

A Superfluous Man: Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Lermontov's *A Hero of Our Time*, and Conrad's *The Shadow-Line*

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Abstract: The concept of a superfluous man is mainly the result of some social and political issues in Russia in the 19th century. That is why Lermontov's *A Hero of Our Time* can be seen as a projection of these issues in literature. The novel dwells upon such features of a superfluous man like intelligence, self-awareness, isolation, doubts, and loss of meaning. However, these personal characteristics can also be seen in English literature in the remote 16th century and the modern 20th century. Shakespeare's young prince in *Hamlet* and Conrad's young captain in *The Shadow-Line* can easily be analysed under the same personal traits. This fact shows that some human characteristics can be analysed as categories that fall upon people under various circumstances. This study concludes that although there is a difference between the social, cultural, and political environment in the 16th, 19th, and 20th centuries in Russia and England, human beings breed similar reactions against changes in their societies.

Keywords: Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Lermontov, *A Hero of Our Time*, Conrad, *The Shadow-Line*, superfluous man

INTRODUCTION

A juxtaposition of the 16th century Shakespeare's legendary tragedy play *Hamlet*, 19th century Russian Romantic Lermontov's *A Hero of Our Time*, and the 20th century Conrad's *The Shadow-Line* sheds light on the concept of a superfluous man that characteristically springs in Russian literature in the 19th century. A nineteenth-century Russia, with its rapid growth of industrialisation and country-wide globalisation, could not accommodate its intelligent population in big

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cities due to their lack of adaptation skill to survive in a capitalistic growing environment. The expensive living costs in such grand cities like Moscow and St Petersburg used to drive ex-slave-owners away to their villages and countries and welcomed skilled people. As a result, educated and intelligent layers of Russian society had to be content in a periphery although it proved to be a difficult task to accomplish. Big city entertainment that used to be the main centre of focus for these people still haunted their dreams and attracted them from remote metropolitan districts leaving them in absolute boredom and frustration. The young representatives of this group of Russian population betray the characteristics that later on invoke the idea of a superfluous man in Russian literature as well as in many examples of world literature. For example, a concept of a superfluous man anticipated many twentieth-century famous figures such as Eliot's Prufrock or Samuel Beckett's characters. Indeed, when Watts discusses a superfluous man, he comments:

[I]n his sense of absurdity and alienation, and in his idea that one could prove one's selfhood by some defiant, anarchic, seemingly irrational action, he anticipates Existentialist or Absurdist heroes: Sartre's Roquentin or Camus's Meursault and Clamence. We could perhaps say that the Existentialist is a Hamlet who chooses to become a Don Quixote. (1993, 65-67)

It is, thus, possible to stretch the width of range of the concept of a superfluous man from Hamlet to the characters of the modern age. Although the concept is the reflection of some reaction against changes in Russia, the traits of a superfluous man can be seen worldwide. Maybe that is why Arian sees Lermontov as one, if not the only, of the Russian writers whose works were able to enter the Western literature without any question of the obligation to understand Russian culture and worldview. He adds that Lermontov's works are not heavily preoccupied with the depiction of Russian culture (Arian 1968, 22-23). In other words, the depth of Lermontov's works and meaning is universal.

The concept of a superfluous man endows Russian literature of the nineteenth-century, especially works of Lermontov, with its bright hue of eccentricity. It is maintained that "superfluous man is one of the more familiar figures in the social and literary history of Russia, in the history of the intelligentsia, among whom he has played so many parts – from the most conspicuous to the quite obscure" (Seeley 1952, 92).

A superfluous man, swerving in high society of Russian circles, is usually egoistic, but intelligent, decadent, neurotic, cynical, ironic, isolated from society, devoid of any function. The obvious demonstration of a superfluous man in a society encompasses the mechanism of over-self-confidence through which he – as it is usually a male figure – attains a self-perception with a high class performance. The blindness of a superfluous man is inherent in his inadequacy to desire impossible, in his blurry shadows of focus and in the emptiness of achievement. Under the light of these features it is possible to think that a superfluous man indulges in Romantic idealism. However, the circumstances of the immediate environment of a superfluous man in Russia at that time, prevent him from realising his goals. Russian culture and political point of view at those times did not allow practising romantic idealism. Still, a superfluous man is not without his own merits; a superfluous man knows his flaws and is able to question himself.

Shakespeare's *Hamlet* encompasses a very complex character that has been analysed since the time of the first staging of the play. Interestingly enough, Hamlet can be regarded as an antecedent of a superfluous man. In general, the play seems to embrace many themes and address a wide period in history. "Shakespeare is not for the Renaissance only, but he has gained a universal esteem in all times and cultures" (Doğan 2009, 14). Hamlet is a young prince of Denmark who is caught in a difficult task of choosing between his responsibility for his father and his unique human features. Believing in the idea that he has to murder his uncle, Hamlet fails to grasp the meaning of any action in this world.

Begun in 1838 and published in 1840, *A Hero of Our Time* is Lermontov's only completed novel in which the protagonist, Pechorin, is an embodiment of the psychological effects of the contemporary circumstances in Russia. The profound tyranny of changes in the country and its consequences leave an indelible scar on Pechorin's psychological state of mind; that is why, in fact, the first critic of the novel, Belinsky states that it was inevitable to have such heroes at those times because the young were either blindly submissive to the system or they rebelled (qtd. in Foote 2001, xx). Maybe it is precisely because of Pechorin's peculiar tendency to rebel makes the novel fall in the same group with such seminal works like Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*, Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, and other works.

Conrad's masterpiece of final years, *The Shadow-Line*, was written in 1915 and published in 1916-17. Although it is an autobiographical picture of a man's life voyage, the novel, like Lermontov's work, focuses on the protagonist's analysis of the depth of human psychology and human condition in this universe. *The Shadow-Line* gives the reader a sense of comprehension of evil and death. This novel is a view on the depth of human psychology and human condition in this universe. Like many other sea stories of Conrad, this story is also about a test of a protagonist to find his identity. *The Shadow-Line* is the masterpiece of Conrad's final period.

SUPERFLUOUS MAN IN LITERATURE

Although deeply rooted in the historical and social background of Russian world, as it is seen in Lermontov's novel, the concept of a superfluous man can be seen far back in the 16th century in Shakespeare's play *Hamlet* and in the works of contemporary authors as it is seen in Conrad's *The Shadow-Line*. Moreover, the concept seems to lurk behind the main themes in the works of authors outside England and Russia. It is quite obvious, for example, that what Kaya claims to be "anguish" in a Turkish author Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar's novel *A Mind at Peace* is an element of a concept of a superfluous man; one of the characters, Suad, has anguish and is "the symbol of void, uncertainty, and death" (2018, 1581). Indeed, Conrad's *The Shadow-Line* will be discussed in terms of existential angst or anguish in the following parts of this study. Apparently, the concept of a superfluous man is impossible to imprison in a particular time or location. While examining the concept of a superfluous man in *Hamlet*, *A Hero of Our Time*, and *The Shadow-Line*, it would be more feasible to focus on the features of a superfluous man – self-assuredness and loss of meaning of existence – rather than on the works themselves.

To begin with, a superfluous man is aware of his strengths and weaknesses. He is not a character who blindly obeys the social, cultural, or any other inscriptions how to behave. This trait of a superfluous man is easily traceable in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Lermontov's *A Hero of Our Time*. However, it should be stressed that while Hamlet's awareness of his strengths and weaknesses is more of a critical nature, Pechorin's self-awareness is more of an air of pride. Hamlet in Shakespeare's play, for example, is aware of his weaknesses. To illustrate, when he remembers Fortinbras' army and

their desire to act and war against the others, Hamlet starts to question his inability to act:

How stand I, then,
That have a father kill'd, a mother stain'd,
Excitements of my reason and my blood,
And let all sleep? while, to my shame, I see
The imminent death of twenty thousand men,
That for a fantasy and trick of fame
Go to their graves like beds; fight for a plot
Whereon the numbers cannot try the cause,
Which is not tomb enough and continent
To hide the slain? (Shakespeare 1996, IV. IV. 54-63)

Hamlet denies himself any possibility of forgiving his flaws. He is perfectly aware of his deficiency of inaction and underlines the fact that there are people who die happily just for a dream, whereas he cannot revenge his father and undergo death. As Turgenev notices: “Hamlet inveighs against himself readily, magnifies his own shortcomings, spies upon himself, is mindful of his minutest defects, despises himself – and at the same time, apparently, he thrives on this disdain” (1965, 96). It is precisely this tendency to attack himself, make his weaknesses seem larger, and criticise himself what makes Hamlet a superfluous man. It shows his inadequacy to act or to accomplish something.

Pechorin in Lermontov's *A Hero of Our Time* is often quite self-conscious about his behaviour. For example, when he talks with Dr Werner, he maintains that his intellect is over his feelings: “The turmoil of life has left me with a few ideas, but no feelings” (Lermontov 2001, 134). Thus, he proves his inability to feel something towards the others. When he thinks about Princess Mary he displays his ruthlessness: “Declare war on me, and I'll show you no mercy” (Lermontov 2001, 101). Other characters in the novel also see him as a man deprived of any kind of warmth. Grushnitsky, for instance, accepts Pechorin as a “[m]aterialist” (Lermontov 2001, 99). He makes Princess Mary believe that Pechorin is not endowed with feelings. Princess Mary is confirmed in this regard when she meets Pechorin after her singing:

‘Since you weren't even listening, I'm all the more flattered,’ she said,
with a mock curtsy. ‘Perhaps you don't like music?’
‘On the contrary, I do. Especially after dinner.’

‘Mr Grushnitsky is right when he says your tastes are very prosaic – I see that music only appeals to you gastronomically.’ (Lermontov 2001, 100)

Apparently, Pechorin tries to depict himself under the light of materialism and becomes successful since people believe him. However, his awareness of his destructive nature with reference to other people makes him upset: “All I know is that if I make other people unhappy, I’m no less unhappy myself” (Lermontov 2001, 34). In addition, when Maxim Maximych wants to see Pechorin after their separation, the latter tries to avoid this meeting which can be explained by his escape from remembering sad events from his past. Barratt and Briggs explain Pechorin’s endeavour to escape any encounter thus:

In fact, these few brief hints supply the contours of an alternative portrait of the hero as a deeply troubled man hiding behind the mask of fashionable boredom and wishing to avoid a meeting with a man who could only remind him of an episode in his life he would prefer to forget. (1989, 41)

Thus, despite the fact that the protagonist tries to mask his feelings in order not to seem weak, there are several instances when he is incapable of concealing his sorrow. Such an ambiguous nature, indeed, helps to construct a very complex character which is difficult to categorise.

Pechorin is also absolutely certain about his ability to attract women. His first victim according to the order of the novel is Bela. Pechorin makes Azamat, Bela’s brother, bring her to him after which Pechorin holds her in his room. When Pechorin and Maxim Maximych discuss this issue, the former articulates: “But I give you my word that she’ll be mine” (Lermontov 2001, 23). The protagonist is quite sure of his abilities to make a woman love him. In fact, after deploying different strategies Pechorin achieves his aim and Bela reveals her love for him. His another victim is Princess Mary, whom he attracts in a similar way by using many techniques; and his expectations become true very easily. So, Pechorin’s self-knowledge is articulated often in the novel.

Because of his high level of self-confidence, Pechorin sees himself superior to the people around him. For example, as he reveals in his notebook, he is not able to have a friend because of his dividing people into slaves and masters:

Of two friends one is always the slave of the other, though often neither will admit it. I can never be a slave, and to command in these circumstances is too exciting, for you have to pretend at the same time. Besides, I have money and servants enough. (Lermontov 2001, 79)

Similar to his desire to dominate his friends, he does not conceal his wish to dominate his women: “It’s always puzzled me that I’ve never been a slave to the women I’ve loved. In fact, I’ve always mastered them, heart and soul, without even trying” (Lermontov 2001, 89). Barratt and Briggs comment on Pechorin’s attitude towards women thus:

The impression created is that for Pechorin possession of the girl is at least as important as physical enjoyment of her. . . . The concept of domination is never far away in Pechorin’s dealings with women (or indeed with humanity in general). (Barratt and Brings 1989, 56)

In other words, Pechorin is obsessed with being superior to others. Being financially advantageous just adds some more self-confidence to him. Barratt and Briggs notice it thus:

In fact, the mere sight of Pechorin’s foppish servant and the elegant carriage so unsuited to the rigours of Caucasian travel is sufficient to confirm in his mind the suspicion, already voiced in ‘Bela’, that Pechorin is the typical Petersburg dandy, the haughty poseur and Onegin-like ‘superfluous man.’ (Ibid., 34)

What comes to the fore is the fact that Pechorin’s wealth is functional to display the desire to dominate and show off.

Another main feature of a superfluous man is his loss of meaning of everything. Being quite a wide subject to be discussed, loss of meaning of existence entails several minor categories that can be traced in all three works. Hamlet is one of the most important characters who influence the other characters in terms of their viewing the world as empty. In Doğan’s words, Hamlet’s “previous tranquil and untroubled life has been shattered, and the values that he believes in prove to be useless” (2009, 117). The world that Hamlet inhabits does not bear any significant elements that could attach him to any meaning. Therefore, Hamlet’s speech related to the universe has become the content that is pronounced by a vast number of modern characters: “How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable / Seem to me all the uses of this world!” (Shakespeare 1996, I. II. 133-134) His sense of meaninglessness led Turgenev to think that although he follows this sense he still clings to

life: “He distrusts himself and yet is deeply solicitous about himself; does not know what he is after, nor why he lives at all, and still firmly adheres to life” (Turgenev 1965, 96).

Hamlet’s tendency to throw everything into doubt emphasises the idea of emptiness in the play. Hamlet doubts everything, including himself. “Doubting everything, Hamlet pitilessly includes his own self in those doubts; he is too thoughtful, too fair-minded to be contented with what he finds within himself” (Turgenev 1965, 95). As Doğan underlines, Hamlet’s self-doubt makes him have a “dual personality” (2009, 99), which once again adds the sense of uncertainty to the play. For instance, in the famous soliloquy of “To be, or not to be”, Hamlet wants to die but doubts the consequences of this death:

To die, - to sleep; -
To sleep! perchance to dream: ay, there’s the rub;
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come,
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
...
To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
But that the dread of something after death, -
The undiscover’d country, from whose bourn
No traveller returns, - puzzles the will,
And makes us rather bear those ills we have
Than fly to others that know not of? (Shakespeare 1996, III. I. 60-82).

So, apparently, Hamlet procrastinates death because of his overthinking and doubts. He becomes unsure about the essence of a life after death. He cannot guess what awaits a man after death; therefore, he delays death. Hamlet, thus, tries to find an answer to his questions, which as James states, are not easy to answer:

If there were no after-life it would not matter, or matter less, which line he took; but he cannot here, upon this bank and shoal of time, jump the thought of a life to come. There is, then, an ethical question; there is also a metaphysical and religious question; and to neither does he know the answer. (James 1968, 79)

It is palpable that Hamlet is overly preoccupied with details and analysis. “[T]he blade with which he vexes and torments himself is the double-edged sword of analysis” (Turgenev 1965, 96). Instead of action he contemplates his action and eventually fails to act. For

example, when Hamlet attains a moment to kill his uncle Claudius, he becomes thoughtful about this matter:

Now might I do it pat, now he is praying;
And now I'll do it: – and so he goes to heaven;
And so am I revenged: – that would be scann'd:
A villain kills my father, and, for that,
I, his sole son, do this same villain send
To heaven. (Shakespeare 1996, III. III. 73-78)

Obviously, Hamlet's sole activity is to fall into deep thought which further prevents him from everything he is capable of. Consequently, all these doubts and delays project a world that is devoid of any meaning since there is a lack of any completed meaningful activity.

Pechorin is a complex type who conflicts not only with the people around, but also with himself. He cannot decide which part to take; being a good man bores him and being bad upsets him. When Maxim Maximych narrates Pechorin for the first time in the novel, he strengthens the strangeness of the protagonist:

His name was . . . Grigory Alexandrovich Pechorin. A grand fellow he was, take it from me, only a bit odd. For instance, he'd spend the whole day out hunting in rain or cold. Everyone else would be tired and frozen, but he'd think nothing of it. Yet another time he'd sit in his room and at the least puff of wind reckon he'd caught a chill, or a shatter might bang and he'd shiver and turn pale. Yet I've seen him go for a wild-boar single-handed. Sometimes you wouldn't get a word out of him for hours on end, but another time he would tell you stories that made you double up with laughter. . . . Yes, he was a funny chap in many ways. Must have been rich too – from the number of expensive things he had. (Lermontov 2001, 11)

Seemingly, Pechorin is not stable which makes him remote from the environment that he inhabits. This shows Pechorin's inner ideas related to his worldview; he cannot stabilise his way of life since he does not know what to expect from life. Barratt and Briggs analyse this passage in which Maxim Maximych describes Pechorin:

Pechorin is described as a funny sort of character; . . . The air of strangeness is clearly based on his unpredictability. Pechorin behaves in a way which is both inconsistent and unlike the normal behaviour of other people. He appears to be both hardy and effete, intrepid and timorous, taciturn and garrulous. (Barratt and Briggs 1989, 26)

Pechorin's unpredictability signifies his meaningless life which he cannot understand. Understanding something means stabilising it. Yet, Pechorin behaves as if he is unsure of which one to choose.

All Pechorin's characteristics lead him into the sense of meaninglessness. When Lermontov was asked about his relationship to Pechorin, the author smartly stated: "it is a portrait of the vices of our whole generation in their ultimate development" (qtd. in Foote 2001, xxi); which can be interpreted as the development of an idea of loss of meaning that is the main attribute of the modern age. Pechorin and the like depict the combination of features of a universal man rather than characteristics of one individual. When he is twenty-five years old, Pechorin starts to understand that there is nothing to achieve for him anymore. He is bored and he wants to escape this state, albeit unsuccessfully. For example, when Pechorin and Maxim Maximych meet again after some time they have a very short and uninteresting conversation in which Pechorin articulates his boredom: "'What have you been doing?' Pechorin smiled. 'Being bored,' he said" (Lermontov 2001, 50). Indeed, Pechorin's boredom is an element of his loss of meaning in life. He cannot catch the feeling of being grounded in a particular place. Therefore, he does not feel that there is a general aim of existence:

I've been going over my past, and I can't help wondering why I've lived, for what purpose I was born. There must have been some purpose, I must have had some high object in life, for I feel unbounded strength within me. But I never discovered it and was carried away by the allurements of empty, unrewarding passions. (Lermontov 2001, 131)

Inability to catch meaning makes him envious of the others who are hopeful and happy to have illusions. For example, when he notices a slight lightning of a growing relationship between Grushnitsky and Princess Mary, Pechorin becomes uneasy: "I've noticed two or three tender looks being exchanged – I must put an end to it" (Lermontov 2001, 93). Pechorin obviously misses the ability to communicate. He is always in conflict with the people around him. "He has developed a wide range of devices by which to confuse and misdirect anyone observing his behaviour. One such device, mentioned in 'Bela' and recurring in the later stories, is the habit of teasing and joking" (Barratt and Briggs 1989, 28). He displays a personality that cannot accommodate itself among the others. As Faletti concludes, Pechorin

reveals the conflict between an individual and society (1978, 366). Consequently, his loss of hope intensifies as he cannot catch the idea of a meaningful relationship.

The emptiness of life is a seminal force in *The Shadow-Line* as well that originates a similarity between the protagonist and a superfluous man. To begin with, the novel starts with the protagonist's sense of emptiness. This devastates him since he develops romantic ideals which, of course, are shattered. Giving up his job is his protest against life with all its despair and futility. His throwing up his job brings forth an idea of understanding the life's inability to provide an enchanted picture: "The whole thing strengthened in me that obscure feeling of life being but a waste of days, which, half-unconsciously, had driven me out of a comfortable berth, away from men I liked, to flee from the menace of emptiness . . . and to find inanity at the first turn" (Conrad 1985, 23). The protagonist's inability to find meaning in life throws him into a sense of discomfort and chaos. "He drops out of the stream, not for political reasons, not in protest against any particular way of life, but in protest against the nature of life itself, its drabness, its sadness, its lack of interest and glamour" (Geddes 1980, 84). In order to avoid insanity because of the sense of emptiness in life, the young captain decides to keep a dairy in which, ironically, he registers the details of the dull turning of the world: "The effect is curiously mechanical; the sun climbs and descends, the night swings over our heads as if somebody below the horizon were turning a crank" (Conrad 1985, 97). Trying to add meaning to life by having a dairy is just another meaningless act of confirming the emptiness of existence.

The protagonist perceives the absurdity of existence which makes him believe that it is a universal issue. He thinks that he is a part of "the universal hollow conceit" (Conrad 1985, 23). He views the world as a machine in which all the parts are endowed with "the sense of absurdity" (Ibid., 24). Even the harbour office is full of absurdity and reflects the life with the characteristics of a machine. The young captain even notices Giles' experience and stability because he remembers his own errors and psychological instability. One of the most interesting aspects that the criticism of this novel puts forth is the one stated by Billy: "As a fully integrated work of art, *The Shadow Line*, with its movement from enchantment and illusion to emptiness and contingency, seems to be a fictive elaboration of Conrad's quarrel with God" (1997, 39). So, Conrad himself is regarded as a superfluous man with some idealistic illusions of trying to come to terms with God.

There are several instances of the narrator's view of the world in which the emptiness of life is emphasised: "I came out on deck again to meet only a still void. . . . The darkness had risen around the ship like a mysterious emanation from the dumb and lonely waters. I leaned on the rail and turned my ear to the shadows of the night. Not a sound. . . . How absurd" (Conrad 1985, 73-74). This passage is a perfect example of existential angst that was mentioned above. The author defamiliarises the external world and draws a portrait of it in a complete void. Billy comments on it thus: "Estranged from habitual points of reference and infinitely remote from the deific authorities who nurtured his youthful vanity, the narrator commences his dark night of the soul" (1997, 48). By showing the meaninglessness of life, the novel provides another message: "*The Shadow-Line* certainly suggests that gods can fail" (Hawthorn 1985, xvi) and this suggests the idea that human beings lose their hope related to existence since they used to depend on their supernatural beliefs. Conrad wants to emphasise that when people try to find any solution in the supernatural powers, they are doomed to fail because of Nietzschean God-is-dead formulation. So, when the young captain of Conrad heavily relies on divine providence when he seeks help from quinine, he fails since the "magic" quinine is not there:

I believed in it. I pinned my faith to it. It would save the men, the ship, break the spell by its medicinal virtue, make time of no account, the weather but a passing worry, and, like a magic powder working against mysterious malefices, secure the first passage of my first command against the evil powers of calms and pestilence. . . . There was the wrapper, the bottle, and the white powder inside, some sort of powder! But it wasn't quinine. (Conrad 1985, 88-89)

The narrator's high expectations from life blind him to the universal nothingness and make him remote from his despair for a time. "Again the young captain strains to create a meaningful explanatory picture of the world. Again his romantic imagination detaches itself from the concrete particulars while seeking cosmic purposiveness" (Romanick 1999, 239). The frustration after discovering the lack of quinine proves to be the main impetus of throwing one into the abyss of emptiness. Watts compares the protagonist of the Conradian novel to Hamlet: "In *The Shadow-Line*, when the narrator is afflicted with acedia (a sense of the pointlessness of action), his phrasing echoes the play *Hamlet* as he speaks of 'this stale, unprofitable world of my discontent'" (1993, 73).

Although the sense of emptiness pervades the world, the protagonist believes that he gets rid of this pervasive feeling when he becomes a captain. Finding a job lets him come back into his romantic realm. Geddes resembles the young captain's hope in relation to his new job to Conrad's belief: "The job promises not only to restore his 'feeling for wonder'" (Geddes 1980, 36), "but also to help him in his search for meaning by giving 'opportunities to find out about oneself'" (Ibid., 23) . . . "Conrad does think of work as an alternative, if not an antidote, to paralysing despair and cynicism" (Ibid., 87-88). Having a work may protect a person from emptiness even without making him believe in the supernatural elements:

The Shadow Line dramatizes a gradual reduction of the modern individual as he is divested of all symbols of authority and certainty. Without appeal to anyone or anything external, whether transcendent or immanent, the individual must adhere, like Marlow in the heart of Africa, to the practical matters of existence to forestall disintegration. (Billy 1997, 38)

The narrator is not strong enough to deal with such troubles as chaos and meaninglessness of existence. Thus, he tries to solve them by applying some rational concepts into which he categorises all his experience. "He clings to the abstract authority inherent in the title *captain* in a desperate attempt to salvage his beleaguered self-image" (Billy 1997, 50). However, although the protagonist starts to view life in all its bright colours and receives back his self-confidence, he confronts "impenetrable blackness" (Conrad 1985, 108) of the sea. The black water swallows all his romanticism and hopes, grandeur and self-confidence. "As the young captain's fortune begins to change, his picture of the world changes – but not his romantic inclination to see an order in it. He is soon torn between pictures of cosmic justice and cosmic malevolence" (Romanick 1999, 239). Billy finds an affinity between the young captain and Hamlet in terms of their sharp confrontation with the absurd reality of the world. Hamlet's discovery of his father's murder and the narrator's disappointment with the quinine become the origins of this similarity (Billy 1997, 47).

In conclusion, starting from *Hamlet* and finishing with *The Shadow-Line* (the order is according to the period in which the works were written), together with *A Hero of Our Time* in the middle, it is easy to notice a similarity between the works. Although a profound analysis can undoubtedly bring a huge amount of similarities to light, an

affinity in terms of the concept of a superfluous man can be regarded as a seminal one. If characterisation is taken into account, Hamlet, Pechorin and the young captain bear the features of a superfluous man. Among the rich assortment of the features of this concept these three characters mainly embody self-assuredness and uncertainty related to their existence. In short, a comparative study of these three works proves the fact that neither time nor distance between human beings can originate a huge difference in their perception of and reaction to harsh social conditions and heavy responsibility.

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