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Imaginative Geography, and the Perspective of the Other in Russian Literature

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**Imaginative Geography and the
Perception of the Other in Russian
Literature:
Mikhail Lermontov and Vladimir
Makanin**

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Advisor: Professor Marina Balina

Imaginative Geography and the Perception of the Other in Russian Literature: Mikhail Lermontov and Vladimir Makanin

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Introduction

In 1839, the Prince Odoevsky wrote a piece of fantasy, entitled *The Year 4338*. It was a surrealist forecast of a distant future, and was narrated by the “voiceless one,” who purports to be a Chinese student writing from Russia. The world has been divided chiefly between Russia and China in the year 4338. The English have long diminished in strength, and the Americans have auctioned their cities “on the public market,” in fact the latter are the only benign menace in this utopian future. Love of humanity is so prevalent that all misfortune has been removed from even literature. In short, while China trails behind as an inferior world counterpart, Russia is the hegemonic idyllic nation in the world; indeed, Russia has become the world. Odoevsky is unabashed in his presentation of a perfect world under the auspices of Russia, hence, accordingly, the nationalist sci-fi work was quite popular in its time. It satisfied the longing of many fanciful Russian imaginations, and assuaged their inadequacies about the position of Russia in the present, as well as the future. Nationalism is an unfortunate aspect of many countries, yet for Russia, its presence has historically been particularly salient.¹ It was as if the West needed spiritual resurrection, and only Russia could deliver this consecrated utopia. The Russian empire contained the “Third Rome,” Moscow, and was therefore the only legitimate home of Christianity.² Messianic rhetoric aside, nationalism, as has been the case for other countries as well, is a product of inadequacies and fear; ultimately, a drive for the subordination of the “other.”³

At this time in the 19th century, the “cursed question,” as James Billington writes, “was the meaning of history.”⁴ Inadequacies have historically registered when Russia compares herself to the West; but as was perceived by Prince Odoevsky, “in Russia many things are bad, but everything

¹Billington, James. *The Icon and the Axe* (New York, Vintage Books Edition, 1970) pg.510

²Ibid. pgs.58 and 63

³ Said, Edward. *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994) pgs.49-73

⁴ Billington, James. *The Icon and the Axe* (New York, Vintage Books Edition, 1970) pg.314

together is good; in Europe many things are good, but everything together is bad.”⁵ Thus times were unique; Russia was expanding (literally), while, for various reasons, Europe was discerned to be on the ebb.⁶ Inculcated with German idealism, the spirit of the *Geist* moved Russia to extend her borders to the “east,” or into the Caucasus. Again, it was the destiny of Russia to expand the empire.⁷ The dynamics of Russians and the perception of the colonized “other,” specifically the Caucasus, are the topic for this paper. Two periods will be examined most closely: the early to mid-nineteenth century and the present. Though the history of Russian imperialist relations with the Caucasus will be examined, an understanding of the nuances of this volatile relationship will be derived largely from two texts: the earlier Lermontov’s *Bela*, and *A Prisoner from the Caucasus* by the contemporary writer Vladimir Makanin. In order to better understand this troubled relationship, this project has endeavored to incorporate Edward W. Said’s theory of “Orientalism” as well as the notion of “intertextuality.”

Edward Said, a contemporary Palestinian-American, makes a concerted effort in his seminal work, *Orientalism*, to re-evaluate the European perception of the East, or the Orient; specifically, he refers to perceptions of Arabic peoples. Orientalism, also generally referred to a “imaginative geography” is compared to what Denys Hay has called the idea of Europe, “a collective notion identifying ‘us’ Europeans as against all ‘those’ non-Europeans.”⁸ Moreover, Said submits that “in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.”⁹ He continues, later in the book to explain, “my argument takes it that the Orientalist reality is both antihuman and persistent. Its scope, as much as its institutions and all-pervasive

⁵ Ibid. pg.318

⁶ Ibid. pg.314

⁷ Ibid. pg.510

⁸ Hay, Denys. *Europe: The Emergence of an Idea* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1968) found in Said, Edward. *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994) pg.7

⁹ Said, Edward. *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994) pg.3

influence, lasts up to the present.”¹⁰ With the “present,” Said makes reference to the enduring conflict in the Middle East, but he may as well include the persistent civil conflict between Russia and Chechnya. Indeed, the paradigm of domination introduced by Said resembles a pattern of Russian subordination and mis-perception of the Caucasus. Both Makanin and Lermontov reflect in their texts an orientation to the “other” that is hardly limited to the substance of fiction, nor is it specific to these two stories— in fact Russia evinces a history of orientalism that carries to the present. Whether from literature or history, or from newspaper clippings to the censure of the Council of Europe and the OSCE; all this consummates to the present in which Moscow launches a bloody campaign against what it calls “Islamic terrorism.”¹¹ Specific discussion of the present war in Chechnya will be limited, although implicit reference, and application, is prudent and perhaps even necessary given the subject matter of the project.

The precarious relationship between the colonized and colonizer is depicted in several works of literature from the earlier era that tell a very similar story; these stories include Pushkin’s *Prisoner of the Caucasus* (1822), Lev Tolstoy’s story *Zhilin and Kostylin* (1863), and most intriguing of this “genre” is Mikhail Lermontov’s *Bela*, which is a story taken from his five-part *A Hero for Our Time* (1838-40). From contemporary literature, Vladimir Makanin’s tense fictional account of the recent Chechen insurrection, *The Prisoner from the Caucasus* (1995) successfully incorporates the familiar plot into an original work. Lermontov, and probably Makanin, are familiar with the “Caucasus’ genre,” and intentionally appropriate some of the material and ideas of previous works into their own. This literary device, coined as “intertextuality” by Julia Kristeva, will be the subject of some further examination in the works.. These works are all written from the perspective of a Russian abroad in the Caucasus. In each instance, the protagonist becomes enamoured with a “native,” and moreover,

¹⁰ Ibid. pg.44

¹¹ Lamborschini, Sophie. “Russia: War In Chechnya Continues to Grind On,” Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty 02/12/01

the reciprocation of interest, culminating in a brief “love” affair, ends in the tragic destruction of the native in both cases. The space that is socially constructed between the Russian and the other is manifestly violated with love; perhaps it is inevitable that in order to return to the “natural order” of power structure, the “other” is ultimately bereaved of former humanity; this implies destruction. Said writes, “knowledge that is non-dominative and non-coercive can be produced in a setting that is deeply inscribed with the politics, the considerations, the positions and the strategies of power.”¹² The less than benign perception of the other is reaffirmed within a larger context; in short, the aggregate mis-perception of a people emerges as an imperialistic domination.¹³

¹² Said, Edward. “Orientalism Reconsidered” in Barker *et al.* *Literature, Politics, Theory: Papers from the Essex Conference*, 1976-84 (Routledge, London 1986).

¹³ Said, Edward. *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994) pgs.122-3

I. Survey of Historical Russo-Caucasus Relations

Though a scholastic understatement, one writer remarks that “the historical encounter of Chechens with Russians was scarcely a felicitous one.”¹⁴ Indeed, while the Chechens have endured the brunt of Russian imperialist aggression, the entire Caucasus, the indigenous populace that have traditionally inhabited the isthmus separating the Caspian and Black Seas, have suffered immensely under Russia. It is not exactly defined, and therefore important, precisely where Mikhail Lermontov stages his stories in *A Hero For Our Time*; the reader is however aware that Bela is, of course, a native of the Caucasus. In Makanin’s *The Prisoner from the Caucasus*, the protagonist is enamored with a native Chechen. Mindful that these stories draw implicitly from the history of Russian interactions with the East, it is fitting that this past be further explicated. Before Russian expansion, the highland regions of the Caucasus had been populous and self-sufficient. In the period of the late Middle Ages until the nineteenth century however, a global cooling phase known as the “Little Ice Age” ensued, which resulted in shortened growing seasons in the alpine area of the mountain range. Thus, the population migrated down just as the Cossacks were beginning to occupy the same area. The Cossacks were a mixed race, which represented “free and lawless communities” with a penchant for mercenary work. The inevitable clash of societies followed, and thus the encounter of the Russians and Chechens, often in close association with the Cossacks, was a historic certainty.

The ancestors of the present-day Ukrainians and Russians, the “Rus” or Varangians passed through the Caspian region en route to invading Persia in the tenth century. Other superficial encounters followed, yet it was not until the time of Tsar Ivan the Terrible that the region was considered as more than simply a passage to the East. In 1556, the isthmus was contested by Muscovy, the Ottoman Empire, Iran, the Crimean Khanite, and other lesser powers. As Muscovy

slowly penetrated the North Caucasus, the rulers of Kakheti (present-day Georgia) actually petitioned their great Orthodox Christian to the north for assistance against Muslim powers. Yet, ultimately, in this time, the presence of Russia only diminished in the Caucasus, given the constraints prompted by internal problems. It was not until 1722, in the time of Peter the Great, that Russia truly initiated an imperialistic presence in the Caucasus.

It was during Peter's 1722 campaign into the Caucasus that the Russians had their first serious encounter with the Chechens. Troops were sent into the village of Enderi with the object of occupying the town; their forces were devastated by the locals. Peter died in 1725, and was succeeded by Empress Anna, who soon abandoned Peter's conquest of Persian territory. Catherine the Great, who followed Anna, however, was partial to her grandfather's campaign of state building. In 1762, she constructed a fort in the area. Several rebellions ensued, the most notable of which being the Muslim Sheikh Mansur, a prominent leader of the resistance, as well as a zealous religious reformer. His men were instrumental in avenging the destruction of the town Aldi; they managed to intercept the Russian troops and left 7 officers and 600 troops dead. A mere 200 were taken as prisoners, and even fewer— a scant 100— managed to escape the slaughter. This is considered by one historian to be "the worst-ever defeat inflicted on the armies of Catherine II."¹⁵ Though the Mansur's strength declined (he died incarcerated for life in Schluselburg Fortress, St. Petersburg), the savage defeat left a palpable impression on the Russians that persists, arguably, to the present.¹⁶ It galvanized the position of the indigenous population in opposition to Russia. In other words, the people to the East emerged as the "other" from the vantage point of Russians. Subsequent history bears witness to the implications of this jaded perspective.

¹⁴ Dunlop, John B. *Russia Confronts Chechnya: Roots of Separatist Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) pg.35

¹⁵ Broxup, Marie Benningsen. Ed. *The North Caucasus Barrier* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), pg.2

¹⁶ At the time of the Russian invasion in December 1994, several journalists observed a painting of Sheikh Mansur hung on a prominent place in the office of Chechen president Dzhokhar Dudaev.

Following the defeat of Mansur, Russia moved to solidify her ties with Georgia. By the autumn of 1801, Alexander declared the kingdom of Kartli-Kaheti null and void. This annexation was largely out of desperation from the latter, and was dictated without much protest. The subordination of the rest of the Caucasus (and Georgia for that matter) is chiefly associated with one name: General Aleksei Yermolov (1777-1861; appointed from 1816 to 1827). The Caucasus War (1817-64), that spanned half a century, opened under Yermolov's lead. He began with the belief that "the whole of the Caucasus must, and should, become an integral part of the Russian empire,"¹⁷ thus it was from this conviction that much cruelty to the native populations followed. Yermolov declared:

I desire that the terror of my name should guard our frontiers more potently than chains or fortresses, that my word should be for the natives a law more inevitable than death. Condescension in the eyes of Asiatics is a sign of weakness and out of pure humanity I am inexorably severe.¹⁸

The poignant memory of recent humiliations only reinforced the perception of "savagery," and Yermolov inaugurated his merciless campaign by constructing more fortresses; the very names of the military compounds, Groznaya ("Dread"), Vnezapnaya ("Sudden"), and Burnaya ("Stormy"), were meant to inspire fear amongst the natives. The setting for *Bela* is in fact centered around one such fort. The strategy that Yermolov introduced involved deliberate starvation (later re-utilized by Stalin for Ukraine); one Russian wrote, "let the standing corn be destroyed each autumn as it ripens, and in five years they would be starved into submission."¹⁹ On occasion, under the auspices of Yermolov, his men carried out brutal massacres of entire villages. The native people fought courageously against the Russians, but in each case, the battle was lost before the first shot was fired; the locals were always out-numbered and lacking in sufficient weaponry. Yermolov was well regarded by most contemporaries, but this was largely the population of Russians that had no

¹⁷ Baddeley, John F. *The Russian Conquest of the Caucasus* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1908) pg.268 found in Dunlop, John B. *Russia Confronts Chechnya: Roots of Separatist Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) pg. 14

experience with the Caucasus. The rhetoric of the government bolstered suspicions about the “wild savagery” of the Chechens. Lermontov is often cited as one of the most vocal critics. This young officer “conveyed a suspicion that the conquest [of the Caucasus] was a spiritually losing proposition for Russia”²⁰ It is his unique critique of Russian imperialist policies that inspired works such as *A Hero of our Time*. Yet his criticism is not overt to the contemporary reader, and by some standards, his work demonstrates the very destructive mis-perceptions that he censured.

Moving ahead into the Soviet period, many of the same patterns of subordination re-emerge. The most notorious action of the Soviet State was the mass deportation of the entire race under Stalin. The Chechens were alleged to have collaborated with the Nazis during the Second World War. This conviction is thought now to be a misrepresentation of the past; in fact the Chechens largely fought alongside the Red army. Nevertheless, beginning in late February 1944, in excess of 300,000 indigenous people were deported to various parts of Central Asia. The entire operation took less than a few weeks to complete; the heavy cost of such efficiency was brutally inhumane treatment. Resistance was quickly overcome, as the natives were completely caught off guard. Some regions were directly murdered. The entire population of Khaibakh – over 700 men, women and children – was burned alive under the auspices of the Soviet government. Humans were packed into freight cars, nearly 400 cars departing a day, and left without decent sanitation and utter disregard for rudimentary needs. Due to the high proportion of children, one official coldly extolled that their “compactness” was “fully expedient.”²¹ In some cars, 50% of the travelers were said to have perished, many from a typhus epidemic. Upon arrival, accommodation was entirely insufficient, and the exiled people were treated more like prisoners than citizens. They were, for example, required to

¹⁸ Dunlop, John B. *Russia Confronts Chechnya: Roots of Separatist Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) pg.99

¹⁹ Ibid. pgs.121-22

²⁰ Ibid. pg. 18

²¹ Ibid. pg.67

register their addresses every month, even though the availability of apartments in some areas was as bad as one for every 50 families. It is estimated that approximately 200,000 perished under these Draconian policies.²² The frightful episode, which was unenthusiastically reversed under Khrushchev in the mid-fifties, exceeds ones notion of imperialism, and emerges, perhaps, as an act of deliberate genocide. Makanin, born in 1937, would have still been quite young during this tragedy, yet with the death of Stalin in 1953, and Khrushchev's famous Secret Speech in 1956, it would have been likely that with greater openness came greater understanding of the mass deportation. The affront to humanity, perpetrated by the state, indubitably shaped his perception of the Soviet regime, particularly in relation to the East. Indeed, the terrible history relates significantly, and in a like manner, on both authors in their very different times. It is important to bear this history in mind with a discussion of Said's *Orientalism*, and the relevance of the theory to Russian relations with "their Orient."

The aftermath of conflict between Russian and Chechnya that has occurred following the dissolution of the Soviet Union can hardly be described exhaustively within the confines of this essay. The familiar patterns of condescension and de-humanizing language remain largely to the present. It is this persistence of a distinct neo-colonialist discourse that led to the demise of civil relations between the two populations; in fact, towards the end of December 1994 relations degenerated to the outbreak of war. Yeltsin on 29 November issued a public appeal "to the participants of the armed conflict in the Chechen Republic," which was a deliberate misrepresentation of the nature of the conflict. Russia was depicted as a neutral, peacemaking force seeking to mitigate an internal conflict; in fact, Russia was actively pushing to destroy the local Chechen government. The deliberately toned down address was overshadowed by a statement of naked hubris made one month prior; Defense Minister Grachev declared that "all the questions" in

²² Conquest, Robert. *The Nation Killers*, 2nd Edition (New York: Macmillian, 1970) pg. 160

Chechnya could be “resolved in two hours with one parachute regiment.”²³ Accordingly, after multiple ultimatums, and various inflated proclamations, the Russian forces initiated a military assault on Chechnya. Rather than belabor the details of the war, specifics of which will perhaps be instructive later in the essay, the factors leading to the insurrection will serve to illustrate the legacy of Russian condescension to the present.

The government in Chechnya was never particularly strong after the fall of communism. It seems that the republic united under one cause, however – sovereignty. General Dzhokhar Dudaev won 85% of the vote to assume presidency of Chechnya on 27 October 1991. On 1 November Chechnya declared its independence from the Russian Federation. This abrupt gesture was point of contention hereafter – the Chechens were largely disinclined to remain “subjects” of the Russia, yet Moscow was unwilling to recognize Chechen sovereignty. After a successful bilateral treaty was signed by Tartarstan and Russia on 15 February 1994, secessionist Chechnya was the sole “holdout” among the eighty-nine “subjects” of the Russian Federation. Certainly a terrible history contributed to the intractable position of Chechnya. One scholar contends that “for a Chechen, to be a man is to remember the names of seven generations of paternal ancestors... and not only their names, but the circumstances of their deaths and the places of their tombstones.”²⁴ Needless to say, even the youngest child was acutely aware of those relatives that have died at the hands of Russian soldiers. Thus in this hostile climate, earnest negotiation was as rare as it was ineffectual. Nevertheless, it is a salient fact in retrospect that Boris Yeltsin never spoke personally to General Dudaev. Indeed, Moscow proved to be an incompetent negotiation partner throughout. On 14 March 1992, a high-ranking official of the Russian Supreme Soviet, V. Zhigulin, signed an agreement in which Chechen “independence and sovereignty” were fully recognized; yet on 31 March 1992, the government

²³ *International Herald Tribune* 21 December 1994, pg.6

organized an unsuccessful coup against Dudaev. Soon after the failure of the “opposition” putsch, Moscow returned to the bilateral negotiations. A close associate of General Dudaev was asked why he pursued a separatist agenda, and he answered, “[Moscow] doesn’t want to take account of me. We are *rossiiane* [i.e., Russian citizens without regard to ethnicity], and I am a *rossiiskii* general”²⁵ In fact, on 25 April 1993, a tenuous period for Yeltsin with a nation-wide referendum concerning his agenda, Dudaev sent an amiable letter with some prudent advice. Yeltsin smugly never responded to the letter, even though he in effect followed the advice soon thereafter! Also on 28 May 1994, Dudaev expressed a clear intent to meet President Yeltsin, yet his request was flatly ignored. The cardinal blunder of Moscow was clearly that it never afforded the government of the Chechnya proper respect. The conceit of Moscow only reinforced the consensus in Chechnya that vestige of an imperialist past remained to the present.

Meanwhile, Chechnya remained one of the poorest regions in the Russian Federation. At the beginning of 1991, an estimated 20-30% of the working population was unemployed.²⁶ Chechen represented largely a rural population, with 73.13% living still in villages at the time of the 1989 all-union census. Birth rates are also exceptionally high in Chechnya. The area is endowed with a significant oil industry, yet “when new specialist were needed in the oil industry, they were imported from central Russia.”²⁷ The indigenous population was offered typically the less-skilled positions in the industry on account of this practice. The health care system in the republic is regarded as “one

²⁴ Arutiunov, Sergei. “Ethnicity and Conflict in the Caucasus,” in Wehling, Fred Ed. *Ethnic Conflict and Russian Intervention in the Caucasus*, Policy Paper no.16 (San Diego, CA: Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation, University of California, August 1995), pg.16-17

²⁵ Dunlop, John B. *Russia Confronts Chechnya: Roots of a Separatist Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) pg.184

²⁶ Tishkov, Belyaeva and Marchenko, *Chechen Crisis* (Moscow: Tsentr Kompleknykh Sotsial’nykh Issledovaniï I Marketinga, 1995) pg.16 found in Dunlop, John B. *Russia Confronts Chechnya: Roots of a Separatist Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998)

²⁷ Dunlop, John B. *Russia Confronts Chechnya: Roots of a Separatist Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) pg.85-8

of the worst in Russia,” and mortality rate is also very high.²⁸ The environment suffers under the auspices of heavy industry, in particular the oil refineries. Income levels have historically lagged behind national averages; in 1991 again, the average wage was 74.8 percent of the Russian average.²⁹ Educational levels are dismal – a mere 4.67 percent could boast of a completed higher education.³⁰ Experts of the area have prudently observed: “When legal sources of existence disappear, then criminal ones are developed,” hence crime has emerged as a salient aspect of Chechnya.³¹ The small republic was the largest center for counterfeit money and false financial documents in the former USSR. High crime rates have persisted into the present. In conclusion, life is difficult for the “other,” and much of this adversity can be attributed to either the neglect or the mistreatment of the colonizer of yesterday and the central government of the present. One sympathetic journalist muses, that Russia has always had an “outside enemy,” such as the Jews, the rich, and so on, but “today the ‘outside enemies’ are the ethnic groups whose existence threatens the new Russia’s sense of unity. These days that mainly means Chechnya, and it often means individual Chechens.”³² From a historic perspective, and again, to some extent into the present, Russia and the “other” have not shared an equal relationship. Hence, the combination of economic destitute and a keen awareness for a terrible past, it is no wonder that Chechens harbor resentment as a “subject” state. It is also consistent with the past that Russians continue to render the “other” in a disproportionate manner relative to their own ethnicity.

²⁸Ibid. pg.85-8

²⁹Ibid. pg.85-8

³⁰Ibid. pg.85-8

³¹ Pain and Popov, “Russian Politics in Chechnya,” *Isvestiya*, 8 February 1995, pg.4 found in Dunlop, John B. *Russia Confronts Chechnya: Roots of Separatist Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998)

II. Lermontov's *A Hero For Our Time*

Mikhail Lermontov's (b.1814) brief literary career spanned a dozen years before his early death in 1841. The compilation of stories called *A Hero For our Time*, which includes *Bela*, was written towards the end of this time, in the years 1838-40. It was only in 1837 that Lermontov truly emerged as a national literary figure with his poem *The Death of a Poet*. It was a severe denunciation of Russian society for the death of Pushkin, who was in fact killed in a duel (a fate that Lermontov himself would soon share), yet nevertheless, many contemporaries believed the death to have been devised by the government. The authorities accurately regarded the work as inflammatory, and Lermontov, a member of the cavalry, was commissioned to service in the Caucasus; in short, he was sent into exile as punishment for his insurrection. It was in exile that he personally confronted the implications of Russian expansion into the Caucasus; moreover, his position obliged him to advance the imperialistic aspirations of the motherland. Lermontov lived a better part of his life under the auspices of a particularly severe autocrat, Nicholas I (r.1825-55). Contemporaries associated the infamous Third Department, the political police, with the reign of this emperor. The Decembrist rebellion (1825), and the swift punishment that followed, set a lasting conservative tenor in the new regime. Artistic freedom was tempered by the inflexible reign of Nicholas I, thus it should have come as no surprise that Lermontov's subversive *Death of a Poet* warranted exile; his succeeding works, including *A Hero for Our Time*, were arguably even more seditious

If his literature can be considered representative, Mikhail Lermontov was patently disenchanted with his limited opportunities in exile. In fact, the protagonist in *Bela*, Pechorin, significantly corresponds to the life of Lermontov in many regards, though the author suggests otherwise in the preface. For example, one may gather that both author and protagonist were endowed with intellectual prowess, yet this attribute was underutilized by the presiding regime, and

thus, the mind was deprived and repressed, and the consequence was an amoral nihilist.

Lermontov's protagonist Pechorin dimly searches for some metaphysical truism, yet in lieu of substance in life, turns to destructive, hedonistic behavior. Lermontov's preface reveals that some contemporary readers refused to "believe in Pechorin," because man was considered to never be so morally unaccountable in reality. Yet, as Lermontov explains, "it is the portrait of the vices of our whole generation in their ultimate development," and he continues, "you have admired far more terrible and monstrous characters than [Pechorin] is, so why are you so merciless towards him, even as a fictitious character? Perhaps he comes too close to the bone?"³³ The particular vices for which Pechorin is guilty emerge in relation to his interaction with the other; hence, it is evident that Lermontov intended *A Hero of our Time* to reflect Russia's troubling answer to "cursed question." The stories, particularly *Bela*, are an indictment of Russian imperialism and a testament to the salient presence of "Russian orientalism."

Bela is a story of a native girl's tragic stint with a nihilistic Russian officer, the protagonist Pechorin. It is told through Maxim Maximych, a former acquaintance of Pechorin, to a passive traveler in the Caucasus. The narrative is *erlebte Rede* (speech projected through the listener's consciousness), yet the work allows for "quotations" from the protagonist.³⁴ The story begins with a wedding party in the "chief's hut." Pechorin and Maxim Maximych both attend as guest of honor, and over the course of the night, the former becomes enamoured with the younger daughter of the chief. Bela is described as "good-looking – tall and slim, with black eyes like a mountain goat's that looked right inside you." (29) A local man, Kazbich, is obviously also smitten with the girl. The tragic rivalry between the two over the girl is thus foreshadowed. The struggle is hardly founded in romantic sentiment, rather the rivalry is centered on the domination of the girl. It reflects a struggle

³² Bennett, Vanora. "Status: Non-person" *New York Times*, 01/27/00

³³ Lermontov, Mikhail. *A Hero For Our Time* (London, Penguin Books, 1966) pg.20; all page numbers denote this book unless otherwise indicated.

of ethnicity, with the Russian pitted against the indigenous man. Later that night, Bela's brother, Azamat, is overheard in a quarrel with Kazbich. The dispute escalates, and Azamat nearly kills Kazbich because the latter will not relinquish his horse. The next day, Pechorin makes a deal with Azamat that requires him to deliver his sister Bela in exchange for Kazbich's horse. Maxim Maximych interrupts his story to add this was "bad business," yet recalls he was rebuked by Pechorin, who "answered that an uncivilized Circassian girl should be glad to have a nice husband like him" (36). The spatial distinction is justified in terms of "civilization." Therefore, Pechorin misconstrues that his "bad business" should actually be taken as a boon to the native girl; even though he is stealing a horse to induce a young boy to kidnap his sister for Pechorin's carnal gratification. A native girl is worth about the same as a horse in his eyes. The relationship, even at its best, can never approach love because Pechorin is not capable of perceiving the other as an equal. This is indicative of the breed of indulgent nihilism that stands to destroy the "other." It is a byproduct of Russian orientalism. Even Maxim Maximych, though a benevolent double to Pechorin, does not treat the "other" as an equal. This sort of "civilized" hubris seems characteristic of Russia's dealings with the "native" East.

Pechorin gets his girl. Maxim Maximych, however, preserves his sympathy for Bela. Pechorin locks her in a room, and makes daily visits with gifts in a weak attempt to win her affection. At times he tries to kiss her, and once she protests, "I'm your prisoner, your slave. Of course you can make me do what you want.' Then more tears" (40). Failing to understand her misgivings, Pechorin exclaims, "That's no woman, it's the devil himself" (41). After some time however, Bela relents her intractable unwillingness, and finally gives herself to Pechorin. The "honeymoon" phase is nevertheless short-lived, and it is soon evident to Maxim Maximych and, painfully, Bela, that the hawkish suitor has lost interest. Pechorin, rather than spend time with Bela,

³⁴ Terras, Victor. *A History of Russian Literature* (New Haven and New York: Yale University Press, 1991) pg.251

turns to frequent hunting. Lermontov is often cited as one of Russia's premier Romantic writers, yet it is significant that the protagonist, an anti-heroic figure, rejects sensuality and love, and then rejects the innocence of the virgin surroundings; and in fact destroys both love (Bela) and nature (continual game hunting). It appears that Lermontov demonstrates a patent deviation from the Romantic tradition by introducing a listless hedonist that finds no solace in an idyllic Rousseauian setting. Society has corrupted Pechorin beyond the capacity of nature to reform him; in turn, he is recklessly destructive. He explains, "All I know is that if I make other people unhappy, I'm no less unhappy myself. Not much comfort for them perhaps, but there it is" (53). He continues, adding, "My soul's been corrupted by society. My imagination knows no peace, my heart no satisfaction" and he concludes, "my life gets emptier every day" (54). Pechorin seems to want to embrace nature, in accord with the Romantic tradition, but fails because his attraction to the native Bela remain unequal. He is a man in crisis; there is an urgency to his sorrow.

The story concludes with the tragic death of Bela. After another uneventful day of hunting, Pechorin and Maxim Maximych returned just as an excited horseman scurries off; it turns out to be Kazbich with Bela wrapped in a sack. Against Maxim Maximych's desperate appeal, Pechorin shoots the leg of the horse, and the two fell down. Kazbich yelled with a dagger in the air, and Maxim Maximych shot, yet as the smoke cleared, Kazbich is gone and Bela laid with blood streaming from her wound. This tragedy concludes the competition trope; in the end, it is Kazbich's savagery that claims the final domination of the girl. Lermontov created simplistic characters to represent the natives. For example, Kazbich is portrayed at the vindictive savage with the gall to destroy an innocent girl. His reasons, presumably, include revenge, but also the necessary conclusion to the battle of "ethnic might." Finally, given their ethnicity, such depravity should be anticipated of the natives, explains Maxim Maximych. He answers why Kazbich attempted to kidnap Bela: "these Circassians have got thieving in their blood. They'll steal anything, given the

chance. Even things they don't want – they'll take them just the same..."(57). Yet it is notable that the "savage" amorality of Kazbich is not worse than the "civilized" amorality of Pechorin, his European counterpart. Even Bela, for whom Maxim Maximych holds genuine sympathy, is incapable of entertaining complex human relations, such as love. When Bela was told that her father died, "she cried for a couple days, and then forgot all about it"(49). Maxim Maximych also remarks that "[Bela] was in a different class altogether [in comparison to Russian women]. Pechorin dressed her up like a doll, and it was amazing how much prettier she grew while with us, with all his pampering and coddling"(49). The content of the observation, though ostensibly flattering, is framed in overtly supercilious language. The remark suggests roots that are primitive and moreover, that the earnest intentions of the Russians to civilize her can only at best make her a "doll" – a girl with a pleasant appearance, but something distinctly less than an equal.

Bela slowly perishes after Kazbich's stabbing. Pechorin is emotionally distanced from Bela up till her eventual passing. Maxim Maximych is moved to grief with this sad death, and attempts to console Pechorin, who, to his horror, responds with laughter; "that laugh sent cold shivers down my spine," he recalls (60). Though Lermontov is not generous in his portrayal of the colonized, the author is certainly ambivalent about the colonizer as well. Pechorin exemplifies the destructive capacity of the cruel imperialist. His double, of course, is Maxim Maximych, the benevolent imperialist. Lermontov seems to indicate that, on one hand, the Russian presence is potentially harmful to the Caucasus, yet, on the other, the simple natives require their "civilizing" influence. Yet an impression of futility predominates throughout the work; perhaps this reflects Lermontov's frustration in his own campaigns to the Caucasus. This message was perhaps the most controversial at the time, implicating that Russia expansion as such was unnecessary. Russia is portrayed as a severe "Roman" state of sorts, whose objective "was to subjugate a primitive world of harmonious

relation to nature.”³⁵ Maxim Maximych, Pechorin’s antipode, is fundamentally unsuited to curb the destruction of the protagonist; his sympathy, and even his admonishment, is ineffectual in preventing Bela’s tragic death. Lermontov appears to conclude that in spite of the civilizing “burden” of the indigenous populations, and the necessity thereupon, the encounter with the superior culture leads to destruction of the colonized. Indeed, the Russian seems bound to a fate scarcely much more encouraging; as an instrument of expansion, the ruinous conduct of Pechorin marks him spiritually barren.

³⁵ Dunlop, John B. *Russia Confronts Chechnya: Roots of a Separatist Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998)

III. Vladimir Makanin's *The Prisoner of the Caucasus*

Vladimir Makanin (b.1937) is the best known of the so-called *sorokaletnie* (literally, forty-year-olds) writers, also dubbed the “Moscow school prose.” This generation was young during the height of Stalin’s terror, and matured in the days of Brezhnev stagnation. Nevertheless, their education and upbringing was infused with the rhetoric of Soviet preeminence. Yet into their adulthood, the realities of Soviet life fell far short of the ideology; thus, this disparity turned the generation into cynics. The attention of these writers turned to Soviet *byt*, or the fatiguing prosaics of everyday existence, which functioned as a palpable juxtaposition with the Soviet myth for many of the reading public. They were particularly critical of the intelligentsia by reason of perceived materialism and spiritual depravity. Makanin, as well as other writers of this generation, developed a penchant for anti-utopian stories with astute and lonely characters inundated by the routine of daily existence (*byt*). Several examples include *Long Is Our Way* (1991) and *Manhole* (1991).³⁶ Both stories bleakly portray human limitations; first, the failure of the intelligentsia to challenge the status quo, and second, the ephemeral nature of beauty. Another story, *The Prisoner of the Caucasus*, adopts a familiar plot, referring to works such as Puskin’s *Prisoner of the Caucasus*, but most significantly, Lermontov’s *Bela*, though with several added distinctions.

In this short story, like the previously mentioned works, there is again the Russian protagonist, Rubakhin, a soldier, encountering native peoples of the East. The setting is contemporary, and the action takes place during the Chechen War. As previously mentioned, the hostilities in Chechnya may be understood as the recent manifestation of Russian orientalism. A significant innovation in Makanin’s story is that the role of Bela, the manifestation of the “other,” takes the form of another man. Rubakhin, not unlike Pechorin, develops an unusual attraction to the other; yet, Rubakhin struggles to withhold expression of his unconventional infatuation. Indeed,

he is ashamed of his feelings. The subject of his affection is not only a man, but also a Chechen that happens to be his prisoner; thus, the explanation of his embarrassment is two-fold: it is an attraction to the lesser “other” as well as being a homosexual desire. It is a given that neither aspect of this attraction is acceptable for a soldier, particularly during a war.

Makanin begins with a poignant appeal to the reader taken from Dostoevsky: “The soldiers, more likely than not, didn’t know that *beauty will save the world*.”³⁷ Dostoevsky’s mantra proves antithetical to the conclusion of the story; hence, Makanin reverts to the familiar anti-utopia genre. The motifs of beauty and brotherhood are consistently reconsidered throughout the text, though both are summarily deemed inconsequential in the end. The utopian scenario would involve the Soviet ideal of international brotherhood, yet the tenor of the story is to jeer at such idealism. Rubakhin and his fellow soldier, Vovka, begin the story by finding a dead soldier. They report the death to their general, who actually lives with his wife in a *dacha*, or country cottage, in close proximity to the “war.” The nature of war is nearly surreal in Makanin’s text. Life lingers dangerously close to normalcy in spite of the unsightly persistence of war. The beauty of country life at the *dacha* is tempered by the violence of war.

Meanwhile, the general seems unmoved by the death of his soldier. Colonial Gurov is haggling with the Chechen Alibekov. Gurov needs rations for his men, while Alibekov wants armaments in exchange, presumably to fight the Russians. This particular irony unabashedly frames this war as ludicrous. At one point, Gurov becomes frustrated and exclaims, “and why are you being so stubborn, Alibek! If you really look at it, you yourself are a prisoner...” (122). Alibek answers: “your kidding, Petrovich. I’m no prisoner— it’s you who’s the prisoner!” (123) The larger context of this exchange, irrespective of who is in fact correct, indicates the needlessness and

³⁶ Shneidman, N.N. *Russian Literature, 1988-94: The End of an Era* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995) pgs.86-91

³⁷ Makanin, Vladimir. *The Loss: A Novella and Two Other Short Stories* (Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1998) pg. 117; all page numbers denote this book unless otherwise indicated.

confusion of this war; it is just another generation of Russian expansion. Both the indigenous man and the Russians revisit the familiar patterns of the past. The nature of Russian relations with the Caucasus seems to be persistent.

Rubakhin and Vovka get word of an imminent raid. They, along with others, decide to intercept the Chechen soldiers. Their motive is hardly patriotic, instead they intend to catch Chechens to exchange for rations and vodka. The ambush begins, and Rubakhin and another pursue two guerilla fighters. One is caught and Rubakhin chases after the second, finally throwing his rifle at the legs of the man. As he falls, Rubakhin tackles him and glanced at the captive: “the face startled him. First, by its youth...The even features the tender skin. The face, native to the Caucasus, struck him in some other way, but what was it? He didn’t quite get it”(133). Similar to Lermontov’s *Bela*, the unfathomable feelings originate from an episode of violence. Bela is kidnapped by her brother soon after the first encounter, and becomes in effect the prisoner of Pechorin; in the same way, Rubakhin tackles his prisoner in a surprise ambush. Yet unlike Pechorin, the stupefied Rubakhin demonstrates some tenderness in subsequent relations, though this predilection has its limits. As soon as they return to the camp, Rubakhin announces, “this one’s mine!,” referring to the prisoner. He explains that he intends to exchange him for something with the enemy. Another soldier remarks of the prisoner: “You’ll be able to exchange two, three, maybe five for one. Them kind— they love like a girl!” (135). Rubakhin then recognized his aberrant intrigue, “ He suddenly understood what it was that had bothered him about the captured fighter: the young man was beautiful” (135). This remark articulates the attraction to the other, yet in this instance, the appeal is patently dangerous. Nevertheless, Rubakhin can hardly contain his feelings; “Rubakhin was a simple soldier— he had no defense against human beauty as such”(137).

Rubakhin and Vovka travel with the prisoner en route to Gurov's *dacha*. At one point, the three reach a swift creek that would inevitably take the prisoner given his hands and legs are constrained. Rubakhin considers that he must carry the prisoner; "a feeling of compassion helped Rubakhin; compassion came to his aid at the right time and from somewhere above" (138). This suggests the presence of some transcendental virtue, presumably referring to the virtue of beauty. He, in effect, treats the prisoner like a woman, instead of an enemy and a prisoner. Rubakhin is moved to give a speech of sorts after assisting the prisoner; he exclaims, "In... normal times, what kind of enemies are we? We are brothers. [...] Can it be denied?" (139). Vovka ironically replies, in the typical Soviet manner, "Long live the indestructible friendship between people" (139). It seems that the time for solidarity has passed, although it is evident from the history of Russian relations with the East that the "union" of peoples was a fragile fiction. The Soviet myth is satirized by Vovka even as the protagonist is captivated by the rhetoric. Rubakhin pities his prisoner, and much to the chagrin of Vovka, he unties the prisoner's arms. Later that night, noticing that the prisoner's feet were swollen, he offers the man his own wool socks. The three settle down for the evening, and Rubakhin "senses that he [...] sympathizes with him... Rubakhin suddenly felt uneasy again" (141). Finally, the enigmatic Chechen speaks; Rubakhin abruptly exclaims, "But you're a handsome one, no doubt about it" (142). A long silence ensues following this revealing faux pas. Gradually, the young prisoner bent his head to the right, onto Rubakhin's shoulder; "then the warmth of the body, along with it, the flow of sensuality, too (also in separate waves), began to shoot through, flowing across— wave after wave— from the youth's leaning shoulder into Rubakhin's shoulder" (143). The protagonist is clearly torn between convention and attraction; the latter ruthlessly wears at what is expected of a soldier.

The successive decrease of Rubakhin's struggle to retain his pronounced masculinity and moreover, his position as a superior Russian in contrast to the "other" is frustrated as the alluring

presence of the prisoner. The young Chechen violates the preordained space that divides the Russian from his eastern counterpart; and in so doing, blurs the distinction between the two—the native acquires humanity. Yet this closeness cannot last; this is the lesson taken from Lermontov's *Bela*. Rubakhin moves nearer to the youth: "his stomach was the first of the bundle of organs to reject such an uncommon sensual overload—it contracted into a spasm, and instantly the abdominal muscles of the practiced soldier became as hard as a scrub board. And immediately he lost his breath"(143-44). The prisoner was startled by a cough, and moved his head from Rubakhin's shoulder. The Russian nearly at once reasserts his ethnicity; his senses return as he physically rejects the nature of his desires. Both the rhetoric of Soviet brotherhood and raw desire are inconsequential; again, Russian orientalism prevails. The fate of the prisoner, destruction, and the dominance of the Russian, seems to be already secured.

The two Russians and their prisoner, "warming each other, made it until morning"(144). Rubakhin "suddenly began to look after the youth. (It worried him. He hadn't expected this of himself)"(145). He offered his socks again to the prisoner, only this time "for keeps." The young Chechen is encouraged by the "shape their relations had taken. Possibly this gratified him"(145). Perhaps the prisoner understands that his relation to the Russian has become exceptional, given the two are on equal ground. Thus, the day starts well, but not far into their excursion, Rubakhin encounters a menacing noise: "*This can't be!* Flashed through the soldier's mind when he heard up above a sound of something dangerous moving... [Chechen] men were coming down both sides of the cliff"(146). Rubakhin and Vovka act swiftly in response to the immediate threat; "now everything was by instinct. A chill pinched his nostrils"(146). At this point, Rubakhin considered the prisoner. He pulled him close, reaching his arm around the body of the young Chechen. Rubakhin "touched his neck, then by feel shifted over to his face, and touching lightly, placed his fingers and palm on the beautiful lips... the lips trembled"(147). In this very moment vivid sensuality, the

destruction of the other is forthcoming; Rubakhin only uncovered the mouth of the prisoner after “his body jerked, legs stiffened,” and finally he was killed (148). The Russian “circled the neck with the hand that embraced him. He squeezed; no, beauty didn’t manage to save. Several convulsions... and that’s all” (148).

Rubakhin’s gentle predisposition was short-lived, and in spite of the feelings, or rather because of the feelings, the prisoner was destroyed. One obvious explanation for the killing is that it was a reaction to imminent danger. Yet perhaps the larger interpretation should make reference to vestige of an imperialist past. Rubakhin suppressed dangerous feelings for the “other,” and was afraid of the consequences of, in effect, acknowledging the palpable “humanness” of the prisoner. In spite of the attraction, which is also evident in Lermontov’s text, the subject remains an object. Said explains that, “it seems a common human failing to prefer the schematic authority of a text to the disorientations of direct encounters with the human.”³⁸ Thus the preconceived notions of the other surpass personal experience, and make the destruction of the prisoner less morally abhorrent. This Russian soldier adopts the pattern of destruction that was conceived in the earliest years of expansion, such as that demonstrated by Lermontov’s work. In order to better understand the similarities of the text, and gain a fuller consideration of Russian imperialism, or orientalism, in the East, the literary theory of intertextuality needs mention.

³⁸ Said, Edward W. *Orientalism* (New York, Vintage Books, 1994) pg.93

IV. Intertextual Comparison Between the Texts of Lermontov and Makanin

Much can be written of intertextuality (and indeed much has), but its distilled gist will suffice to attest to the nearness of Lermontov's *A Hero of Our Time* and Makanin's *Prisoner of the Caucasus*. Judith Still and Michael Worton, in their article *Intertextuality: Theories and Practices*, begin by explaining, "the theory of intertextuality insists that a text cannot exist as a hermetic or self-sufficient whole, and so does not function as a closed system."³⁹ In short, it is sensible that a writer is also a reader, and thus has "borrowed" ideas from antecedent texts. The process can be inadvertent, but it may also be purposeful. Intertextuality was originally conceived and used by a critical avant-garde as a form of protest against the established literary scene; this is not to suggest, however, that the erudite application is merely recent. Most authors suggest that the phenomenon has existed as long as language itself, although it was only christened in 1960s. The most explicit form of intertextual appropriation is through quotation, but this does not relate directly to the analyzed stories. Heinrich F. Plett writes of "material versus structural" intertexts.⁴⁰ The material aspect is inclusive of content-based parallels, whereas the composition of the story represents the structure. While this division is helpful, it is difficult to find instances in which both aspects do not overlap. For example, Makanin's work appropriates both the structural and material aspects of Lermontov's work. Lermontov himself, as has been previously mentioned, adapted both these aspects from earlier writers such as Pushkin and Lev Tolstoy, and their stories. The history of intertextuality relating to the subject of Russian expansionist policy suggests a distinct continuity between the two works, and moreover beyond these stories, indicative of the persistence of ethnic strife in Russo-Caucasian relations. In short, the shared aspects of these works testify to the history of Russian and Chechen discord. The works of literature examined, and their literary "peers," are compelling evidence of the

³⁹ Worton and Still. Eds. *Intertextuality: Theories and Practices* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, YEAR?) pg.1

⁴⁰ Plett, Heinrich F. ed. *Intertextuality* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1991) pg.7

persistent aspect of Russian orientalism throughout history, which moreover, accounts for hostilities in Chechnya that endure even to this day. Indeed, little has changed in this regard; intertextual correspondence is offered as evidence.

Perhaps the most apparent correspondence shared between the two stories is that they are both set in the Caucasus. The setting contributes to the nature of the relations between the Russian and the “other.”⁴¹ The exotic appeal of the environment, the so-called “poetics of space,”⁴² is adopted by the native, enhancing the attraction of both. Makanin’s text begins with an appeal to beauty, which makes implicit reference to both the geography and the prisoner, and concludes on a similar note. Rubakhin muses after the killing of the Chechen, “Mountains. Mountains. Mountains. How long now have their majesty, their mute solemnity chafed his heart— but what actually did their beauty want to say to him? Why did it call?” (154) Geography and the native are two entities that in effect, become one for Rubakhin by the end of the story. Pechorin, for his part, is preoccupied with hunting towards the end of the *Hero*, and seems too also respond to this “beauty.” His response is destruction for both “geography,” and Bela. This “spiritual geography” captivates the young Russians, and each respond with a perilous attraction to the native of the Caucasus. Though Rubakhin demonstrates considerably more tenderness in his relation with the native, both he and Pechorin reflect an eventual disregard for the “humanness” of the other. This attraction is significantly lessened by the historical presence of Russian orientalism. The relationships that ensue are fundamentally unequal. Bela and the young Chechen (who pointedly remains nameless) exist as something like children in the minds of both Russians. Pechorin explains to Maxim Maximych that “a native girl’s love is little better than that of a lady of rank. The ignorance and simplicity of the one are as the coquetry of the other... [Bela] bores me” (54). His critique of home is evident, yet, more

⁴¹ Said, Edward. *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994) pgs. 54-57

⁴² Gaston, Bachelard. *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jones (New York: Orion Press, 1964) found in Said, Edward. *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994) pgs. 54

importantly, there is a distinct aspect of superiority in Pechorin's comments about the "native girl" Bela. Rubakhin's behavior and thoughts are less alarming; nevertheless, the conclusion reinstates the unequal relationship with the destruction of the "other." After the death of the prisoner: "not a word about the person, that, all and all, they had grown quite accustomed to... sit a while [by the grave]? No way— there's a war going on!" (149) War and military motifs also permeate through both stories. Pechorin and Rubakhin are soldiers. Although it is only the latter that is displaced in the Caucasus for reason of "war," this observation does not save Bela from destruction. At the forefront is the emotional life of several characters, yet these figures are hardly independent of the forces in the background, of "spiritual geography," war, ethnic conflict, and, significantly, the legacy of Russian expansion— Said's orientalism.

In both instances, the story begins with a fatal attraction to the "other," is followed by the termination of "love," and concludes with destruction of the subject of attraction by the Russian. It is ironic that it is the more compassionate Rubakhin that physically kills his prisoner, while Pechorin does not directly contribute to at least the corporeal death of Bela. It is the reckless disregard of Pechorin, however, that smacks of moral repugnance, whereas Rubakhin is driven more by instinct in that critical moment. His instinct, nevertheless, is not tempered by rashness of his deed; this killing re-establishes the conceived inferiority of the Chechen. Pechorin leaves unaffected by the death of the other, as his chilling laugh following Bela's death indicates. Makanin's protagonist is haunted by dreams of "the beautiful face of the youthful prisoner" after his death, which implies some notion of guilt. Irrespective of the motivations and afterthoughts of these characters, the larger observation is that there is a relevant critique of Russian expansionist policies manifest in both texts. Lermontov and Makanin seem to both register the disastrous consequences of the Russo-Caucasian encounter, particularly when the former is attracted to a native; both stories function as a metaphor. Fundamentally, the crisis originates from the intractable imperialistic perceptions of the

Russians, which position the natives in an inferior locale relative to themselves. This is perhaps the most salient appropriation of both material and structural aspects found in both Makanin's and Lermontov's texts, and its presence is very purposeful. The "cursed question" of the role of Russia in the history of the past up to the present is often returned with a equivalently cursed answer: the de-humanizing subjection of the other.

Conclusion

This project has endeavored to describe the Russian perception of the “other,” specifically the Caucasus. This mis-perception has imparted a troubled history Russo-Caucasian relations which carries to the present. With the benefit of Edward W. Said’s theory of orientalism and the intertextuality conjecture, two works have been examined within their larger historical context. Intertextuality suggests the constant interchange of literature. In this case, the semblance of certain patterns of domination emerge in the stories of both Lermontov and Makanin, as well as others in the “Caucasian genre.” Hence the usefulness of Said’s seminal work *Orientalism*. Said writes, “the essential relationship, on political, cultural, and even religious grounds, was seen— in the West [including Russia], which concerns us here— to be one between a strong and weak partner.”⁴³ Said discusses more specifically the relationship between Western Europe and the “Orient,” yet the study pertains as well to Russia and the Caucasus.⁴⁴

The exegesis of *Bela* and *The Prisoner of the Caucasus* demonstrates that relations between Russians and Chechens remain fundamentally unequal. This remains true even as the Russian protagonist is attracted to the “other,” as is described in both stories. In both instances, the “other” is destroyed either literally, or at least on “spiritual” level, by the Russian protagonist. Therefore, contact is the harbinger of ruin, rather than the anomaly of reconciliation. Nevertheless, the attraction is reciprocated by both native characters. Both the young Chechen and Bela are won over by material gifts; the initial hatred of the conqueror is easily overlooked. This implies a simplistic disposition; a marked lack of sophistication. Why did the Chechen prisoner never escape, though given ample opportunity? Why did Bela concede to Pechorin’s hawkish courtship? Said writes that an observation about a hypothetical tenth-century Arab poet “multiplied itself into a policy towards

⁴³ Said, Edward W. *Orientalism* (New York, Vintage Books, 1994) pg.40

⁴⁴ Ibid. pg.104; here Said actually considers Soviet Russia an “imperial power”

(and about) the Oriental mentality in Egypt, Iraq, or Arabia [...].”⁴⁵ In short, an inflexible essentialist conception of the “other,” the Chechen, trumps even intimate personal encounters. In part, this is because the relationship remains largely superficial and inconsequential. Rubakhin and Pechorin illustrate this truism with the ultimate destruction of the object of their former attraction; thus Chechen remains a pedestrian savage. Even the writers, Lermontov, and to a lesser extent, Makanin, both represent their native characters as objects rather than subjects. Surely this is the larger point of this project: Russian orientalism is not limited to these stories; its formidable presence transcends mere fiction and history— indeed, Russian orientalism carries to the present. The enduring paradigm of Russo-Caucasian relations continues to involve mis-perception, subordination, and the calamitous de-humanization of the “other.” In order to appreciate the “other” as an equal, “we must [at last] virtually see the humanistic values that Orientalism, by its scope, experiences, and structures, has all but eliminated.”⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Ibid. pg.96

⁴⁶ Ibid. pg.110

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