi?¹⁰

In the light of the above-stated problem, Lermontov's enthusiastic comment about *Hamlet* is of particularly important significance: 'I defend the honour of Shakespeare. If he is great, then he is so in *Hamlet*. If he is indeed Shakespeare – that universal genius penetrating into the hearts of men, into the laws of fate, the highly original, that is, the inimitable Shakespeare – then he is so in *Hamlet*.'¹¹ These lines date from the poet's early years when he was still only shaping his writing and had not yet produced his major works. It is significant that in this short remark, it is *Hamlet* out of all of Shakespeare that is singled out for the ability of the 'universal genius' to penetrate 'into the hearts of men, into the laws of fate.' In other words, Lermontov singles out those features which will be central to his own future creative efforts.

Lermontov's comment about Hamlet must be examined against the background of the literary era when Romanticism was at its height and Shakespeare became the standard, the supreme and inaccessible model of high poetry. B.G. Reizov writes: 'Shakespeare was of greatest importance for French Romanticism in 1820–30 at which time he was the standard in the struggle against classicism and, to a considerable extent, the model not only for the new dramaturgy, but for the new literature and aesthetics as well.'¹²

10

Call hope a dream,
Injustice, consider a truth,
Do not believe praises or promises,
But believe, o, believe in my love!

Quoted in B.M. Ejxenbaum, *Stat'i o Lermontove* 138. This is Lermontov's free translation of the following passage:

Doubt thou the stars are fire,
Doubt that the sun doth move,
Doubt truth to be a liar,
But never doubt I love.

(II.ii.116–20)

- 11 'Vstupajus' za čest' Šekspira. Esli on velik, to eto v *Gamlete*; esli on istinno Šekspir, etot genij vseob'emlemyj, pronikajuščij v serdce čeloveka, v zakony sud'by, original'nyj to est' nepodražajemyj Šekspir – to eto v *Gamlete*.' M. Ju. Lermontov, *Polnoe sobranie sočinenij* (Moscow-Leningrad: Izd. AN SSSR 1957) VI 407
- 12 'Naibol'šee značenje Šekspir imel dlja francuzskogo romantizma 1820–1830–x godov, kogda on byl znamenem v bor'be s klassicizmom i v značitel'noj mere obrazcom ne tol'ko dlja novoj literatury i estetiki.' B. Reizov, 'Šekspir i estetika francuzskogo romantizma (Žizn' Šekspira F. Gizo),' in *Šekspir v mirovoj literature: Sb. statej* (Moscow-Leningrad: Goslitizdat 1964) 157

Russian Romanticism was no less indebted to Shakespeare, whose works became known in Russia through his German and French critics.

During the years 1820–30, the Russian press was full of enthusiastic reviews in which the great English dramatist was proclaimed a 'magician, a true romantic magus,' the profound meaning of whose works cannot be understood. 'He,' wrote I. Ja. Kronenberg about Shakespeare, 'is an enigma, just as nature herself is. He is as inscrutable, as sublime, as inexhaustible and as multifarious as she.'¹³ But not only Kronenberg wrote with such enthusiasm about Shakespeare; so did the author of 'Literary Reveries' ('Literaturnye mečtanija'), V.G. Belinskij: 'Shakespeare – divine, great, unattainable Shakespeare – understood hell, earth and heaven. King of nature, he took equally from good and evil and divined via his own inspired vision the throbbing pulse of the universe.'¹⁴

Foregrounded were Shakespeare's psychological insights, the ultimate of which he attained in *Hamlet* where, wrote S.P. Ševyrev, he 'reaches the highest and the most insolvable of life's mysteries. In this tragedy, Shakespeare wanted to reveal the lowest depths in the ocean of life; that is why this play is so sombre and mysterious.'¹⁵

Belinskij brought much that was both new and important to an understanding of the essence of Hamlet's character. He, at various times and from different points of view, returned to the idea of Shakespeare's tragedy.

Some inconsistencies can be observed in Belinskij's judgments of Hamlet. On the one hand, it seems as though he agrees with Goethe in the latter's opinion of Hamlet as an indecisive man, 'a spineless, weak youth on whose shoulders has fallen a burden beyond his strength.'¹⁶ Belinskij speaks of Hamlet's weakness of will, pointing out that despite the weighty reasons for 'inexorably and terribly avenging profaned right ... virtue, greatness and his own self,' Hamlet displays weakness in entering into 'open and desperate combat' against evil. But on the other hand, Belinskij underscores 'the sublimity and chasteness' of Hamlet's soul and points out that the weakness of his will 'is not innate' but 'only a consequence of the disintegration of his

13 'Istinnym volšebnikom v romantičeskom stile duxov ... On est' zagadka, kak i sama priroda! On nepostižim, kak i ona! On veličestven, kak ona! ...' 'Minevra,' *Čast' 1* (1835) 251

14 'Šekspir, božestvennyj, velikij, nedostižimyj Šekspir, postig i ad, i zemlju, i nebo; car' prirody, on vzjal ravnuju dan' i s dobra, i s zla i podsmotrel v svoem vdoxnovennom jasnovidenii bienie pul'sa vselennoj...' V.G. Belinskij, *Polnoe sobranie sočinenij* (Moscow: Izd. AN SSSR 1953) 132. Further references to this publication will be abbreviated 'V.G. Belinskij.'

15 'Doxodit do vyššix nerazrešimyx zagadok žizni. Šekspir v etoj tragedii xotel raskryt' glubočajšee dno Okeana žizni: vot počem ona tak temna i tainstvenna.' M.P. Alekseev, ed., *Šekspir i russkaja kul'tura* (Moscow-Leningrad: Izd. 'Nauka' 1965) 221

16 'Bezvol'nogo xrupkogo junoši, na pleči kotorogo svalilas' neposil'naja zadača.' B. Reizov, op. cit. 194

character' and that 'by nature Hamlet is a strong man.' Belinskij goes on to say: 'His bitter irony, his momentary outbursts, his passionate pranks during his conversation with his mother, his proud contempt and unconcealed hatred for his uncle – all this is indicative of his energy and the greatness of his soul.'¹⁷

Lermontov's understanding of the essence of Hamlet's character, as mentioned by Ejxenbaum, is closer to Guizot's interpretation according to which Hamlet is not a spineless being, but an active and stoic champion of justice 'to whom it is not revenge that is necessary but justice, who abandons himself not to the pessimistic lamentations about the world's evil, but to a persistent search for truth.'¹⁸

The Romantics found Shakespeare to be the greatest interpreter of 'the life of the soul and heart' ('žizni duši i serdca'). The figure of Hamlet attracted them as a psychological type, as a complex character with his internal struggle, his contradictory world of passion, feelings, and thoughts, and with the intense tragedy of his intellectual and suffering personality. And it was on the basis of such factors that Lermontov arrived at his evaluation of Hamlet's character.

Hamlet's attacks, like those of the hero of Lermontov's novel, must be understood not as attacks on good but, as Turgenev wrote, as attacks 'on feigned good under whose mask, once again are concealed its age-old enemies, evil and falsehood.' Comparing Hamlet to Mephistopheles, Turgenev also noted: 'Hamlet is the same as Mephistopheles, but is a Mephistopheles imprisoned in the living circle of human nature; hence, his negation is not an evil but is itself directed against evil.'¹⁹ This thought is closer to Belinskij's opinion of Pečorin and Lermontov's heroes in general.

Hamlet dates from the second period of Shakespeare's work, during which time he became more and more absorbed in moral-psychological problems, turning to the theme of the tragic conflict between a thinking, suffering

17 'Mstit' neumolimo, strašno za porugannoe pravo ... za dobrodetel', za veličie, za sebja samogo ... otkrytyj i očajannyj boj ... veličie i čistota duši ... ne po prirode ... tol'ko vsledstvie raspadenija ... ot prirody Gamlet čelovek sil'nyj ... Ego želčnaja ironija, ego mgnovennye vspyški, ego strastnye vyhodki v razgovore s mater'ju, gordoe prezrenie i neskryvaemaja nenavist' k djade – vse eto svidetel' stvuet ob energii i velikosti duši.' V.G. Belinskij II 293

18 'Kotoromu nužna ne mest', no sud, kotoryj predaetsja na pessimističeskim setovanijam o mirovom zle, a nastojčivym poiskam pravdy.' B. Reizov, op. cit. 194

19 'Na poddel'noe dobro, pod ličinoj kotorogo opjat' -taki skryvaetsja zlo i lož', ego iskonnyje vrugi ... Gamlet tot že Mefistofel', no Mefistofel', zaključennyj v živoj krug čelovečeskoj prirody; ottogo ego otricanije ne est' zlo – ono samo napravleno protiv zla.' I.S. Turgenev, 'Gamlet i Don-Kixot,' in *Polnoe sobranie sočinenij i pisem v dvadcati vos'mi tomax* (Moscow-Leningrad: Izd. 'Nauka' 1964) VIII 183

personality and his milieu. This explains the intense interest of the Romantics in general and Lermontov in particular in this Shakesporean tragedy.

Hamlet and Pečorin – both are psychological enigmas, both are vivid characters constantly provoking the most contradictory judgments. Hamlet's personality, like Pečorin's, is veiled in a mysterious shadow.

Hamlet is the focal point of Shakespeare's tragedy; in him reside the principal idea and emotional appeal of the work. Pečorin functions the same way in Lermontov's novel.

The amount of literature on *Hamlet* is enormous. An infinitely large number of articles, books, and essays have been written, in which Shakespeare's tragedy is considered from many different points of view. Some see the basic theme of the play (its 'pafos') in the necessity to struggle against evil and against all that distorts man's natural essence, which contains within itself all good and humane elements. Others think that the fundamental idea of *Hamlet* consists of the conflict between law and duty and 'of the struggle between the indignation at vice and crime and the inability to enter into an open and desperate combat with them as the consciousness of duty demands.'²⁰ Such is the diversity of opinion about the figure of Hamlet, the most 'enigmatic' of all characters created by the great English dramatist. Reizov writes: 'Rude and gentle, craving revenge and not wishing to avenge, wise and reckless, weak-willed and resolute, a reflective man and a man of action, Hamlet has been endowed with the most contradictory psychological characteristics and has served as grounds for diverse psychological, aesthetic and philosophical meditations.'²¹

Hamlet, like Leonardo da Vinci's 'Gioconda' and every other significant artistic image, offers room for individual perception. In this I.S. Turgenev saw 'the particular superiority of great poetical works,' opinions on which, 'as on life in general, can be infinitely varied.'²² Each critic discovers in the multiplicity of Shakespeare's Hamlet that which is in agreement with his own tastes and concepts.

Kenneth Muir, a contemporary English critic of Shakespeare, speaking of

20 'Sostavljaet bor'ba negodovanija na porok i prestuplenie s bessiliev vstupit' s nimi v otkrytyj i otcajannyj boj, kak togo trebuet soznanie dolga.' V.G. Belinskij VII 313

21 'Grubyj i mjagkij, žažduščij mest' i ne želajuščij mstit' mudryj i bezumnyj, slabovol'nyj i volevoj, čelovek refleksii i čelovek dejstvija, Gamlet nadeljalsja samymi protivopoložnymi psixologičeskimi svojstvami i služil povodom dlja raznoobraznejšix psixologičeskix, estetičeskix i filosofskix razmyšlenij.' B.G. Reizov, 'Sud'ba Šekspira v zarubežnyx literaturax (17–20 vv.)', in *Iz istorii evropejskix literatur* (Leningrad: Izd. Leningr. universiteta 1970) 363

22 'Osobnoe preimuščestvo velikix poetičeskix proizvedenij ... kak i na žizn' voobšče, moguť byt' beskonečno raznoobrazny...' I.S. Turgenev, op. cit. 271

how portraits of the Danish prince created by critics 'differ sharply one from another,' quotes various interpretations of Hamlet's character from Coleridge to Bernard Shaw. He notes that all the judgments 'are self-portraits or, at least, bear the imprint of the interpreter's own pre-conceptions.'²³

More accurate and subtle observations about the main feature and emotional appeal of Shakespeare's tragedy are to be found in George Brandes. He writes:

There are ... books whose fundamental idea is capable of many interpretations and affords matter for much dispute, but whose significance lies less in what they say to us directly than in what they lead us to imagine, to divine, and to think on our own. They have the peculiar faculty of setting thoughts and feelings in motion; more thoughts than they themselves contain, and perhaps of a quite different character. *Hamlet* is such a book. As a piece of psychological development, it lacks the lucidity of classical art; the hero's soul has all the untranspicuousness and complexity of a real soul...²⁴

If we can call Shakespeare's tragedy a 'history of Hamlet's soul,' which it undoubtedly is, then by the same token, Lermontov's novel, *A Hero of Our Time*, can be called, above all, a 'biography of Pečorin's soul.'

Many critics mention how 'enigmatic' and 'mysterious' Hamlet is. Muir, for example, expresses doubt about the possibility of our ever completely exposing the essence of this Shakespearean character: 'Is it possible for us to understand the hidden meaning of Hamlet's nature? In creating such a character, Shakespeare sought to emphasize that this man is too complicated to be reduced to a formula.'²⁵

So, too, is Pečorin. Belinskij, to whom we are obliged most of all for our understanding of the essence of Lermontov's hero, concludes his judgment of Pečorin with the following words: 'He eludes us as the same incompleated and unresolved being as he appeared to us to be at the beginning of the novel.'²⁶ The source of Hamlet's tragedy, as of Pečorin's, lies in the fact that they are personifications of 'that solitude of soul which cannot disclose itself

23 K. Muir, 'Gamlet,' in *Vil'jam Šekspir: K četyrexsotletiju so dnja roždenija, 1564-1964: Issledovanija i materialy* (Moscow: Izd. 'Nauka' 1964) 160. Muir's original article in English could not be found. Given here is a translation from the Russian by C. Roberts.

24 George Brandes, *William Shakespeare: A Critical Study*, trans. W. Archer and D. White (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co. 1963) II 38 [here and later with slight changes, to harmonize this translation with the original and the Russian edition used by author - editor's note]

25 K. Muir, op. cit. 169

26 'On skryvaetsja ot nas takim že nepolnym i nerazgadannym suščestvom, kak i javljalsja nam v načale romana.' V. G. Belinskij iv 267

to others.²⁷ Both Hamlet and Pečorin are 'restless' characters. In both of them is hidden a kind of magnetic force. It is impossible to regard them with indifference. Each generation must experience their tragedy in its own way.

Noting Hamlet's 'enigmatic' and 'mysterious' manner and his 'inquisitive, proud mind,' George Brandes comes to the following conclusion: 'He embodies the lofty and reflective spirit, standing isolated, with its severely exalted ideas, in corrupt or worthless surroundings, forced to conceal its inmost nature, yet everywhere arousing hostility. He has the unfathomable spirit and ever-changing physiognomy of genius.'²⁸ Similarly, these words characterize the relationship between Pečorin and his hostile environment. Like Hamlet, he is greater in stature than the people around him. To them, he is both alien and incomprehensible.

Critics often 'accused' and still 'accuse' Hamlet of exactly those characteristics attributed to Pečorin: of 'egoism,' 'rudeness,' 'mockery' toward his fellows, of 'posturing,' 'callousness,' 'cruelty,' 'scepticism,' and 'lack of faith.' In Russian criticism, a similar view of this Shakespearean character is held with the utmost consistency in Turgenev's well-known article, 'Hamlet and Don Quixote' ('Gamlet i Don-Kixot'). Of Hamlet, Turgenev writes:

He lives for himself alone. He is an egoist ... and does not find anything in the whole world to which he can dedicate himself with all his soul. He is a sceptic – always busying himself with and making much of his own self ... always looking within himself, he knows to a fineness all his shortcomings, despises them, despises his very self. ... He does not know what he wants or why he lives. ... Everyone sympathizes with him and understandably so: in him, everyone finds something of himself. But it is impossible to love him. It is impossible, I repeat, because he loves no one himself. ... a penetrating, fine and sceptical mind. ... Hamlets hold the mob in contempt. ... Hamlets are all concerned only with themselves; they are loners. ... In him (Hamlet) is personified the principle of negation ... the reflective and analytical spirit, a spirit leaden, sombre, devoid of harmony and bright hues. ... Hamlet is on occasion deceitful and even cruel.²⁹

When reading these lines, all that critics have written about *A Hero of Our Time* comes immediately to mind. Almost every one of these psychological

27 G. Brandes, op. cit. 38

28 Ibid. 32

29 'On ves' živët dlja samogo sebja, on egoist ... ne naxodit ničëgo v celom mire, k čëmu by mog prilëpit' sja dušoju; on skeptik – i večno vozitsja i nositsja s samim soboju ... večno gljadja vnutr' sebja, on znaet do tonkosti vse svoi nedostatki, preziraet ix, preziraet samogo sebja. ... On neznaet čëgo xočet i začëm živët ... sočuvstvuet emu vsjakij, i ono ponjatno: počti každyj naxodit v nem sobstvennye čerty; no ljubit' ego, povtorjaem, nel'zja, potomu čto on nikogo sam ne ljubit ... pronicatel'nyj, tonkij, skeptičeskij um ... Gamlety prezirajut tolpu ... Gamlety vse tol'ko soboju zanjaty: oni odinoki ... V nem (Gamlete) voploščeno načalo

attributes, both the negative and the positive, have been mentioned in connection with Pečorin at one time or another, beginning with the moment Lermontov's novel first appeared, right up until the present day. But, of course, they have been mentioned from varying ideational and methodological points of view, with different emphases and in different words.

It is well known that critics have written more than once about Pečorin in exactly such terms, saying that he is an 'egoist,' that he 'poses and mocks,' that he 'loves no one' and is 'a loner,' that he possesses 'a penetrating, fine and sceptical mind,' that in him is personified 'the principle of negation,' that there lives in him 'the reflective and analytical spirit, a spirit leaden, sombre, devoid of harmony and bright hues.'

Hamlet is approximately thirty years old; Pečorin is roughly the same age. They coincide with each other in the following principal ways: in their position on life, in their attitudes towards their surroundings, their disposition for self-analysis and self-knowledge, their psychological intensity, and to use Belinskij's phrase, in their manifestation of 'the suffering spirit which seeks salvation in itself.'³⁰

Shakespeare distinguishes between the 'outer' and the 'inner' man. The king, noticing the drastic change in Hamlet's behaviour, says:

Something have you heard
Of Hamlet's transformation – so call it,
Sith nor th' exterior nor the inward man
Resembles that it was. (II.ii.4–7)

The poet makes a point of Hamlet's introspection, his ability to gaze intently into his inner world. Hamlet is familiar with that frame of mind when, so to speak, the soul acquires vision. When Horatio asks him where he saw the image of his dead father, Hamlet replies, 'In my mind's eye' (I.ii.185).

As it is shown in the tragedy, Hamlet's life disintegrates as though in two clearly demarcated stages. Of the first stage we know little, but one thing is clear: before us is a youthful dreamer brought up in spirit of the Renaissance.

otricanija ... dux refleksii i analiza, dux tjaželyj, mračnyj, lišenyj garmonii i svetlyx krasok. ... On trevožen, inogda daže grub, poziruet i glumitsja ... Gamlet pri slučae kovaren i daže žestok.' I.S. Turgenev, op. cit. VIII 174, 176–8. In his interpretation of Hamlet, Turgenev is not alone. Points of view similar to his were fairly wide-spread during the 1840s. See the notes to Turgenev's essay, 'Gamlet i Don-Kixot,' VIII 556.

And even in our times, articles can be found in which Hamlet is considered as the personification of 'excessive egoism,' as 'one obsessed with the idea of evil,' casting around himself a deadly poison, and as 'a dark force in this world.' See R. Vajman, 'Nekotorye voprosy izučenija Šekspira v Anglii i sšA,' in *Vil'jam Šekspir: Issledovaniya i materialy* (Moscow: Izd. 'Nauka' 1964) 49, 51

30 'Straždušcij dux iščet spasenija v samom sebe.' V.G. Belinskij XI 526

He lives more in an ideal world than in the real one; inspired by the lofty ideas of the age, he believes in life and mankind, in goodness and justice. The turning point in Hamlet's fate, as in his behaviour, occurs after the sudden death of his father in whom he had seen the ideal man and statesman. Hamlet grieves deeply. Hamlet not only feels antipathy towards his uncle, who by nature is the opposite of his brother, but he is seized by the vague foreboding of some terrible crime. Hamlet's meeting with his father's ghost exposes a horrible secret. Belinskij writes: 'To lose faith in people on account of some bitter experience does not mean to lose all one's faith nor does it mean to lose faith irretrievably. Such a loss is only the result of some momentary bitterness which may continue for a while but which cannot remain the permanent state of a great soul. But to lose faith in one's own self, to see one's own beliefs in utter discord with life, that is a terrible loss. And such is Hamlet's condition.'³¹ He collided with a terrible reality, he saw all the horror of real life and this became the source of his inner tragedy.

And Pečorin, too, knows well this oppressive condition caused by the loss of faith in one's self. Characteristic for him, also, is the inner struggle, the 'quarrel with his own self.' He is tortured by doubts and both judges and punishes himself for this weakness.

Reality imposes its laws. Hamlet sees and tragically endures all the incongruity between his ideals and the severe reality. He becomes convinced, as Belinskij wrote, 'that dreams about life and life itself are not at all one and the same thing and realizes that of the two, one must be false. And in his eyes, the falsehood lay in life and not in his dreams about life.'³² The collision with reality, when he 'saw the world and men not as he would like to see them but as they really were,' destroyed Hamlet's faith in life and mankind, in goodness and justice. From here stems his irony, his bitterness, his 'disharmony,' and his morbidity of spirit. 'My wit's diseased,' says Hamlet to Rosencrantz (III.ii. 322-3). This same idea is to be found in one of Lermontov's early lyrics: 'bolen razum moj' ('my mind is sick').³³

31 'Poterjat' veru v ljudej, vsledstvie kakogo-nibud' gor'kogo opyta, eščë neznačit poterjat' vsë i poterjat' bezvozvratno: takaja poterja kažetsja tol'ko potereju vsledstvie mgnovennogo ožestočenija, kotoroe možet prodolžat' sja bolee ili menee, no ne možet byt' vsegdašnjim sostojaniem velikoj duši; no poterjat' veru v samogo sebja, uvidet' svoi ubeždenija v soveršennom razlade s žizn'ju – eto poterja užasnaja. Takovo bylo sostojanie Gamleta.' V.G. Belinskij II 292

32 'Mečty o žizni i samaja žizn' sovsem ne odno i to že, čto iz dvux odno dolžno byt' ložno: i v ego glazax lož' ostalas' za žizn'ju, a ne za ego mečtami o žizni ... uvidel mir i čeloveka ne takimi, kakimi by on xotel ix videt', no uvidel ix takimi, kakovy oni sut' v samom dele ... disgarmonija ...' V.G. Belinskij v 290

33 M. Ju. Lermontov, *Polnoe sobranie sočinenij* (Moscow-Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo Xudožestvennoj Literatury 1947) I 137

Although Pečorin is from a different epoch and different historical circumstances from Hamlet's from the standpoint of psychological development, he undergoes an evolution analogous to that of the Danish prince. In Lermontov's novel, the first state, wherein Pečorin believed in mankind and goodness, seems to be missing, but it is constantly present by implication not only in *A Hero of Our Time*, but in some other works of Lermontov. Lermontov's 'hero,' wrote Ejxenbaum, 'is malicious and even depraved not because he was born that way, but because he became so (like the Demon) having gone all the way from love and passion for the good to hatred and contempt.'³⁴ In Pečorin's self-analyses and in his confession there occasionally flashes the thought that he is not what he appears to be to those around him, that by nature he is someone else, that at one time he believed and loved and that he has since been broken by life and made cruel by circumstances.

In Pečorin, as in Hamlet, evil and vice provoke noble anger and indignation. His soul, like Hamlet's 'fine soul,' 'has cursed all good and evil, has cursed life itself.'³⁵

It would be incorrect to think that Hamlet is weak-willed by nature. His vacillation is the result of his need for conclusive proof of his uncle's guilt. And when there does not remain any doubt about the truth of what his father's ghost has revealed to him, Hamlet becomes resolute. He is ready for open confrontation. He must kill the criminal-king not out of personal vengeance, but in order to punish evil and restore justice. But the role of murderer does not suit him:

The time is out of joint: O cursed spite,
That ever I was born to set it right? (I.v.189-90)

Hamlet's indecisiveness and hesitation result because by nature he was not made for bloody deeds. The awareness that he, once having killed the king, must 'restore order,' makes him 'uneasy.' By nature, he is good and straightforward, but extraordinary circumstances force him to take upon himself a role unsuited to him. Thus, he is secretive, dissimulates, and becomes bitter and cruel. 'Hamlet,' wrote Belinskij, 'was born to love mankind and to make men happy, not to punish and destroy them.'³⁶

While acknowledging the subtlety of Turgenev's psychological observa-

34 "'Geroj" Lermontova zlobnyj i daže poročnyj ne potomu, što on takim rožden, a potomu, što on takim stal, projdja, (kak Demon) ves' put' ot ljubvi i strastnyx poryvov k dobru do nenavisti i prezrenija.' B.M. Ejxenbaum, 'Dramy Lermontova,' in *Stat'i o Lermontove* 194

35 'Prekrasnaja duša ... prokljala vse dobroe i zloe – prokljala žizn'.' V.G. Belinskij v 291

36 'Gamlet rožden ljubit' ljudej i delat' ix sčastlivymi, a ne karat' i gubit' ix.' V.G. Belinskij u

tions and the originality of his profound understanding of the essence of the Shakespearean character, we cannot but at the same time notice a certain one-sidedness in his judgment of Hamlet. In his striving to elevate Don Quixote's character which, apparently, corresponds more with his own personal notions about nobility and moral idealism, he is too severe with Hamlet.

Turgenev's initial position is incorrect; hence there follows an arbitrary interpretation of the text. Turgenev is mistaken. Hamlet loves no less strongly, no less exaltedly, purely, or ideally than Don Quixote. But his love takes on a tragic cast. Hamlet's position on life differs sharply from Don Quixote's, from Quixote's good nature, his naïve trust in his ideals and his meditatively dreamy attitude towards the world. By nature, Hamlet is quite different. His conflict with his world is more complicated. He, like Pečorin, did not find salvation in love.

One can hardly doubt the sincerity of Pečorin's feelings towards Bela, Vera, and even towards the Princess Mary during a certain stage in the development of their relations.

In its fundamentals, the evolution Pečorin experiences is close to the evolution of Hamlet's feelings towards Ophelia, with the sole difference that Lermontov emphasizes the stage of the destruction of feelings. Just like Hamlet, Pečorin behaves cruelly towards the woman he loves. Their common characteristic is that they are both infected with scepticism; neither believes in possibility of happiness.

The tragedy of Hamlet's love stems from the time he first fell in love with Ophelia. Here, too, it is possible to draw an analogy with Lermontov's hero, whose love, according to his psychological make-up, is ideal, 'divine.' They both love that which they 'see' in others, that which their restless, dreamy, and romantic imaginations create. Their idealized feelings last only so long as they do not come into contact with reality, only so long as they are not ruined by the tragic circumstances of real life.

Turgenev was profoundly mistaken when he assumed that 'ideal chaste love' ('idealnaja, čistaja ljubov') is impossible for Hamlet and when he even went so far as to attribute to him a gross sensuality and lasciviousness. Hamlet's words in his conversation with Rosencrantz are a reaction to the cynicism of his milieu and are pronounced in a state of bitterness and despair bordering on madness.

In the scene to which Turgenev refers as evidence that Hamlet is by nature incapable of love, Hamlet at first tells Ophelia that he loved her once and then denies that he ever loved her at all. Where is the truth? What is to be believed? 'The truth,' wrote A. Kettle, 'is that he loved *what he thought he saw* at that time and what still appeared to be so up until now. But now he sees life and Ophelia in a different light; from here stems his cruelty. This

cruelty is torture even for himself. Hamlet *does not spurn Ophelia but that which time has done to her*, i. e. he spurns his love for her' [my italics].³⁷

Under the influence of the terrible truth about his father's murder, Hamlet's soul undergoes a fundamental change: his trust in reality and faith in mankind are destroyed. Encircled by enemies, the only bright point remaining in his gloomy life is his love for Ophelia. But now faith in the purity and loftiness of his love is shaken. In his conversation with Ophelia, Hamlet doubts her sincerity, and notices dissimulation in her behaviour. The bright image comes to ruin and everything in Hamlet protests, revolts. In his bitterness, he does not spare his feelings for Ophelia who, willingly or not, becomes the obedient weapon in the hands of his enemies.

Hamlet says to her:

Get thee to a nunnery: why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners? I am myself indifferent honest; but yet I could accuse me of such things that it were better my mother had not borne me: I am very proud, revengeful, ambitious. ... What should such fellows as I do crawling between earth and heaven? (III.i.121-9)

The real sense of this scene to which Turgenev refers may only be understood in the context of Hamlet's emotional state; that is, his experience of profound tragedy. The words he addressed to Ophelia were full of bitter irony.

Why did Hamlet, who had such lofty ideas about love, who has, we may say, such a delicate soul, utter such rude, cruel words to his beloved? Simply because faith is dead in him and the feelings which for him were most sacred are injured.

Shakespeare's tragedy and Lermontov's novel share many common generic features. In both, the lyrical element predominates. In both cases, a critic has the right to consider these two works as reflections of the author's personality. The words of George Brandes to the effect that Shakespeare, while working on his tragedy, 'came to deposit in Hamlet's mind, as in a treasury, more and more of his own life-wisdom, of his own experience, and of his own keen and mature intellect',³⁸ sound completely convincing.

The same can be said of Lermontov's novel, which was the supreme synthesis of all his works and in which was found the most complete reflection of the author's personality, his own experiences of life and his observations not so much on his milieu, as on his own inner life. Pečorin, like Hamlet, is not strongly attached to life and does not particularly value it. 'I

37 A. Kettle, 'Gamlet,' in *Vil'jam Šekspir: K četeryxsoletiju so dnja roždenija, 1564-1964: Issledovanija i materialy* (Moscow: Izd. 'Nauka' 1964) 155. Kettle's original article in English could not be found. Given here is a translation from the Russian by C. Roberts.

38 G. Brandes, op. cit. 35

do not set my life at a pin's fee,' says Hamlet (I.iv.65). 'You cannot, sir, take from me anything that I will more willingly part withal: except my life' (II.ii.218–9).

Hamlet's famous soliloquy begins with these words:

To be, or not to be, that is the question,
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing, end them. (III.i.56–60)

What will take the upper hand, what will triumph in him – common sense or rebelliousness? How will he decide the fundamental question: whether to make the best of things and submissively endure the blows of fate or whether to oppose, 'to take up arms' against the 'outrageous' and hateful reality?

Two centuries after Hamlet, Pečorin was confronted with the same question. Like Hamlet, he, too, can say that he has borne all the misfortunes,

the whips and scorns of time
Th' oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,
The pangs of disprized love, the law's delay,
The insolence of office, and the spurns... (III.i.70–3)

and still did not submit. He, like Hamlet, chose the way of 'opposition.' Hamlet and Pečorin both belong to that class of men who, in the words of M.A. Gončarov, 'are born out of storm, under blows in struggle.'³⁹ The academician V. Parin writes:

Outwardly, a man who silently and submissively resigns himself always appears to be the most decent. But this is not the way for men of action. Hamlet fights. Obviously, it is difficult for him and those around him. But it is necessary, both historically, as the critics of Shakespeare maintain, and physiologically, as those who study man's anatomy would now say. This is the ever-lasting literary hero – the man who fights. Having thrown everything away, he deliberately enters a stress situation. He does not avoid it.⁴⁰

39 'Rodjatsja ot prikosnovenija buri, pod udarami, v bor'be.' I.A. Gončarov, *Sobranie sočinenij v vos'mi tomax* (Moscow: Goslitizdat 1955) VII 204

40 'Vnešne vseгда vygljadit blagoprstožnee čelovek, kotoryj molča i pokorno pokorjaetsja. No takoj put' ne dlja aktivnyx ljudej. I Gamlet protivoborstvuet. Očevidno, eto tjaželo i emu, i okrižajuščim. No neobxodimo. Istoričeski – kak utverždajut issledovateli Šekspira. I fizioloģičeski – tak skazali by nyne issledovateli organizma čeloveka. Eto večno živoj literaturnyj geroj – obraz bojca. On soznatel'no, vse vzvesiv, vyxodit na stress-situaciju, a ne uklonjaetsja ot neě.' Akad. V. Parin, 'Čtoby talant stal normoj,' *Nedelja* XIV No. 578 (1971) 22

By nature, Pečorin, too, belongs among men of action. He also choses the way of 'opposition.'

The king and queen urge Hamlet to the way of 'common sense,' but he is not able to resign himself to life's falsity nor is he able to forgive the bloody crime. 'Common sense' and propriety, according to the common, vulgar interpretation, are foreign to Pečorin as well. He is in no condition to adjust to his hostile environment where people wallow in a swamp of petty concerns. He lives in a different, incomprehensible world. So, too, does Hamlet. They both appear to be 'strange' and both produce a painful and distressing impression on those around them.

In their appraisal of reality, Hamlet and Pečorin both begin from the same initial position. In the light of a romantic ideal, the world appears to them to be dull, boring and sad. 'O God, God,' says Hamlet,

How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable
Seem to me all the uses of this world! (I.ii.132-3)

To Hamlet and Pečorin, the world is 'cramped.' They are the idealistic embodiment of human nature, of high intellectualism, of the keenly and finely-feeling personality and of vigorous, intense spirituality. Their natures are 'purely introspective, contemplative, subjective and born for feeling and thought.'⁴¹ They cannot reconcile themselves either to the falsity of life or to evil. They both are surrounded by low, mean people. Speaking to Horatio, Hamlet describes himself as 'Being thus be-netted round with villainies' (v.ii.29). Both Hamlet and Pečorin are heroes of evil times, 'of a hollow age,' 'of a cruel world,' 'of an epoch of doubt and hesitation, an epoch conscious that some dark deed has occurred at its side, conscious of some great treasons committed for the benefit of the worthless and the vulgar.'⁴²

They both suffer from an excess of inner life and from an uneasy state of the soul. They both belong among those individuals 'who always find themselves in conflict with the external world and with their own selves, who are always dissatisfied, grieved and bitter.'⁴³

Hamlet says:

...it goes heavily with my disposition, that this
goodly frame the earth, seems to be a sterile promontory, (II.ii.301-3)

41 'Čisto vnutrennie, sozercatel'nye, sub''ektivnye, roždennye dlja čuvstva i mysli.'
V.G. Belinskij v 20

42 'Pustogo veka ... surovogo mira ... epoxi somnenij i razdum'ja, epoxi soznanija kakix-to černyx del, soveršivšixsja vozle nix, kakix-to izmen velikomu v pol'zu ničtožnogo i pošlogo.'
A.I. Gercen, *Sobranie sočinenij v tridcati tomax* (Moscow: Izd. AN SSSR 1956) IX 37

43 'Kotorye večno naxodjatsja v bor'be s vnešnim mirom i samimi soboju, vseгда nedovol'ny, ogorčeny i želčny.' V.G. Belinskij IV 240

where nothing satisfies him.

This condition is familiar to Pečorin. The sources of Hamlet's sorrow, and of the 'black thoughts' ('černyx dum') of the hero of Lermontov's novel, is the reality which does not at all conform with that which lives in their consciousness or with their high ideals. One can say of Pečorin and his tragic fate exactly what Guizot said of Hamlet: 'A personality who enters the struggle with circumstances affirms a certain universal value common to all mankind, even in his own death.'⁴⁴

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(Translated by Carolyn Roberts, University of Alberta)

44 'Ličnost', vstupajuščaja v bor'bu s obstojatel'stvami, utverždaet nekuju miroviju obščeečelovečeskiju cennost' daže v samoj svoej gibeli.' B. Reizov, 'Šekspir i estetika francuzskogo romantizma,' op. cit. 194