

8 Herzen and Ogarev

Alexander Herzen, like many Russian boys, spent his childhood dreaming of being arrested.¹ His greatest ambition was to be hanged, and so he became a writer. As a young man, he published “Notes of a Young Man,” and as an old man, he published his reminiscences, “Notes of a Formerly Young Man.” His first great success was his novel *Why Did I Write This?* which established the Russian tradition of using questions as titles.² Other famous examples include Chernyshevsky’s *Who Is to Be Shot?* Immodest Musorgsky’s *What Is There to Drink?* and Alexander Blokhead’s *What Does This Mean?* Postmodernists continued this tradition with *What Is This Called? How Much Are My Royalties?* and *Am I Tippy, and How Much Are My Tips?*

1. The name Herzen (Of the Heart) was given to this illegitimate child by his father. However, its non-Russian origin has provoked Russian nationalists to attribute Jewish ancestry to the writer—a national sport. Indeed, at one time or another every significant figure of Russian culture has been discovered to have Jewish blood, except Pushkin. In world culture, the only figure in whom nationalists have not discovered Jewish blood is Jesus. See also the debate among Russian theologians about whether the first Jew, Abraham, had Jewish blood.

2. As Herzen himself pointed out in “Why Did I Write *Why Did I Write This??*”