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DEMÖNIC GAMES, OR THE HIDDEN PLOT OF MIXAIL
LERMONTOV'S *KNJAŽNA MERI*

— Эх, братец! на все есть мапера; многое
не говорится, а отгадывается...

— Я никогда сам не открываю моих тайн, я ужасно
люблю, чтоб их отгадывали...

The hidden plot in "Knjažna Meri" is a diabolical game that the Devil himself plays with the unsuspecting hero. The prize in this game is Pečorin's soul. The Devil sets Pečorin up for the temptations, springs his traps, and successfully brings the hero to his downfall. There are three temptations that the hero fails to overcome: killing Grušnickij, seducing Vera and deceiving Meri in her innocent love. The Devil's game with Pečorin is played against the background of the games that the hero, who sees himself as a demonic figure, plays with his unsuspecting victims Grušnickij and Meri.

The concept of "*igra*" appears early in the story. The English word "game" does not completely bring out the double meaning of the Russian word. It means "a game" (and, as a verb "*igrat'*," "to play a game," "to gamble") and "acting, performing" (as a verb, "to act, to perform"). Both of these meanings find realization in "Knjažna Meri." Pečorin engages himself in manipulative games in which pawns (or cards) are people, and he acts as an omnipotent master of the game, setting its rules and directing the moves. At the same time, he is an actor in the comedy that he thinks he is staging, an acting director of sorts. At this plot level the situation can also be viewed as a puppet show,¹ where the fake puppet master Pečorin believes he holds all the strings, including those of a puppet with his own face on it. Yet on the fantastic level, the moves that Pečorin makes in his societal games are instigated by a greater master.² As far as role-playing is concerned, Pečorin, who believes himself to be directing the show, appears on the fantastic level merely as a character in someone else's comedy. This interpretation of the realistic and fantastic plots through game- and role-playing adds a new and deeper perspective to the story.

The Devil in the story is Vera's husband, a lame old man. Limping has always been a feature of the devil, and he is often called, among other names, "The Croo-

ked Serpent" (Rudwin, 29) or "Old Serpent" (Rudwin, 32). A Russian popular name for the devil is "xromoj čert." As part of the game, the real Devil has a decoy — Doctor Verner. The doctor has all the prerequisites for being the devil: the title, the German name, and a limp. He is even called Mephistopheles. Yet with the doctor its all a Byronic romantic pose. He is a person of morals, and when Pečorin kills Grušnickij, Doctor Verner does not want to shake his hand. Grušnickij's limp is caused by the wound as well as his romantic ideal and looks more like a caricature. It is yet another decoy for the real Devil.

Ėjxenbaum also mentions a popular novel of the time — Alain René Lesage's *Le Diable boiteux* (known in Russia as "Xromoj bes") — as a possible source for Lermontov's "new devil" (Lermontov, vol. 4, 618-19). The mention of this "new devil" first appears in Lermontov's unfinished poem "Skazka dlja detej," where the poet turns to "čert" (devil) rather than the familiar Demon: "No étot čert sovsem inogo sorta: Aristokrat i ne poxož na čorta" (Lermontov, vol. 3, 420). Lermontov never finished the poem — his "new" devil was becoming nothing more than a parody of Demon (Durylin, *Kak rabotal Lermontov*, 98). This devil, who "never made it" in "Skazka", appears in an unfinished story "U graf. V... byl muzykal'nyj večer" (also known from the memoirs of E. P. Rostopčina as "Štoss" [*M. Ju. Lermontov v vospominanijax sovremennikov*, 285]). Structurally, the plots of "Knjažna Meri" and "Štoss" are similar: both of the old men are lame (in "Štoss": "...to byl sedoj sgorblennyj staričok; on medlenno prodvigalsja prisedaja..." [Lermontov, vol. 5, 336]), both try to win the hero's soul, and both employ love of a woman as a device to cause the hero's downfall. In "Štoss," as well as in "Knjažna Meri," such downfall was to be realized in the literal meaning of the word: at the end of the story Lugin was going to throw himself out of the window (Udodov, 652; I. M. Boldakov's view is presented by Ėjxenbaum in his commentaries: Lermontov, vol. 5, 496). In "Knjažna Meri," the fall from a window remains as a component of a plot (the scene in Vera's garden), but it does not acquire the crucial importance that it bears in "Štoss." The downfall of Pečorin is realized in the story through the actual fall of Grušnickij from the cliff, and, finally, Pečorin's fall from his horse, which will be discussed later. Pečorin's demonic mask is that of the old Demon, a rebellious spirit and a lonely and disillusioned Romantic hero. In this connection Pečorin's confrontation with "the catcher of human souls" can also be viewed as the author's way of dethroning the old idol (the Demon), cutting the umbilical cord that for so many years tied him to his favorite hero.

The demonic drama where the hero is just another puppet in the skillful hands of a greater Master starts long before Pečorin decides to play his games with Grušnickij and Meri, and does not end with the death of Grušnickij and the hero's words: "*Finita la comedia*." Fate, which for Pečorin is just a part of his romantic Weltanschauung and a means to provide an excuse for his immoral actions,

becomes a material entity in the story in the form of the Devil. Pečorin never realizes that someone is playing a game with him, yet in his diary he unknowingly drops some clues that allow the reader to follow this new game and discover the hidden plot of "Knjažna Meri." The Devil gets involved in person in the events only at the end, when Pečorin is put to his decisive final tests. Yet throughout the story the Devil's presence is felt through the actions of his numerous agents who steer the plot in the direction desired by their master³ and through the landscape which becomes a gigantic stage set for the unfolding demonic game-drama.

The demonic background that mountains, depths, and the extinct volcano craters create in the story has already been noted (Faletti, 369-70). Their role in the story is to project and eventually to show the downfall of the hero. It is a "realization of a metaphor," since the second meaning of the phrase "*padenie geroja*" is reinforced by constantly "setting up" Pečorin, figuratively as well as literally making him balance on the edge of an abyss. In all the key events of the story such dangerous or high places are mentioned. On his arrival to Pjatigorsk, Pečorin finds an apartment in the highest place in town ("na samom vysokom meste").⁴ He sees Grušnickij for the first time, standing on the edge of a mountain: "Ja ostanovilsja, zapyxavšis', na kraju gory..." (Lermontov, vol. 5, 242. In future references only the page will be given). At this time Grušnickij shows him Princess Meri, and then the hero suddenly leaves and takes a walk among the dangerous cliffs: "Ja povernulsja i pošel ot nego proč'. S polčasa guljal ja po vinogradnym allejam, po izvestčatym skalam i visjaščim meždu nix kustarnikam" (245). Most likely, it is during this walk, and especially at the end of it, seeing Grušnickij at the well, that Pečorin for the first time thinks of playing a joke on Grušnickij. After an incident at the ball, Pečorin and Meri go to the hollow ("*proval*"), and it is here, that Meri's love for Pečorin becomes apparent both to him and to the reader: "K nemu [provalu] vedet uzkaja tropinka meždu kustarnikov i skal; vzbirajas' na goru, ja podal ruku knjažne, i ona ee ne pokidala v prodolženie celoj proguški" (273); and later: "My prišli k provalu; damy ostavili svoix kavalerov, no ona ne pokidala ruki moej. Ostroty zdešnix dendi ee ne smešili; krutizna obryva, u kotorogo ona stojala, ee ne pugala..." (274). The hero does not understand that it is he who should be afraid of the precipice.

Another key episode in the development of Pečorin's game with Princess Meri, is their trip to the cliff called The Ring. The cliff is in a canyon, and in order to get there, the heroes have to cross a treacherous mountain river ("Gornye rečki samye melkie opasny...[285]). Crossing the stream, Pečorin takes advantage of Meri's dizziness and kisses her. Meri confesses her love just to find a cold indifference on the part of the hero. And again, the fact that the action shifts to a dangerous mountainous road, is stressed: "Ona udarila xlystom svoju lošad' i pustilas' vo ves' dux po uzkoj, opasnoj doroge..." (286). Pečorin follows Meri on this dangerous path...

When Pečorin arrives in Kislovodsk, he rents an apartment on the hill. Vera's mezzanine apartment is conveniently located in the house next to Pečorin's. The restaurant, situated on a hill ("... v restoracii, postroennoj na kolme, v neskol'kix šagax ot moej kvartiry, načinajut mel'kať večerom ogni..." [283]), is also an important site: it is here that Pečorin overhears the plot to substitute blanks for bullets in both his and Grušnickij's guns. The hero's stopping at the window is part of the game in which he is being set up by the Devil. Lermontov stresses the location of the house on the edge of a ravine: "V odnom iz domov slobodki, postroennom na kraju ovraga (A. V.), zametil ja črezvyčajnoe osveščenie; po vremenam razdavalsja nestrojnyj govor i kriki, izobličavšie voennuju pirušku" (286).⁵

The place for the duel with Grušnickij is chosen in the mountains, on a high and inaccessible cliff which overlooks a precipice ("Uzkaja tropinka vela meždu kustami na krutiznu..." [301]). The terms of the duel specifically state that the participants are to stand at the edge of the abyss. Thus, the one who loses the duel will fall down on sharp rocks which will cover up any traces of illegal activity. And while Grušnickij finds his death at the bottom of the canyon, his literal fall marks another step to the final downfall of Pečorin, who has been set up from the very beginning to kill this simple and naive victim of the double play.

At the end of the story, when Pečorin tries to catch up with Vera, a ravine blocks his path: "Vse bylo by spaseno, esli b u moego konja dostalo sil ešče na desjat' minut. No vdrug podnimajas' iz nebol'sogo ovraga pri vyezde iz gor, na krutom povorote, on grjanulsja o zemlju" (308). In this way both the direct meaning of the word "*padenie*" and its figurative meaning are realized in this episode where the hero, who has killed his friend, seduced someone else's wife and broken the heart of an innocent young girl, falls in frustration off his horse to the ground. As much as cliffs, rocks, canyons, ravines and dangerous mountainous streams and paths are important in the Devil's scheme to cause the hero's downfall, it seems that the springs, as shall be demonstrated, bear even more importance. Springs are central in the story both in terms of location and plot development. It will not seem strange, though, if we consider the fact that these springs are sulphurous ("*kislosernaja voda*"), sulphur being the element universally connected with the Devil.⁶ The odor of sulphur was constantly present in the air of Pjatigorsk,⁷ and Lermontov (who was so much interested in and aware of the demonic) certainly intended significance for this element in the story. The connection between the springs, the mountains and hell becomes clear from F. A. Batalin's (Lermontov's contemporary) description of the Hollow — an extinguished crater of a volcano and, therefore, a gate to hell (Rudwin, 58):

Эта геологическая достопримечательность Пятигорска (находится почти в 2 км от города) представляет собою расселину с отвесными стенами высотой около 30м, на дне

которой бассейн глубиной в 13 м, наполненный теплой мутно-голубой водой, пропитанной сероводородом. (quoted in Manujlov, 218)

It is by the springs that Pečorin sees Meri for the first time (" V étu minutu prošli k kolodcu mimo nas dve dame: odna požilaja, drugaja moloden'kaja, strojnaja" [243]). It is here, that Pečorin decides to start his game with Grušnickij and Meri. He is returning from a walk in the mountains and stops at the well to rest. "Incidentally" the hero becomes a witness to the scene with the glass. When Verner mentions for the first time a woman with a birthmark (Vera, who is about to play such an important role in the hero's downfall), the well also appears: " Ne vstretili l' vy ee u kolodca? (251). When, following Vera, Pečorin moves to Kislovodsk, he finds an apartment next to Vera's and also next to the spring ("bliz istočnika"). Pečorin and Vera have their secret meetings in the garden by the well ("...my vstrečаемcja, budto nečajanno, v sadu, kotoryj ot našix domov spuskaetsja k kolodcu" [282]). It is by the well that Meri confesses to Pečorin her love for him and is rejected. The last time the sulphurous springs are mentioned in the story, they acquire a symbolic and ominous meaning. Before going to the duel, Pečorin takes a bath:

Велев седлать лошадей, я оделся и сбежал к купальне. Погружаясь в холодный кипяток Нарзана, я чувствовал, как телесные и душевные силы мои возвращались. Я выпел из ванны свеж и бодр, как будто собирался на бал. После этого говорите, что душа не зависит от тела!.. (297)

This sulphurous bath, that Pečorin takes immediately before killing Grušnickij, for the first time directly connects the hero with the diabolical element. It is an anti-baptism of the hero,⁸ the moment when he, without realizing it, consigns his soul to the Devil. Ironically, the compact is about to be sealed with Grušnickij's blood.

The Devil is also connected with the natural electricity, he is known to appear accompanied by thunder and lightning. Electricity plays an important role in the scene, where Meri falls in love with Pečorin: "...kisejnij rukav slabaja zaščita, i električeskaja iskra probežala iz moej ruki v ee ruku; vse počti strasti načinajutsja tak..." (274). Electricity also "fills the air" when Vera is introduced into the story (255-6). Pečorin's seemingly incidental encounter with Vera would not have any consequences if it were not for a thunderstorm: "Groza zastala nas v grote i uderžala lišnie polčasa" (258).⁹

The Devil that Pečorin faces is the Biblical Serpent, the Tempter. Allusions to the snake are quite frequent in the story. One of the mountains is named Zmeinaja (259) and looks like a group of snakes (Manujlov, 209). Other two — Beštu and

and Èl'brus — appear as five- and two-headed infernal monsters ("pjatiglavij Beštu," "okančivajas' dvuglavym Èl'borusom" [240]). In another description of the Mašuk mountain, clouds that gather around the peak of the mountain, are seen as snakes: "...krugom ego vilis' i polzali, kak zmei, serye cločki oblakov..." (255). Pečorin kisses Meri in view of the cliff named The Ring (*Koľco*). The secondary meaning of the word ("a coil"), as well as its connection with the episode of Meri's seduction, brings to mind the biblical Serpent. It is as if the Serpent is constantly present in the story, assuming one or another form. He is present in the magician's show in the same form of a ring (a coil): "Fokusnik obraščalsja k nemu [Grušnickomu] vsjakij raz, kak emu nužen byl nosovoy platok, časy, *koľco* (A. V.) i proč." (290). His presence is signalled when Pečorin for the first time sees Meri, in the form of kerchief that "coils" around her neck: "...legkaja šelkovaja kosynka vilas' vokrug ee gibkoj šei" (243). He shows himself in the gold chain that coils on the vest ("izvivaetsja po ... žiletu" [244] of one of his agents — the gambler Raevič.

The demonic game is introduced by Raevič, an infernal gambler and the Devil's agent, who otherwise does not serve any purpose in the story and does not appear after a short episode at the beginning. Yet Lermontov makes sure that Raevič's presence is registered by the reader:

О! это московский франт Раевич! Он игрок: это видно тотчас по золотой огромной цепи, которая извивается по его голубому жилету. А что за толстая трость -- точно у Робинзона Крузо! Да и борода кстати, и прическа а *la moujik*. (244)¹⁰

Raevič's presence in the story entails the same dropping of clues that we saw in the instance with Pečorin and Grušnickij: it is a part of the game that the Devil is playing with the hero.

After the stage for the demonic drama has been set with its serpent-like mountains and sulphurous springs, the performance starts. Pečorin's downfall is conceived as a combination of the killing of Grušnickij, the betrayal of Meri's love and the seduction of Vera. The connection of Meri with the biblical Mary is present in the story in the words of Princess Ligojskaja, rendered by Doctor Verner: "Ona mne ob'javila, čto doč' ee nevinna kak golub'" (251). Vera, on the other hand, has sold herself to the Devil for her son (257), because she is sick and does not have much longer to live. She even has a mole, which in the middle ages was considered to be a Devil's mark (Robbins, 135-36). It is by this mole that Pečorin recognizes her from Verner's discription. The first meeting between Pečorin and Vera takes place in a grotto. The air is full of electricity, and all the hero can think about is the woman with a mole. He finally sees Vera, who is dressed in black as if in mourning for someone. They have a short talk, and

when the hero is about to leave, the thunderstorm starts and detains Pečorin and Vera in the grotto, thus giving them an opportunity to become closer again. Next time Pečorin sees Vera by the well. When Vera asks Pečorin to get acquainted with the Ligovskie so that she can see him more often, the heroes are dipping their glasses into sulphurous water.

It is no accident that Pečorin oversees the scene between Grušnickij and Meri. It takes place at the well, and the object around which the scene is centered is a glass of sulphurous water. Pečorin is being set up by the Devil in the same way he sets up his victims. Pečorin's manipulative games are part of a greater plan, and what the hero considers to be his own device is but a plot prompted by an experienced and ingenious prompter — the Devil. When Meri sees Pečorin for the first time, Vera's husband is there too, following Meri and her mother on their walk. During the following days Pečorin meets Meri at the well and successfully tries to deprive her of her crowd of admirers. But in order for Meri to fall in love with Pečorin, he should appear as a hero. The opportunity for this is provided at the ball. The conversation that Pečorin overhears between the stout lady and the Dragoon Captain is another "set up" of the Devil. Like Raevič previously, the stout lady at the ball is described in every detail, yet does not appear later in the story:

Я стоял сзади одной толстой дамы, осененной розовыми перьями; пышность ее платья напоминала времена фижм, а пестроту ее негладкой кожи — счастливую эпоху мушек из черной тафты. Самая большая бородавка на ее шее прикрыта была фермуаром. (262)

The description of the lady suggests a description of a witch. Her warts — witch's marks¹¹ — as well as the name of one of the nearby mountains — *Lysaja* (259),¹² — connect the character to the infernal forces of the story. Another agent of the devil is the lady's escort, the Dragoon Captain,¹³ one of the most important instruments in the development of the story. The plot of the two infernal agents against Meri gives Pečorin the opportunity to save the girl from sure shame and win her gratitude. It is because of this incident at the ball that Meri imagines Pečorin as a Romantic savior with whom she eventually falls in love. This seemingly fortunate turn of events in the long run brings Meri nothing but misfortune.

When Pečorin moves to Kíslovodsk, he rents an apartment on the hill, next to the house where Vera and the Ligovskie live. It is on Vera's advice that the hero rents this place: "Najmi kvartiru rjedom; my budem žit' v bol'som dome bliz istočnika, v mezonine; vnzju knjaginja Ligovskaia, a rjedom est' dom togo že hozjaina, kotoryj ešče ne zanjat ..." (275). The lucky coincidence of the vacant apartment right next to Vera's house is set up by her husband.

The campaign against Pečorin and Meri is led by the Dragoon Captain. When Pečorin learns that the rumors about him and Meri are circulating around town, he attributes this mainly to Grušnickij: "Iz slov ego [Venera] ja zametil, čto pro menja i knjažnu už raspuščeny v gorode durnye sluxi: čto Grušnickomu darom ne projdet!" (282). Pečorin is mistaken when he says: "...teper', kažetsja, rešitel'no sostavljaetsja protiv menja vraždebnaja šajka pod komandoj Grušnickogo. U nego takoj gordyj i xrabryj vid..." (279-80). Grušnickij is a victim rather than a conniving head of a gang ("komandir šajki"). It is the Dragoon Captain who spreads the rumours about Pečorin and Meri; he also engineers the plot to substitute blanks for the bullets in the first duel-plot. Grušnickij here is obviously drunk, and the Dragoon Captain uses this, as well as the fact that the young man is hurt by the betrayal of his supposed friend. The hurt and drunk young man is an easy victim to manipulate, and the captain very artfully does so by praising Grušnickij's courage and, at the same time, presenting Pečorin as a coward. The Dragoon Captain who 'directs' this 'scene', offers the main part to Grušnickij: "A vot slušajte: Grušnickij na nego osobenno serdit — emu pervaja rol!" (287). The second part naturally goes to Pečorin, who is meant by the Devil to overhear the conversation standing on the edge of the ravine, at the window of the tavern. Hearing the plot Pečorin reacts: "Beregites', gospodin Grušnickij! govoril ja, proxaživajas' vzad i vpered po komnate: so mnoj étak ne šutjat. Vy dorogo možete zaplatit' za odobrenie vašix glupyx tovariščej. Ja vam ne igruška!" (288). Yet Pečorin is a toy, a puppet in the hands of a greater master,¹⁴ and his fury and anger at Grušnickij are part of a plan that will eventually bring his own downfall.

At the well ("Poutru ja vstretil knjažnu u kolodca" [288]) in the presence of Vera's husband ("Knjaginja šla vpered i nas s mužem Very..." [288]) Pečorin tells Meri that he is not in love with her. As few times as Vera's husband appears in the story, he manages to be present both during the first and the last meetings between Pečorin and Meri. At the time events begin to develop in the subplot concerning Vera. Vera's husband very conveniently leaves for a day for Pjatigorsk, and on the same day a magician comes to town. This "udivitel'nyj fokusnik, akrobat, ximik i optik" (289) — in a word, a quite shady character of questionable origin appears in town for just one night. He has a specific function in the Devil's game: as a Devil's agent, he is there to provide an opportunity for Pečorin and Vera to be together. Vera sends Pečorin a note asking him to visit her:

«Сегодня в десятом часу вечера приходи ко мне по большой лестнице; муж мой уехал в Пятигорск и завтра утром только вернется. Моих людей и горничных не будет в доме: я им всем раздала билеты, также и людям княгини. — Я жду тебя; приходи непременно». (289)

The magician's name is Apfelbaum, which is German for "apple tree." Vera's husband, the Biblical Tempter, the Serpent, is offering his victims this forbidden fruit in the hope of bringing about Pečorin's downfall. Again, the author stresses the fact that Vera's room is on the top floor.

Grušnickij learns of Pečorin's visit from an anonymous friend: "...včera odin čelovek, kotorogo ja vam ne nazovu, prihodit ko mne i rasskazyvaet, čto videl v desjatom času večera, kak kto-to prokral'sja v dom k Ligovskim" (292). This 'someone' is, no doubt, the Dragoon Captain, who was following Pečorin from the show: "Vdrug mne pokazalos', čto kto-to idet za mnoju. ... Proxodja mimo okon knjažny, ja uslyšal snova šagi za soboju; čelovek, zavernutyi v šinel', probežal mimo menja" (290). The captain then brings Grušnickij to the garden (of Eden), and both try to catch Pečorin. Yet the hero gets away. Chasing Pečorin and letting him go are nothing else than moves in the game that are essential for the next morning's key scene.

In the morning Vera's husband comes back. He meets Pečorin at the well and takes him to breakfast: "...ja vstrelil muža Very, kotoryj tol'ko čto priexal iz Pjatigorska. On vzjal menja pod ruku, i my pošli v restoraciju zavtrakat'" (292). It seems quite strange that a man who is hardly mentioned in the story before, and with whom Pečorin never seems to communicate, takes the latter by the hand, and leads him to the restaurant. Presumably, there must be another reason for this:

Мы уселись завтракать возле двери, ведущей в угловую комнату, где находилось человек десять молодежи, в числе которой был и Грушницкий. Судьба вторично доставила мне случай подслушать разговор, который должен был решить его участь. Он меня не видал, и следовательно я не мог подозревать умысла; но это только увеличивало его вину в моих глазах. (292)

Pečorin stresses the fact that everything that happens is incidental, which makes Grušnickij's fault even greater. He does not see anything ill-intentioned in the situation ("ja ne mog podozrevat' umysla"). Yet the intention here is obvious: Vera's husband chooses the table, and the Dragoon Captain chooses the topic of conversation. Ironically, all Pečorin worries about is that Vera's husband might hear this conversation and suspect the truth. Pečorin confronts Grušnickij, claiming that the latter is lying. Grušnickij, who is right, is ready to take his words back for the sake of Meri, and would do so if it were not for the Dragoon Captain: "Dragunskij kapitan, sidevšij vozle nego, tolknul ego loktem; on vzdrognul i bystro otvečal mne, ne podymaja glaz..." (293).

Later Verner goes to arrange the details for the duel, and overhears another plot, where Pečorin is supposed to get a pistol without a bullet. There are three

men in the room: Grušnickij, the Dragoon captain and someone else, whose name Verner does not remember ("kotorogo familii ne pomnju" [294]). There are only two instances in the story when Verner does not remember someone's name. In the second case, he is talking about Vera's husband: "Knjaginja mne govorila nynče, čto vy streljalis' za ee doč'. Ej vse etot staričok rasskazal... kak biš' ego? — On byl svidetelem vašej styčki s Grušnickim v restoracii" (309). One of the major qualities of the devil is his ability to deceive, and it seems reasonable to assume that the first time Verner does not remember the name of the man, it is also Vera's husband.¹⁵ There is another episode in the story where the Devil could have made an appearance. At one soirèe at the Ligovskie house there are no guests except for Pečorin, Vera and a funny old man ("prezabavnyj staričok" [275]). It could have been Vera's husband, especially since she left the party only at two in the morning. In the draft of the story, Vera's husband is present at the party together with the "funny old man" (Lermontov, v.5, 472). By removing Vera's husband, the author seems to merge these two into one. If so, Pečorin's loss of memory, like Verner's, could also be caused by the Devil. This also seems to be the only chance for Pečorin to be formally introduced to Vera's husband,¹⁶ as he would have to have been in order for them to have breakfast together later.

The description of Pečorin's bath is important also in another way:

Велев седлать лошадей, я оделся и сбегал к купальне. Погружаясь в холодный кипяток Нарзана, я чувствовал, как телесные и душевные силы мои возвращались. Я вышел из ванны свеж и бодр, как будто собирался на бал. После этого говорите, что душа не зависит от тела!.. (297)

It is ironic that the hero here makes a connection between the body and the soul. His bathing reminds one both of boiling sinners in the infernal pots¹⁷ and the folkloric descriptions of reviving the dead in *živaja voda*: "Nedarom Narzan nazývajúť bogatyrskim kľučom" (282). After taking his bath the hero feels fit for a ball — a worldly and vain enterprise. Lermontov's attitude to such social functions as a source of evil can be well illustrated by the poem "Kak často pestroju tolpoju okružen..." and by the ominous role that the ball plays in the poet's drama *Maskarad*. According to È. A. Šan-Girej, balls in Pjatigorsk were organized in the restaurant or right above the abyss of the hollow (covering it with boards) with its sulphurous pond (quoted in Manujlov, 218).¹⁸

The duel between Pečorin and Grušnickij takes place on top of a cliff above the precipice: "Vidite, na veršine etoj otvesnoj skaly, napravo, uzen'kuju ploščadku?" (300). The space looks like a circus arena, set for a fight before an infernal audience — "a herd of mountains" with the two-headed Èl'brus domineering the horizon:

Вот мы взобрались на вершину выдавшейся скалы; площадка была покрыта мелким песком, будто нарочно для поединка. Кругом, теряясь в золотом тумане утра, теснились вершины гор, как бесчисленное стадо, и Ельборус на юге вставал белой громадой, замыкая цепь льдистых вершин, между которых уж бродили волокнистые облака, набежавшие с востока. (301)

Throughout the duel Grušnickij has doubts about going through with it. It is only because of the Dragoon Captain that the killing finally takes place. He pushes Grušnickij into the duel naming him a fool and a coward. The phraseology that the captain uses is an ordinary and banal idiom of a semiliterate brute-officer, yet it has an additional connotation if we keep in mind that the captain really is an agent of the Devil. Thus, a cliché idiom, "Natura — dura, sud'ba — indejka, a žizn' — kopejka!" (303), acquires an ominous overtone; and the phrase addressed to Grušnickij right before the shooting, "Podelom že tebe! okolevaj sebe kak muha..." (304-5), becomes the verdict of Fate and the projection of the young officer's death.

Vladimir Turbin has noticed the demonic connection in the physical setting of the duel:

В культуре, язык которой сейчас частично утрачен, смысл содержался и в графической линий, в сочетаниях линий — в геометрических фигурах. Геометрическая фигура означала и слово, и ни целую фразу, и философское утверждение. Бог эмблематически изображался как равносторонний треугольник, обращенный вершиной вверх; в трехмерном пространстве — пирамида. Демон, дьявол — треугольник, обращенный вершиной вниз. 6 — двукратно повторенное 3; 3+3 — кощунственная мысль о равноправии бога и демона. «Площадка, на которой мы должны были драться, изображала почти правильный треугольник. От выдавшегося угла отмерили 6 шагов в...» Печорин нашел ровную площадку — треугольник, лежащий горизонтально. Ни к небу не ведущий, ни в бездну. А — в тупик: в никуда. Жребий ставит Печорина на краю ее: на вершине треугольника. Но пуля не берет его; и на обрыве тернера ставят Грушницкого. А Печорин вразумляет его: «Я вам советую перед смертью помолиться богу...» (147)

Later after the death of Béla, Pečorin draws something with a rod in the sand: "Čto on čertil? Už ne 'tot' li, ne nedavnij treugol'nik: veršinoju vverx? Ili vniz? No čert-il da čert-il" (148). At this point the hero, who has lost the game with the Devil, is completely in his power. And it is only natural that he draws the demonic triangle and laughs with demonic laughter in Maksim Maksimych's face.

The compact between the hero and the Devil is now sealed in blood, yet the test is not over.¹⁹ Neither the anti-baptismal water of the sulphurous bath nor the killing of Grušnickij, neither the seduction of Vera nor the deception of Meri's love make Pečorin the prey of the Devil. There is an ultimate aspect of the test that the hero has no face — the test of faith.²⁰ Vera's husband suddenly and without any good reason becomes jealous of his wife and takes her away. In Vera's own words, the reason for his jealous rage was the fact that she became pale and almost fainted at his mention of the duel. Yet it would seem quite natural for a frail society woman in a poor health to react in this way even if she were not in love with Pečorin, especially when the duel concerns the young men she knows and the good name of her relative and friend — Princess Meri. Also, in the first draft of the novel Vera's husband is never mentioned in the letter. It is Vera, jealous of Pečorin and Meri, who decides to leave (Lermontov, vol.5, 477-8). Obviously, it was important for Lermontov to make Vera's husband the active force and Vera a mere victim. From the only speech description of Vera's husband in Pečorin's journal, the former seems more like a grotesque old man than a shrewd psychologist who reads in his wife's eyes:

— Благородный молодой человек! — сказал он, с слезами на глазах. — Я все слышал. Какой мерзавец! неблагодарный!.. Принимай их после этого в порядочный дом! Слава богу, у меня нет дочерей! Но вас наградит та, для которой вы рискуете жизнью. Будьте уверены в моей скромности до поры до времени, — продолжал он. — Я сам был молод и служил в военной службе; знаю, что в эти дела не должно вмешиваться. Прощайте. (294)

In this monologue the Devil is playing the fool. The old man also does not keep his word, and the same morning that Pečorin goes to the duel, he tells Meri's mother and Vera about it. This further complicates the situation with Meri and leads to Vera's departure — final and most important part of the Devil's game.

After receiving Vera's letter, the hero sets out in hot pursuit. The nature description seems to indicate that the infernal forces have prepared for this final battle: "Solnce uže sprjatalos' v černoj tuče, otdyxavšej na xrebtě zapadnyx gor; v uščel'e bylo temno i syro. Podkumok, probirajas' po kamnjam, revel gluxo i odnoobrazno" (307). In this crucial moment of his life, Pečorin resorts to a prayer. For Pečorin Vera is not just a woman, but an embodiment of love that he is afraid to face. Only this love could save the hero, redeem his sins. In this connection, his fear of losing Vera can be understood as his fear of losing faith (*vera*).²¹ For the first time in the story the hero does not rationalize, but acts on a true instinct. Pečorin almost reaches his destination, but his horse suddenly stumbles and falls on its way up from a ravine. This last fall becomes the final

downfall of the hero. It brings Pečorin to his "senses," and he makes his final choice: "Kogda noćnaja rosa i gornji veter osvežili moju gorjaščuju golovu, i mysli prišli v obyčnyi porjadok, to ja ponjal, što gnat'sja za pogibšim sčastiem bespolezno i bezrassudno" (308). The hero's soul has become impotent ("duša obessilela" [308]). Vera is lost forever, and together with her Pečorin loses his faith and hope ("poterjav poslednjuju nađeždu" [308]). The game, the demonic drama, came to its end. Before the curtain is drawn, in the manner of the ancient Greek theatre, *deus ex machina* appears. Only in this case it is *diabolus ex machina* — the two ravens that descend on the corpse of Pečorin's horse, as if claiming the dead soul of the defeated victim. This final scene of the story can be viewed as Lermontov's interpretation of Alexander Puškin's well-known poem "Voron k vorony letit": it also has two ravens, a defeated *bogatyř*, and his horse, taken over by the enemy. This brings to mind an earlier established parallel between Pečorin and the *bogatyř* from the medieval Russian *bylina*. This parallel can be drawn further to the real *bogatyř*, St. George, who defeated the Serpent. But in case of "Knjažna Meri" the *bogatyř* is bogus, and it is the Serpent who gains victory.

Notes

- 1 Ju. M. Lotman finds that the interpretation of the laws of the life of gentry society through the prism of such conventional forms of theatrical spectacle as masquerade, puppet comedy, and *balagan* could be quite revealing (Lotman, "Theater," 169). In general, the theatricality of *Geroj našego vremeni* has been noticed by a number of critics and is not going to be considered here.
- 2 An unsuccessful attempt to show a demonic figure steering the fate of his unsuspecting victims was made by Lermontov in his drama *Maskarad* (Karlinsky, 169).
- 3 My approach to the story of "Knjažna Meri" will explain the seeming inconsistencies and coincidences that were noticed by Ėjxenbaum (*Lermontov*, 153) and later drawn by Nabokov into an impressive list that culminates with eight examples of eavesdropping (IX, XI-XII).
- 4 Freeborn thinks that Pečorin's reason for getting this house is that "[h]e assumes at once an attitude of superiority towards the provincials of the spa" (64). It is true and in character with the hero's romantic mask, yet on another plot level it works as a trap set for Pečorin by his invisible partner in the game (30).
- 5 In connection with Kislovodsk Pečorin uses the word "*traktir*" as a substitute for the word "*restoratsija*." Immediately after describing his apartment and the adjacent restaurant, he says: "Grušnickij s svoej šajkoj bušuet každyj den' v

traktire i so mnoj počti ne klanjaetsja" (283). The infernal nature of this place, besides the direct association with wine, is also stressed by the persistent description of it as being well-lighted ("načinajut mel'kat' ogni," "črezvyčajnoe osvešćenie"), which brings the connection with the infernal fire.

- 6 When Grušnickij complains to Pečorin that Meri has become indifferent to him, the latter replies with a joke: "Ėto, možet byt', sledstvie dejstvija vod..." (266). The irony lies in the fact that the water, being an agent of the Devil, does have to do with the sequence of the events in the story.
- 7 S. I. Durylin quotes from the notes of a Decembrist A. E. Rozen: "Pri tixoj pogode letom, pri tumane zimoju, po vsemu gorodu rasprostranjaetsja sil'nyj sernyj zapax" (Durylin, "*Geroj našego vremeni*," 211).
- 8 "The Devil was particularly anxious about his partner's repudiation of his baptism, the first sacrament which wipes away the original stain, which sacrament is man's safeguard against Satan. The man not only was expected to deny his baptism, but he had to accept another sacrament of baptism from hell" (Rudwin, 175-6).
- 9 Ju. K. Ščeglov notices a connection between the grotto scene in "Knjažna Meri" and that in Virgil's *Aeneid* (220). This comparison can be extended: in the same way that Juno brought the storm to provide the opportunity for Aeneas's and Dido's intimacy, the Devil brings the thunderstorm that detained the characters in the grotto. It is also interesting to note that all the pagan deities are considered demons in the Christian faith.
- 10 In Russian folklore the Devil is often portrayed with a cane (P.V. Štejn. *Materialy dlja izučenijsa byta i jazyka russkogo naselenija Severo-Zapadnogo kraja*. St. Petersburg, vol. III, quoted in E. V. Pomeranceva, 92).
- 11 There is a difference between the witch's mark of the lady at the ball and Vera's devil's mark —her birthmark: "...the devil's mark resembled a scar, birthmark, or tattooing, whereas the witch's mark was a protuberance on the body at which the familiars were supposed to suck..." (Robbins, 135). The lady's wart could be such a protuberance.
- 12 *Lysaja* is a famous name of a mountain near Kiev known in folklore as a place for the witches' sabbaths (Dal', vol. 2, 276).
- 13 The fact that the captain is a cavalry officer, and consequently, wears spurs, could possibly connect him to the demon Asmodeus, whose one limb is believed to be a cock's foot (Rudwin, 93). The mentions of Asmodeus in Lermontov's poetry (Lermontov, vol. 1, 269; Lermontov, vol. 3, 415) show that the poet knew the conventional beliefs connected with this demon. The demon Asmodeus is also one of the main characters of the already mentioned Lesage's novel.

- ¹⁴ Lotman, examining a parallel structure in Puškin's "Pikovaja dama," refers to Germann in the same way. In the episode before the death of the old countess, she, meaninglessly swinging right and left, appears not as much a person, but rather a card in the game that is being played with Germann: "... karta, orudje, no ne v igre Germanna, a v č'ej-to drugoj, v kotoroj sam Germann okažetsja igruškoj" (Lotman, "Tema," 135).
- ¹⁵ It is interesting to note a similar kind of forgetfulness on the part of the critics who mention only Grušnickij and the Dragoon Captain in connection with this episode (Belinskij, 177; Nabokov, XII).
- ¹⁶ Vera was strongly opposed to Pečorin's meeting her husband. She stressed it at their first meeting in the grotto (252) and also repeated it later, at the Ligovskie house (267).
- ¹⁷ The metaphor "*xolodnyj kipjatok*" could also carry a connection to hell: "What is not generally known is the fact that, in addition to its pools of fire, the infernal realm also boasts of plains covered with ice" (Rudwin, 59).
- ¹⁸ Manjulov also quotes S. Šuvalov who associates Pečorin's words about a ball with death (237). Such parallel further enhances the demonic significance of the sulphurous bath.
- ¹⁹ The compact with the devil is also found in *Maskarad* in the character of The Unknown: "Ja zaključil s sud'boj poslednee uslov'e" (Lermontov, vol. 4, 357). It was, most likely, going to be a part of the unfinished story "Štoss."
- ²⁰ "The Devil, notwithstanding the great power he possesses over the bodies and minds of mortals, is, however, not potent enough to put a man to death, unless his victim has blasphemed or renounced the Lord. ... In view of this limitation of his power over the body of man, Diabolus exacted from his partner in the bond, which assigned the victim's soul to hell, a formal denial of the Christian faith..." (Rudwin, 175).
- ²¹ P. N. Paganucci identifies the loss of Vera with the loss of faith in which he sees the hero's tragedy: "No ne bylo v nem [Pečorine] very i Vera uxodit ot nego navsegda" (88). Faletti also identifies faith with Vera who represents possible redemption of the hero (374). Such play on words seems in order since the poet himself used it in connection with the name Vera. In a New Year epigram to Vera Buxarina he jokingly warns his friends against trusting Vera, which can only make them sorry: "Zakona very ne zabudeš' / I staroverom proslyveš'!" (Lermontov, vol. 1, 250).

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