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A Hero of Our Time by Mikhail Lermontov, translated by Vladimir and Dmitri Nabokov

"How was your understanding of the cultural and contextual considerations of the work developed through the interactive oral?"

Word count: 334

Before participating in the discussion, I thought that the cultural references made in the novel were for the purpose of setting. Instead, the cultural references highlight limits in perception. Lermontov layers the setting under multiple perspectives to achieve this affect. Each perspective imposes a new limitation on what would be the original setting, so any judgments made would be limited as well. This is the fundamental limitation that comes up when trying to analyze Lermontov's development of Pechorin, because the imposed cultural perspective filters details that may be important for understanding why Lermontov makes Pechorin do what he does.

Lermontov starts off the novel with cultural layering: *Bela* is a story about Pechorin and Maxim Maximych, told by Maxim Maximych, written down by an unnamed narrator. Each character introduces another culture, another layer that limits the view of the setting. Before the discussion, I would have thought that Lermontov only uses the layered narratives as foils for Pechorin. While this is partly true, it ignores the fact that each character Lermontov creates ignores

certain events that go on around them, or at least do not perceive them as being as significant as they actually are. Maxim can conspiracize about how Ossetians are trying to get a tip out of him, but he will never know exactly why or how they go around extracting the tip, because the linguistic gap between Maxim and the Ossetians prevents him from understanding what they are saying in their native tongue.

Each limitation stacks on top of another, until someone reads the novel. Again, cultural perspective comes into play. Someone from America in 2014 may not know what was significant in Russia in 1840, leading to the loss of some information. Perhaps information is ignored because it goes against their cultural values. This was Lermontov's greatest difficulty; he can control the perspectives of his characters, but he cannot control the perspective of the reader, which essentially leaves his work at the mercy of the perception of the reader.