



A Hero of Our Time

Mikhail Lermontov

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MIKHAIL LERMONTOV, like the national poet Pushkin, was killed in a duel. Although only twenty-six when this melancholy event took place in 1841, he had produced a sufficient body of true poetry to give him in his own country an imperishable name. He wrote only one work of prose fiction, "A Hero of our Time," which has been translated into many languages, sometimes with the title "The Heart of a Russian."

The scene of the tale is laid in the Caucasus, a region loved by Lermontov with the only lasting passion of his life.... Always, no matter what the incident in hand may be, we are conscious of the atmosphere of the Caucasus. Always there is suggested the majestic background to the isolated mountain fortresses and garrison towns in which the episodes of the novel take place, dwarfing the petty human passions of the characters.... Psychologically, 'A Hero of Our Time' displays a curious division, almost a duality in the author's temperament.

This is not a unified work of art; but rather a collection of sketches and tales, held together by the personality of a diarist. The interesting thing about this book is its gloomy romanticism; it was written under the all-powerful influence of Byron, who had such a profound an effect on Pushkin. At times the Byronic prose is almost amusingly in evidence, amusingly, that is, in 2013.

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