

Title: Dilettantism and Realism: On the Aesthetico-Political Nexus of Herzen's Early "Philosophical" Journalism

Author: Vadim Shkolnikov, Columbia University

Although scholars have expressed admiration for Alexander Herzen's *Dilettantism in Science*—Chizhevsky called it “the most significant philosophical work” produced by Russian Hegelians of the 1840s—their interpretations have never penetrated into the compositional complexity of the four-part series of articles, published in *Notes of the Fatherland* in 1843. With most of the attention directed to the political implications of Herzen's emphasis on “action,” as well as his “brilliant essayistic style,” it has been difficult to determine the actual philosophical substance of Herzen's articles.

This paper will attempt to show how the discursive heterogeneity of *Dilettantism in Science*, which places (Hegelian) philosophy in problematic relation to aesthetic and *potentially* (but not yet) political formulations, accounts for its importance as a defining theoretical expression of Realism in Russia—understood, here, not simply as a literary style, but as the cultural ethos of an emerging urban intelligentsia and the essential precursor to Russian Socialism. Beginning with *Dilettantism in Science*, Herzen's intellectual pursuits essentially merged with theoretical currents that had initiated within the Stankevich circle and were now being perpetuated, though in a radically different form, through the “civilizing” mission of Belinsky's Petersburg criticism. Even before the major works of the Natural School had appeared, Herzen's multi-faceted prose articulated an implicit but vital definition of the man of Reality, in opposition to a host of dilettantes. One of the keys is Herzen's antithetical stance towards Romanticism, which he interprets and historicizes in accordance with Hegel's *Aesthetics*. In turn, the ultimate task of the Realist is conceptualized as what Russian Classicists, Romantics, and dilettantes all failed to do: become a force within contemporary history. This becomes the goal of Herzen's “philosophy of action”—and only after his emigration in 1847 will he shift his hopes of realizing it, from the urban intelligentsia to the revolutionary masses.