

Title: Desidero, ergo sum: The Subject of Empire and the Desiring  
Subject. Hume, Kant, and Mikhail Lermontov's *A Hero of Our Time*

Author: Lena Lencek, Reed College

Mikhail Lermontov's *A Hero of Our Time* (1841) is investigated as a case study of linguistic, conceptual, and aesthetic appropriation of a distinctly Western European philosophical paradigm of desire into Russian literary romanticism of the imperial era. Desire – in its multiple philosophical, ethical, and political significations – is understood as a cultural artifact of a particular kind, with a particular historical trajectory, with meanings that have changed over time, and that command various degrees of emotional and political legitimacy. We begin with the philosophical notions of desire formulated by David Hume (1711-1776) and Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), taking these as modular and capable of being transplanted to the intellectually and culturally “alien” medium of Imperial Russia, where they interact with a wide variety of political and ideological constellations (Slavophiles/Westernizers; reactionary/progressive; demotic/elitist; romantic/pragmatic) to produce a model of the “self” that requires a particularly complicated series of negotiations and the paradoxical positing of the desiring subject as void of autonomous desire. The personal, social, and ethical consequences of these then explored in their systematic “performance” in the intricate, ironic, contradictory, and equivocal rhetoric of Lermontov's *A Hero of Our Time* taken as a hybrid text that rehearses all the iterations of Russian masculinity under the stringent conditions of autocracy.