a ‘carrot’ not be forthcoming for the other Balkan states, however, the outlook is bleak indeed. Skyrocketing unemployment, staggering crime rates, sluggish economic growth, or even possible collapse as in the case of the scarcely viable Kosovo: these are only the most visible symptoms of a seemingly endemic and potentially crippling instability that could all too easily undermine a still fragile peace. Furthermore, the recent declaration of Montenegrin independence and the ‘quasi-state’ status of Kosovo may encourage other statelets such as the *Republika Srpska* (so far a part of Bosnia and Herzegovina) to claim independence as well, thus contributing to a further ‘Balkanization’ of the region. Whatever the outcome, we may be sure that Bideleux and Jeffries have not said the last word on this troubled corner of the world.

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David Powelstock, *Becoming Mikhail Lermontov: The Ironies of Romantic Individualism in Nicholas I’s Russia*, Studies in Russian Literature and Theory (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2005), xii + 582 pp.

By any measure, this voluminous literary biography must count as a major contribution to Lermontov studies in English. Through a probing analysis of poems, plays and prose, David Powelstock has attempted to trace the poet’s aesthetic development ‘in close relation to the cultural and social paradigms of his time’ (464). As his subtitle indicates, he finds the key to this in Lermontov’s ‘radical version’ of Romantic individualism (3), so fatefully at odds with the ethos of his milieu: political repression, social conformism, sterile and restrictive cultural and linguistic stereotypes. The first three chapters, devoted to the ‘pre-Pushkin period’ of juvenilia and Byronism, focus on those aspects which in Powelstock’s reading were to be fundamental to Lermontov’s ‘poetics of liberation’ (44): a ‘hyperconsciousness of self-other relations’ (193), the search for an authentic means of self-expression beyond the limitations of denotative language, the quest for ‘self-transfiguration through discourse’ (78). Chapter IV is centrally concerned with the ‘pivotal text’ (26) in the Lermontov story, *The Death of the Poet* (or *A Poet’s Death*), in which elegiac reflections on Pushkin’s demise give way (especially in the inflammatory coda) to denunciation of those held responsible:

court and society. Not only did this 'hybrid' work secure for Lermontov the fame he craved, but also (as Powelstock argues) it signalled the emergence of a new poetic persona, both lyricist and avenger, characterised in turn by the discourses of private emotion and public protest which inform the 'guardhouse cycle' of 1837 and the verse of the first Caucasian exile.

Chapters V and VI continue the narrative of Lermontov's creative trajectory by concentrating on two major works, *The Demon* and *A Hero of Our Time* respectively. The first of these is related to a transformation in the poet's attitude to his reader ('the other') wrought by his experience of growing literary fame, social acceptance and amorous success. The pessimism engendered by his earlier sense of alienation was now modified by the recognition among his admirers of kindred souls, potential readers with whom 'communicative intimacy' (328) was possible. The mode of such communication, designed to liberate this target audience from its conventional assumptions and expectations, was irony; *The Demon*, a work which continues to resist any 'coherent interpretation' (297), through whose eight successive redactions Powelstock traces a 'shift toward ambiguity' (307), is a case in point. Embracing the paradox at the poem's heart, he finds in the Demon a complex embodiment of Lermontov's Romantic individualism, and in Tamara a 'reader figure' seduced by the Demon's appeal, who 'earns her salvation… by freely choosing' to love him (318). Paradox, irony and seduction are key terms too in Powelstock's reading of *A Hero of Our Time*, a work written 'to expose the hypocrisy of regnant aesthetic and moral judgements and replace them with a ruthlessly frank vision of human nature' (331). Readers are 'seduced' into interpreting the novel just as the secondary characters are seduced into 'understanding' Pechorin – only to have their misperceptions revealed. The dual structure of the novel – the disjunction between *siuzhet* and *fabula* diagrammatically represented on pages 338–9 – embodies its ambiguity, while Maksim Maksimych is a figure for the 'moralising reader' (348) bent on imposing his moral and aesthetic truisms on the narrative and its hero. Recognition of the fallacy of his judgement 'seduces' the reader towards a truer understanding of Pechorin's 'moral consciousness' (363) and the values at the core of his individualism.

In the verse of Lermontov's final period (the subject of the seventh and last chapter), Powelstock discerns a new element in the poet's commitment to 'the primacy of individual consciousness' (404): a belief that in expressing his true self the poet can show others how to liberate their own consciousness. His irony becomes ‘more inviting’ and ‘more tolerant of readerly misconceptions’ (434); a philosophical acceptance of the limitations of language brings a new awareness of ‘alternative semantic means’ (400): musicality, rhyme, rhythm, enjambment, the personification of Nature, the transformation of Romantic cliché, the ‘forging of lyric intimacy requiring active participation of the reader’s consciousness’ (464). This new poetics is illustrated from Lermontov’s last *poema Mtsyri* (translated as *The Novitiate*) and from some of his best-loved lyrics. Rejecting the conventional view of the writer as a poet of unfulfilled potential, the brief conclusion celebrates his command, not so much of language as a means of self expression, as of the ‘polyvalent signifying potential’ (466) of poetic activity as a whole.

Becoming Mikhail Lermontov unfolds its subtle and often technical arguments in great depth, though sometimes at great length. While the final page-count is swollen by an appendix containing the Russian text of all the poems cited, as well as by Powelstock’s practice of providing complete English translations in the body of the text, the general impression is of expansiveness rather than concision. In the space of a single paragraph, for example, *Eugene Onegin* is described as ‘a state-of-the art cornucopia of generic approaches to narration and characterization’, ‘a sumptuous buffet of narrative devices’ and a ‘kaleidoscopic encyclopaedia of voices and perspectives’ (59). To some readers, the more densely-textured sentences may seem tortuous or prolix; others may find Powelstock’s overarching argument less illuminating or accessible than the individual readings and analyses adduced to support it. Yet others may see further irony in the fact that a book aiming ‘to strip away the expectations and extrapolations that have been posthumously loaded onto Lermontov’s legacy’ (464) should so consistently impose a ‘coherent interpretation’ on this most ironic and ambiguous of writers. Yet all will acknowledge Powelstock’s very considerable achievement. Handsomely produced by Northwestern University Press, this is a valuable addition to their series on Russian literature and theory which is bound be a standard work for many years to come.

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