

Ed Garstin
Dr. Churchwurd
English
10/1/03

Egocentricity of Pechorin vs. Jason

In this essay I will compare the egocentricity of the characters of Pechorin from the Russian novel, A Hero of Our Time by Lermontov, and Jason from the Greek Tragedy Medea, written by Euripides. I have selected the topic of egocentricity or self-absorption for it is prevalent in both works in respect to Pechorin and Jason where they show little if any regard for anyone but themselves throughout the works. However the time differences and social and cultural conditions of the time and place the works were written must be taken into consideration. I feel that the theme of complete selfishness and the consequences that follow is strongest in respect to Jason and Pechorin and I will compare and provide evidence for such an argument in both works.

I will start by analysing Jason's utterly selfish behaviour throughout the Ancient Greek play Medea, written by Euripides. Jason is a completely egocentric character but he doesn't have as much depth or complexity as Pechorin in A Hero of Our Time which is partly due to when this play was written in ancient Greece. Society was very different people were devoted Pagans and lived in a world of superstition. Also literature was no way near as advanced however Medea still contains the fundamentals such as psychology. Jason is motivated solely by self-interest, his only motivation to court Medea in the play is the fact that she has mystical powers to get him what he wants; the Golden Fleece, for which he will get a generous reward in return. Jason even allows Medea to kill her own brother out of lust and be banished from her homeland forever by her father as a

consequence. Unfortunately Jason is too self-involved to even comprehend how his Actions would affect Medea and their children. Again we see further evidence of Jason's egocentricity when he divorces Medea and abandons his kids for Glauce, princess of Corinth. He doesn't consider the affect on Medea and their children for he is blinded by his selfishness, he doesn't even mind that they are going to get banished as long as he increases his political and social status. His only defence is that he will one day be king and they will inherit the kingdom, which has no validity for he has already betrayed her trust and showed no sign of guilt and is just trying to justify himself. Even the nurse says that his marriage is for social status not love, "Jason has betrayed his own sons, and my mistress, for royal bed."ⁱ Unfortunately we don't get to see Jason's interaction with friends in this play, which I would guess to be very short sighted and shallow as usual. Jason seems to have an extreme lack of morals when it comes to his own actions such as abandoning his wife and kids simply for political gain. Also his motivation for this immoral action was money and political power not love for Glauce, which is immoral. The final similarity between the two characters is regret. Jason ends up in deep regret for his action for the outcome is the death of his new wife Glauce and his children as well as his almost social castration as a result. He learns that egocentricity leads to self-destruction for you lose sight of other peoples feeling and don't take them into consideration. Where Jason's Character differs from Pechorin is in respect to his emotion place in the work and his inability to except his faults. Jason's only real sign of emotion throughout the play is the within respect to the murder of his children. "What? Killed my sons? That word kills me."ⁱⁱ This shows the pain he must have felt inside with this loss. Jason also seems to have an inability to admit his faults. He is blinded by his self-

involvement, which is evidence of insecurity for living in your own world protects your from reality. Finally I feel that Jason's role in the play is more of a villain, which could be because the play is mainly Medea's view. A template of how not to get caught up in shallow insecurities, where as Pechorin in *A Hero of Our Time* is portrayed as more of a modern Hero where he has faults which make him easier to relate to and a much more believable character.

Pechorin is also portrayed with an immoral and selfish attitude in the Novel, *A Hero of Our time*. Yet Pechorin is given a lot more human characteristics and is described in much more detail with points probing on the physiological aspects even though it's just pre-Freud. It was written 2332 years after Medea from a different culture and is a much larger work therefore is bound to be different in style. Pechorin is definitely as selfish as Jason is, if not more so. He uses all his so-called romantic relationships to gain control and domination over the hearts of young women. Firstly with Bela he trades her for a Horse he stole. How immoral is firstly stealing and then trading a women as an object? Because of this her father is killed and her brother rides off so she's left with literally nothing. He soon got bored of her and barely felt anything at her death. Later on in his relationship with Princess Mary he is similarly selfish. He wants Princess Mary for she's in high demand as well as a challenge and he feels the need to win her, in part of this was due to his old friend Grusnitski who also desired Mary. Pechorin saw this as a challenge and didn't even consider the effect it would have on Mary and Grusninski and didn't really care for he's caught up in his own world. He even sets out to destroy Grusnitski's reputation and ends up killing him. He is also very immoral in respect to the treatment of friends such as Maxim Maxyovich. He is disrespectful towards Maxim for he feels that he

is now old and useless to him, which is shown at their unexpected reunion where Pechorin is very selfish and immoral. Pechorin also experiences regret like Jason in Medea, but his regret builds up and turns into bitterness. "Passions are merely ideas in their initial stage. They are the property of youth, and anyone who expects to feel their thrill throughout life is a fool."ⁱⁱⁱ Pechorin has not been able to find true passion or love throughout his life. He has quickly got bored of every relationship he has been in and is bitter to the fact that true love has never found him. Evidence that he could once feel emotion would lie in when he felt joy in the memory of the sulphur springs. Now this has forced him to become callous and use everyone to hide from his empty heart. However Pechorin does admit he has faults, "Ambition has been crushed in me by circumstances, but it comes out in another way, for ambition is nothing more than a lust for power and my chief delight is to dominate those around me."^{iv} But doesn't justify them or even try to change. I believe his self-analysis is shallow and this ties in to his duality as a person, which prevents him from expressing emotion. "For a long time now I've lived by intellect, not feeling. I weigh and analyse my emotions and actions with close interest, but complete detachment. There are two men within me – one lives in the full sense of the word and the other reflects and judges him."^v Finally I feel that Pechorin is portrayed more as the new "Hero of our Time."^{vi} Who isn't old fashioned but strong and unconventional with human faults that we can relate to therefore he's definitely the protagonist of the novel and an affective character.

Therefore I conclude that both Pechorin, A Hero of Our Time and Jason from Medea, are extremely egocentric characters who have many similarities. They are both completely selfish in the way they treat their partners and friends throughout the works.

Both works seem to show us the short-term gains of leading an immoral life and the long-term losses. In Jason's case he loses everything including his children and social status. Pechorin ends up very similar without children or love for he has led a callous almost sadistic life for too long and ended up bitter and emotionless. They both seem to comment on how not to lead your life. However they also both contain differences. Lermontov's, *A Hero of Our Time* is a much more complex book. It seems to have hit on the underlying duality of man. Also the title is very ironic for he is a template of an immoral character away from romanticism. Pechorin can also self-analyse and accept he has faults. The main difference is definitely the time and place and type of society it took place in. Despite this both Lermontov and Euripides are trying to deliver the same message and outcome of leading a selfish and immoral life.^{vii}

Bibliography:

- ***Euripides, Medea (413 BC)***
- ***Lermontov, A Hero of Our Time (1814-1841)***

ⁱ Euripides, *Medea* p(17-18)

ⁱⁱ Euripides, *Medea* p(57)

ⁱⁱⁱ Lermontov, *A Hero of Our Time* p(103)

^{iv} Lermontov, *A Hero of Our Time* p(103)

^v Lermontov, A Hero of Our Time p(134)

^{vi} Lermontov, A Hero of Our Time (Title)