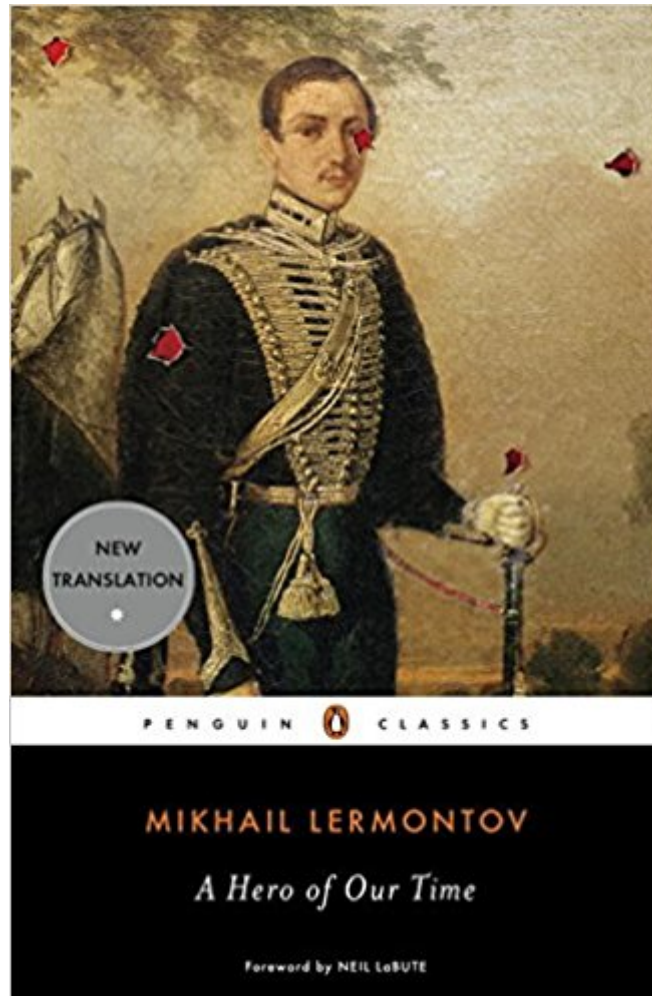




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A Hero Of Our Time (Penguin Classics)



Synopsis

The first example of the psychological novel in Russia, *A Hero of Our Time* influenced Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, and Chekhov, and other great nineteenth-century masters that followed. Its hero, Pechorin, is Byronic in his wasted gifts, his cynicism, and his desire for any kind of action-good or ill-that will stave off boredom. Outraging many critics when it was first published in 1840, *A Hero of Our Time* follows Pechorin as he embarks on an exciting adventure involving brigands, smugglers, soldiers, rivals, and lovers. This edition includes a new introduction, chronology, suggestions for further reading, maps, and full explanatory notes.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

While out travelling, the narrator - who we can assume is either Lermontov himself, or a fictionalised version thereof - meets an old soldier, Maxim, who is more than happy to share a tale or three of his life. 'Lermontov' is an appreciative listener, taking notes and jotting down places and names. This is why he is travelling, this is why he talks to people: For their stories, their lives, their experiences that you 'cannot find in the romances of Russia'. Maxim tells him the story of Grigory Alexandrovich Pechorin, another soldier who once shared his quarters. The picture he paints is an interesting one. On the one hand, he declares this Pechorin a great friend, but on the other, comments on his lack of emotion and coldness. He is capable of great generosity, and equally great hostility, the choice of which seems more a whim than for any reason. Maxim admires his education, wit and talent with

women, but is offended by his lack of accountability. In the story Maxim tells, he and Pechorin travel to an Asian warchief's home, where Pechorin is infatuated with the leader's young daughter, Bela. Through a series of manipulative events - all arranged by Pechorin, without remorse or even satisfaction - the daughter is kidnapped and the young soldier falls in love. The story ends tragically, though not unexpectedly, and serves to whet our appetites for who this man really is. As narrated by Maxim, these stories are colorful, eventful, and written with great, broad strokes. Maxim is not a very educated man, and as such he is unable to properly paint the picture of Pechorin. But he has an admirable flair for description, which in his own, simple ways, are very effective.

This was Lermontov's only novel, published a year before his death in a duel at the age of 27. Although it was written in the late 1830s, it is strikingly modern both in its structure and in its treatment of the hero. In structure, the book consists of a collection of short stories and novellas rather than a single narrative. These stories, however, are linked in two ways. Firstly, all feature the same protagonist, Grigoriy Pechorin, a young officer serving with the Russian army in the Caucasus. Secondly, they are bound together by a complex framework featuring a single anonymous narrator (not to be identified with Lermontov himself), a traveller in the Caucasus. The first story, Bela, is supposedly told to this narrator by Maksim Maksimych, a brother-officer of Pechorin. The second, Maksim Maksimych, is related by the narrator himself and deals with a meeting between Pechorin and Maksim. The other three, Taman, Princess Mary and The Fatalist, are all told in Pechorin's own words, taken from his journal which has come into the narrator's hands after Pechorin's death. It is the fourth tale, Princess Mary, which is the longest and the one which lies at the heart of the work. Bela and Taman are adventure stories with an exotic setting (the Caucasus had the same sort of appeal for nineteenth-century Russians as India had for their British contemporaries). Maksim Maksimych is a linking narrative, and the final story, The Fatalist is an unsettling, spooky treatment of the concepts of fate and predestination. In Princess Mary, the mood changes abruptly from the romantic exoticism of the earlier stories. Pechorin is stationed in a fashionable spa town in the northern Caucasus.

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