

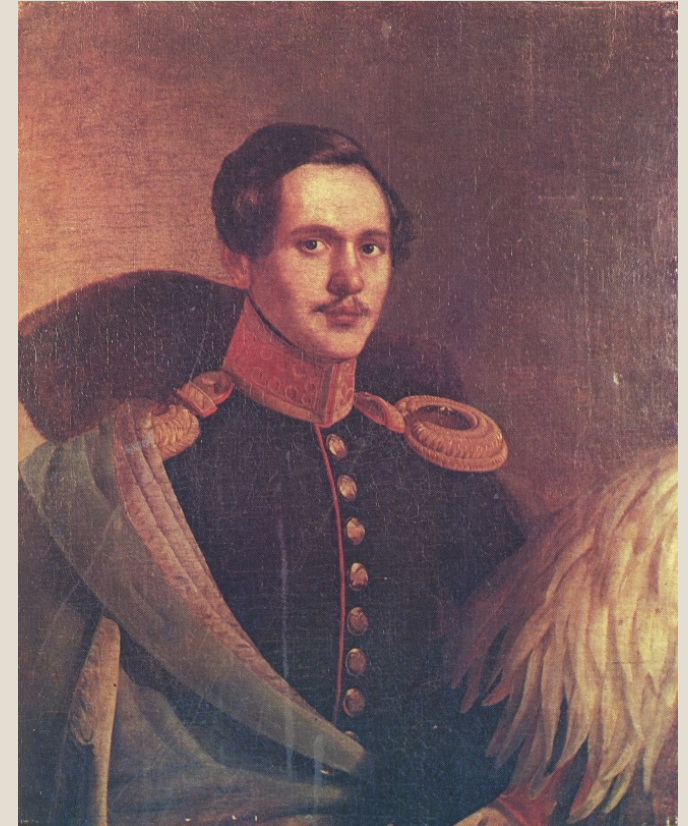


# MIKHAIL YURYEVICH LERMONTOV

Readings in Russian Literature: The Nineteenth Century  
IIIT Hyderabad  
February 7, 2024

# Mikhail Yuryevich Lermontov (1814-1841)

- Russian Romantic poet and writer
- Noble origins, family history of military service
- Sheltered, privileged upbringing under his maternal grandmother's doting eye
- A sickly child, so his grandmother took him to live among the fresh air of the Caucasian mountains
- Went to boarding school and university in Moscow, became a voracious reader
- Learnt several languages, e.g. French, German, Greek, and English; began writing around the age of sixteen
- Joined the Life-Guard Hussar Regiment in Tsarskoe Selo, St. Petersburg
- His friends and colleagues considered him wise and well-read

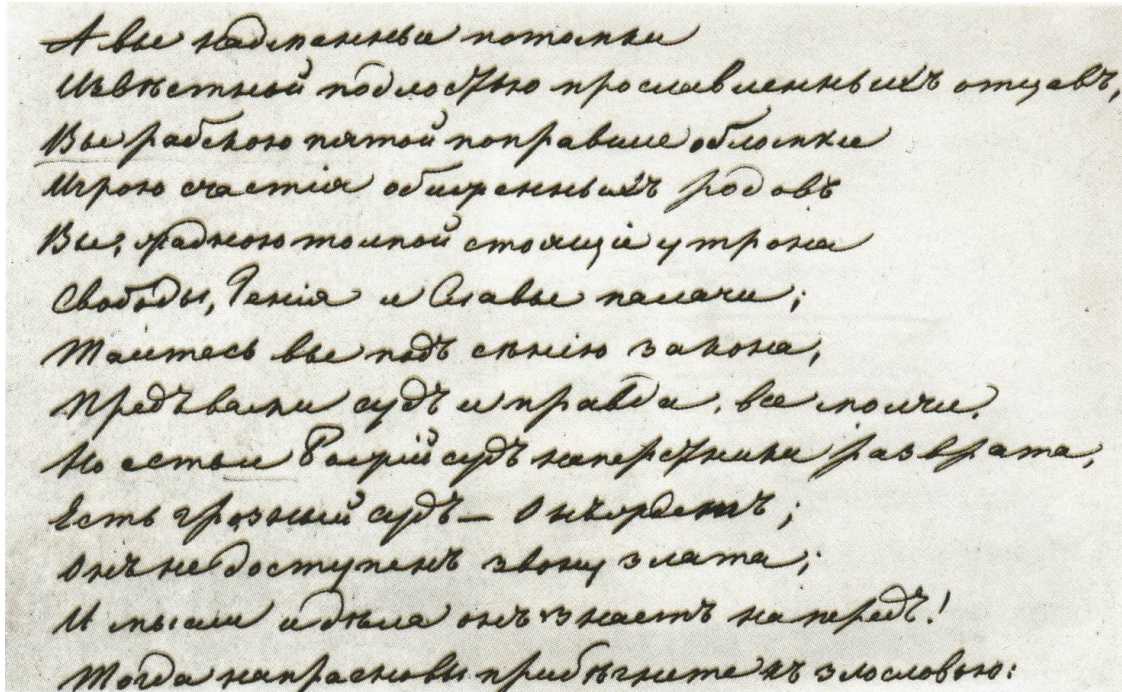


Portrait of M.Y. Lermontov  
Pyotr Zakharov-Chechenets  
Oil on canvas?  
1834



# Mikhail Yuryevich Lermontov (1814-1841)

- Almost had a nervous breakdown on hearing of Pushkin's death in a duel; considered challenging his opponent.
- Wrote "Death of a Poet" as a tribute; it earned him both ire and renown as "Pushkin's Heir."
- But unlike Pushkin, difficult, complex, and contrary; a brave but boastful soldier.
- Unlike Pushkin, could never marry the love of his life.
- Fought a duel at the exact spot where Pushkin was wounded.



**"Угас, как свечоч, дивный гений"**

**"Quenched is the marvellous light of genius"**

# Mikhail Yuryevich Lermontov (1814-1841)

- Imprisoned, later demoted and transferred to the Caucasus
- Wrote extensively about the Southern Caucasus (Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia): “the Orient”
- Teased an old school friend, Nikolai Martynov, who challenged him to a duel. Lermontov is said to have made it clear he would fire in the air, but Martynov aimed for the heart and killed him on the spot.



*Tiflis (1837)*  
Mikhail Yuryevich Lermontov  
Oil on panel





# Asheek-Kerib (1837)

- “A Story from Turkey”: “Турецкая сказка”
- Translated by Avril Pyman. Drawings by Oleg Korovin. Printed 1983, reprinted 1987.
- Retelling of an anonymous romantic **dastan** of “**Aashiq Qarib**” (**The Wandering Minstrel**), popular and common to the southern Caucasus, Central Asia, and Turkey.
- However, the role of empire and, therefore, appropriation need to be examined.

From a Lermontov Encyclopedia, 1981.  
Original sketch from 1939  
Maksim Ushakov-Poskochin



# Asheek-Kerib (1837)

- Discovered posthumously along with many other texts among Lermontov's belongings.
- Dismissed by Belinsky as “a perfectly insignificant article in prose” (qtd in Orte 545).

From a Lermontov Encyclopedia, 1981.  
Original sketch from 1939  
Maksim Ushakov-Poskochin





# Asheek-Kerib (1837)

***“On the whole, Lermontov scholarship in the west has echoed this dismissive assessment, seeing in ‘Ashik-Kerib’ no more than part of the poet's miscellany or a transcription/translation of obscure South Caucasian folklore: an unfinished, non-poetic, non-creative act, about which there is nothing much to say” (545).***

From a Lermontov Encyclopedia, 1981.  
Original sketch from 1939  
Maksim Ushakov-Poskochin



# Asheek-Kerib (1837)

- Lermontov does not identify a source for the fairytale like a folklorist might. In so doing, he claims it as an act of creation, not transcription/translation.
- In the traditional dastan,
  - this is an archetypal tale of the legendary Aashiq's love story.
  - Aashiq's lyrics connected by narrative prose
- Massive oral epic becomes a short, written "fairytale" → implications?

From a Lermontov Encyclopedia, 1981.  
Original sketch from 1939  
Maksim Ushakov-Poskochin





# Asheek-Kerib (1837)

- Lermontov rewrites the dastan as a “сказка” (“skazka”) – “a literary fairytale” (Orte 546).
- In doing so, he transforms the dastan into a genre recognizable to his Russian readership.
- However, he also retains epic qualities, e.g. a hero's homecoming.
- Fabula (story) and syuzhet (plot): The plot of Lermontov's Asheek-Kerib remains the same, the story is different.

From a Lermontov Encyclopedia, 1981.  
Original sketch from 1939  
Maksim Ushakov-Poskochin



# Asheek-Kerib (1837)

***“‘Ashik-Kerib’ belongs to the Orientalist imagination of the literature of the Russian Empire: representing a land to which one might poetically fall ‘captive,’ but which must fall victim to, first, the assault of imperial expansion and, second, to another literary representation claiming to give it a falsely superior, universal value” (Orte 558).***

From a Lermontov Encyclopedia, 1981.  
Original sketch from 1939  
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# Asheek-Kerib (1837)

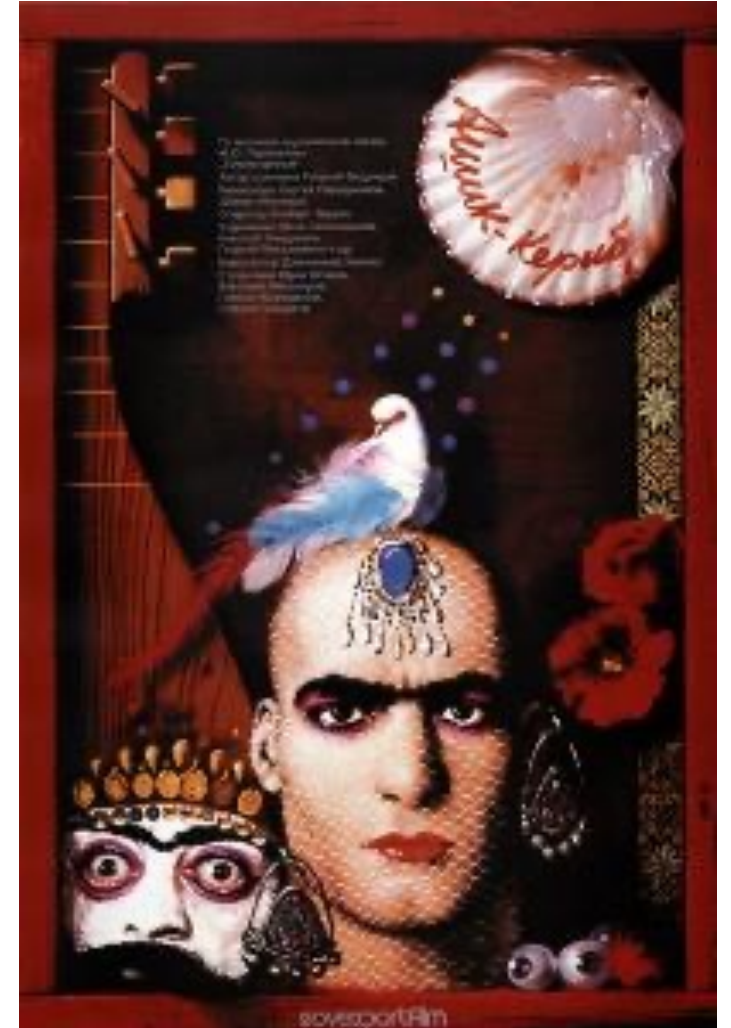
- In other words,
  - Russian imperial control of the Southern Caucasus makes Lermontov's translation possible.

***The interconnectedness of culture and ideology, of culture and society and politics.***

From a Lermontov Encyclopedia, 1981.  
Original sketch from 1939  
Maksim Ushakov-Poskochin

# Fairytale Elements

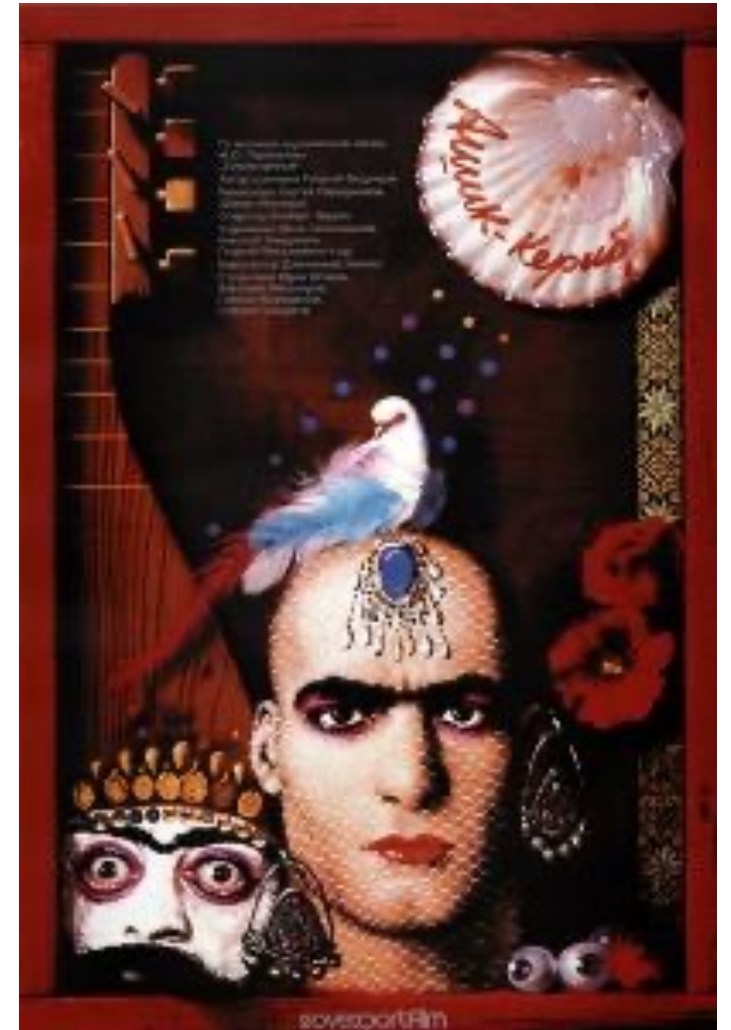
- Formulaic quality indicative of orality.
  - Very simple, straightforward language
  - certain lyricism of syntax that is reminiscent of orality (or translation from another language):
    - “Мало было надежды у бедного Ашик-Кериба получить ее руку - и он стал грустен, как зимнее небо.”
    - “Little hope had Asheek-Kerib of ever winning her hand and became as sorrowful as the sky in winter” (75).
- Preference for colons and semi-colons over period and comma is indicative that Lermontov wanted to retain a sense of the oral.





# Fairytale Elements

- ***Fairytales lend themselves well to the Orientalist imagination, which is why they are so popular with Orientalist writers and scholars.***
  - Eternal Orient, timeless and mythical → fairytale time
  - Story driven not by reason or logic, but mystical/magical figures and actions
  - Flat characters, who do not develop
  - The oppressed woman, with little say over her life, and at the mercy of the men in her life:
    - Magul-Megeri (her father, Kurshud-Bek, and Asheek Kerib)
    - Asheek Kerib's sister



# Lermontov's Wandering Hero

- Lermontov's fascination with the wandering hero can be attributed to two reasons (Samedova and Megreleshvili):
  - Personal Identification: poet in exile in what soon becomes a "citadel of freedom," while ironically also remaining a place subjugated by the Russian Empire and seen as an essential part of it.
  - It becomes the Archetypical Image of the Poet/Creator, one that has existed since before writing, and is in some ways, prehistoric.



# The Archetypal Poet/Creator

- This has to be seen as part of the larger development of Lermontov's theory and perspective on literature, i.e. his poetics:
  - “Смерть поэта” = “Death of *the Poet*”

In this way, Lermontov's “Asheek Kerib” becomes

**“An ‘oriental’ folktale containing an archetypical image of the creator ... woven into a romantic poet's personal vision and destiny ...” (Orte 551).**

- Lermontov's motivation in writing this is personal and aesthetic, not spiritual or esoteric. But there is a desire to understand and represent “the Eastern/Oriental mentality.”

# The Poet-Prophet

- There are three references to Haderiliaz in the text:

*“I am poor Kerib (a beggar), and poor are my words; but the great Haderiliaz helped me to descend from the high cliff, although I am poor and poor are my words. Recognise me, mother, know your wanderer” (81).*

*“In the town of Halaf, I drank wine of Misir, but God gave me wings and I flew hither in one day” (82).*

*“I made my morning prayer in the valley of Arzinyan, my noon-tide prayer in the town of Arzerum; before the setting of the sun I made my prayer near the town of Kars, and my evening prayer in Tiflis. Allah gave me wings, and I came flying hither; my white stallion galloped swiftly, surefooted as a tight-rope walker, from the mountain into the ravine and from the ravine into the mountain: Maulyam (the Creator) gave Asheek wings, and he has come to the wedding of Magul-Megeri” (83).*



# The Poet-Prophet

- The first “I” in the fairy-tale: It is now that Asheek-Kerib becomes a true lyric hero, i.e. the hero of his song.
- And this lyric hero is also a prophet.
- The poet’s song is connected to a transcendent, prophetic truth.
- Kurshud Beg realizes this and that is why he accepts the role of fate.
- *“The exiled poet realizes the truth of life through wandering” (Megreleshvili 113-114).*
- *“The transformative experience of exile involves the revelation of fate and the source of true, sublime inspiration” (Orte 556).*

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