

THE LINGUOCULTURAL CONCEPT OF PECHAL'/PECHAL'NYI IN ALEXANDER HERZEN'S MY PAST AND THOUGHTS

Aleksandra Gerkerova

Education Department, Ariel University

Kiriat Hamada, 3, Ariel 4070000, Israel

E-mail address: aleksandrag@ariel.ac.il

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7449-6112>

Nitza Davidovitch

Education Department, Ariel University

Kiriat Hamada, 3, Ariel 4070000, Israel

E-mail address: d.nitza@ariel.ac.il

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7273-903X>

ABSTRACT

Aim. This study analyses the linguocultural concept *pechal'*/*pechal'nyy* (sadness/sad) in Alexander Herzen's *My Past and Thoughts*, exploring its linguistic and cultural functions. It examines how *pechal'* serves as a marker of emotional, intellectual, and moral depth, revealing layers of meaning in the portrayal of characters, their worldview, and 19th-century Russian mentality.

Methods. The study uses quantitative and qualitative methods, including content and contextual analysis. It identifies and categorises all occurrences of *pechal'* and *pechal'nyy*, examining their frequency, semantic roles, emotional connotations, and cultural-historical associations. It also draws on dictionary definitions, gender and referent classification, and analyses of how *pechal'* is used in depicting Herzen's circle.

Results. *Pechal'* appears 188 times and functions as a culturally charged emotional concept denoting sorrow, reflection, and existential awareness. It is closely linked to characters with intellectual depth, critical thought, and emotional sensitivity. The analysis shows that *pechal'* is not only a personal emotion but also a cultural phenomenon embedded in Russian identity and literary tradition. It also marks Herzen's inner circle, distinguishing genuine suffering from theatrical melancholy.

Conclusions. The study identifies *pechal'* as a linguocultural marker uniting emotion, intellect, and moral reflection. It functions as a culturally shaped emotional-

cognitive response to the world's imperfections, marking individuals of ethical sensitivity. Traced across characters and contexts, *pechal'* serves as both a literary device and a cultural code, illustrating how emotional lexemes convey complex ideological and identity meanings in historical and literary discourse.

Keywords: linguocultural concept, Herzen, Russian literature, sadness, emotional lexemes, cultural identity

INTRODUCTION

My Past and Thoughts (*Byloje i dumy*) is an autobiographical chronicle of the Russian politician, thinker, and writer Alexander Herzen (1812-1870). It is his major literary work and is considered one of the most important documents of Russian intellectual life in the 19th century. Written between the 1850s and 1860s, the work reflects a period of intense political upheaval, ideological crisis, and the growing disillusionment of the Russian intelligentsia with both autocracy and the limitations of Western liberalism. Herzen began writing the memoir in exile, after the revolutions of 1848-1849, which deeply influenced his political thought and personal worldview.

The text responds directly to the failure of the European revolutions and the stagnation of reforms in Russia, offering both a critique of the existing political order and a meditation on the moral responsibilities of the individual in times of social collapse. Herzen's reflections capture the inner struggles of a generation torn between action and despair, idealism and skepticism. His writing is not only personal but deeply dialogic, engaging with contemporary European thinkers, the Russian aristocracy, and the emerging radical youth.

My Past and Thoughts was met with considerable interest in 19th-century Russian émigré and intellectual circles. It was praised for its psychological depth, candid self-analysis, and its ability to fuse autobiography, philosophical essay, and historical narrative. In many ways, it anticipated the confessional style and critical tone of later Russian thinkers, influencing both literary and political discourses. Herzen's narrative, rich in emotion and cultural commentary, became a key text for understanding the Russian national consciousness during a time of ideological transition. Within this historical and ideological framework, the present study focuses on the emotional and cultural meanings encoded in the lexeme *pechal'*, approaching Herzen's text through the lens of linguoculturology.

Linguoculturology, which examines the interplay between language and culture, regards language as a gateway to cultural layers, enabling the capture of emotions, thoughts, and dialogues of people distanced from us by time and space. A person is shaped by the language they think and speak in, yet they also contribute to the creation of linguistic reality, adding new shades of meaning.

Linguoculturological research uncovers the mechanisms by which cultural information is embedded within language, as well as the processes through which a knowledgeable recipient extracts this information. Linguoculturology studies culture as a world of meanings, exploring ethnic mentality and the conceptual and linguistic worldviews (Khrolenko, 2021).

The aim of this study is to examine the characteristics of the linguocultural concept *pechal'*/*pechal'nyy* (sadness/sad) and its representation in Herzen's work *My Past and Thoughts*.

According to Vladimir Vorobyev, unlike a word, a linguocultural concept encompasses not only segments of language (linguistic meaning) but also culture (extralinguistic cultural meaning) (Vorobyev, 2008). Emotives always possess national and cultural specificity in their expression, characteristic of a particular era and cultural stratum. In the autobiographical chronicle *My Past and Thoughts*, the linguocultural concept *pechal'*/*pechal'nyy* (sadness/sad) occurs 188 times.

METHODS

This study employs both qualitative and quantitative text analysis methods to examine the linguocultureme *pechal'*/*pechal'nyy* (sadness/sad) in Herzen's *My Past and Thoughts*. A content analysis was conducted to identify all instances of the lexemes *pechal'* and *pechal'nyy* in the text, enabling an assessment of their frequency and the context in which they appear. Contextual analysis further explored the emotional and semantic load of these words, revealing key patterns in how they are used to express the characters' states, attitudes toward events, and their worldview.

The linguocultural analysis provided insights into the additional cultural and historical meanings embedded in the use of *pechal'*/*pechal'nyy* (sadness/sad) in the text. This approach allowed for an exploration of how these words reflect the 19th-century Russian mentality, the interaction between language and culture in literature, and the connection between the characters' emotional states and the national and cultural characteristics of the era.

THE EMOTIONAL AND CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF PECHAL' IN HERZEN'S WORKS

In psychology, it is commonly accepted to identify five basic emotions: fear, pleasure, joy, *pechal'* (sadness), and anger. *Pechal'* (sadness) is one of the most enduring emotions, often passing through periods of protest, resignation, and helplessness, and it can last for days. The emotion of *pechal'* (sadness) in Herzen's works is often associated with action. Actions accompanied by *pechal'* (sadness) include: walking,

standing, looking, sitting, writing, seeing, stopping, pointing, listening, saying good-bye, speaking, reasoning, waiting, and noticing. This means that *pechal'* (sadness) is a constant companion of both the characters' thought processes and their ordinary, routine actions.

According to Grigorii. Krylov's etymological dictionary, *pechal'* (sadness) is a common Slavic word derived by adding a suffix to *pecha*, which means "care" and originates from the same root as *opeka* (protection). The now-obsolete word *peka* referred to "heat" or "warmth." (Krylov, 2004). Therefore, *pechal'* (sadness) literally translates to "something that burns."

The image of a person who is tormented by something burning within, unable to find peace, hindered from living a happy life, tortured by unresolved issues, the lack of prospects for improvement in the foreseeable future, and a sense of impending doom is very characteristic of Herzen.

The adjectives describing the word *pechal'* (sadness) in Herzen's memoirs can be categorised into three groups:

- Intensity and magnitude: (deep *pechal'* (sadness), great *pechal'* (sadness));
- Legitimacy: (legitimate *pechal'* (sadness));
- Severity: (excruciating *pechal'* (sadness)).

Pechal' (sadness) in Herzen's work represents the heavy burden of recognising the world's imperfections and the inability to correct them. Aileen Kelly notes that in response to Michelet's dismissive remarks about the Russian intelligentsia and the emerging Russian literature, Herzen argued that the self-analysis and self-criticism found in Russian poetry, along with the detailed exploration of human nature by its novelists, were indicative of Russia's immense potential. *Pechal'* (sadness), skepticism, and irony are the "three strings of the Russian lyre" (Kelly, 2016, p. 326.).

The linguocultural concept of *pechal'* (sadness) is widely represented in Russian proverbs and sayings: "There is no person without *pechal'* (sadness), and if there is, then they are not truly human." (Mikhaylova, 2009, There is no) Does this imply that a happy person is not a person? No, because "there is neither *pechal'* (sadness) without joy, nor joy without *pechal'* (sadness)," (Mikhaylova, 2009, There is neither) as another proverb tells us. The ability to resonate with *pechal'* (sadness) is a characteristic of a sensitive person in Herzen's works: "And how could this not reflect on the soul of a woman so unhappily, deeply understanding all that is sorrowful" (about Natalie) (Herzen, 1956a, p. 321). At the same time, *pechal'* (sadness) is destructive; it corrodes a person, consuming their soul and body, as proverbs warn us: "Rust eats iron, and *pechal'* (sadness) eats the heart" (Dal', 1989, p. 118); "moths eat clothes, and *pechal'* (sadness) eats the heart" (Dal', 1989, p.118); "the day fades into night, and a person fades into *pechal'* (sadness)" (Dal', 1989, p. 117); "joy curls the hair, but *pechal'* (sadness) splits it." (Dal', 1989, p. 118). In Herzen's works, the existence of a person living in an aura of *pechal'* (sadness), though somewhat romanticised, still carries a destructive effect:

My childhood was the saddest, the most bitter; how many tears were shed, unseen by anyone, how many times at night, not yet understanding what prayer was, I would secretly rise (not daring to pray at the wrong time) and ask God that someone would love and caress me. (Natalie's words, Herzen, 1956a, p. 321)

CATEGORIES AND CONTEXTS OF PECHAL' IN MY PAST AND THOUGHTS

According to the analysis of contexts in the work, the subjects of *pechal'* (sadness) are categorized into five groups based on gender, age, quantity, and type of referent:

- Male subject (51);
- Female subject (14);
- Non-adult (child or adolescent) (3);
- Collective subject (6);
- Inanimate object or abstract concept (114).

We can assert that the experience of *pechal'* (sadness), its recognition, or expression, has a distinctly gendered specificity in Herzen's work.

As a result of analysing the dictionary definitions of the term *pechal'nyy* (sad), five categories were identified:

- experiencing feelings of *pechal'* (sadness), bitterness; sad; expressing *pechal'* (sadness): "His face was welcoming, his features soft and rounded, with a tired and *pechal'nyy* (sad) expression." (Herzen, 1956a, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 8, p. 56)
- filled with *pechal'* (sadness): "In addition to the *pechal'nyy* (sad) chronicle of that time, a few details about Alexander Polezhaev should be conveyed." (Herzen, 1956a, 165);
- evoking or inducing *pechal'* (sadness), melancholy, or despondency:
- Obviously, all of this was awkward and soul-wrenching – the lurking spies, the scribes, the reading of instructions to the gendarme who was supposed to take me, the inability to say anything without witnesses – in short, a more offensive and *pechal'nyy* (saddening) situation could not have been imagined (Herzen, 1956a, p. 219) ;
- causing *pechal'* (sadness), regrettable (about a person): "The pages where I speak of his solitary, *pechal'nyy* (sad) existence were omitted by me; I do not wish to publish them without his consent." (Herzen, 1956a, p. 25)
- bad, reprehensible: "One of the most *pechal'nyy* (regrettable) outcomes of Peter's coup was the rise of the bureaucratic class." (Herzen, 1956a, p. 252).

The nouns described by the epithet *pechal'nyy* (sad) in *My Past and Thoughts* can be categorised into the following groups:

- *Face, facial expression, eyes, voice, body*: expression, appearance, figure, voice, smile, eyes, hand, features;

- *Characteristics of movements and actions*: cry, tone, behaviour;
- *Attitudes and reactions*: loyalty, reproach, mockery, rebuke, consolation, contempt;
- *Characteristics of a person and their actions*: rank, drunkenness;
- *Thought processes or the nature of thinking in relation to its subject*: truth, clairvoyance, consciousness, self-deception, thoughts;
- *Results of human activity*: results, evidence, conclusions, failure, consequences, victory;
- *Abstract concepts*: religion, images, homeland, life;
- *Emotions*: peace, rapture, despair, love;
- *Situations*: existence, setting, sides, news, walk, condition, details, spectacle, matter, misunderstanding, alternative;
- *Legitimacy*: law;
- *Time*: winter evening, time, childhood, past, era, two or three days, future, burden of the past, bygone;
- *Nature*: distance, reflection, horse, blueness;
- *Objects and spaces*: yard, field, letter, camp, Europe;
- *Narrative, story*: chronicle, story, page, details;
- *Generalisation*: everything, all;
- *Uncertainty*: something.

***Pechal'* as a Defining Marker in Herzen's "Circle of His People"**

Herzen, in his work, distinctly identifies a circle of "his people": educated intellectual individuals capable of perceiving the world with sensitivity, people with high moral standards who are in opposition to the political order of the state, critically thinking and inclined toward reflection – sometimes excessively so – leading them to be preoccupied with their own fate, the fate of the state, and the world at large. This constant need for contemplation often results in disheartening conclusions. The *pechal'nyy* (sad) tint in their facial expressions, character, behaviour, and worldview is associated with a sense of transience, inevitability, and the impossibility of rectifying the current state of affairs. *Pechal'* (sadness), like a bird with a giant wing, casts a shadow over these people, enveloping them in the awareness of deep, hidden meanings and nuances of existence, granting them access to a secluded world of reflection and the pursuit of truths that do not lead to optimistic conclusions or forecasts. This emotional state is fundamentally different from the existential melancholy and romantic ennui that became fashionable in the 19th century, thanks to Lord Byron, who created Childe Harold. Unlike the feeling of ennui and disillusionment with life due to an excess of pleasures experienced by Onegin and Pechorin, *pechal'* (sadness) in Herzen's characters is not born of indulgence but from profound intellectual and moral contemplation: "The sickness, with which he was smitten, / The cause of which it's time to seek, /

That *spleen* (so Englishmen are bitten) / Or *chondria*, when we Russians speak, / Had gradually overwhelmed him” (Pushkin, 2009).

I don't know whether I am a fool or a scoundrel; but the fact is that I am to be pitied as much, if not more than she. My soul has been warped by the world, my mind is restless, my heart insatiable; nothing suffices me: I grow accustomed to sorrow as readily as to joy, and my life becomes emptier from day to day. (Lermontov, 1951)

Herzen's *pechal'* (sadness) is a profoundly different feeling, full of inner depth and, paradoxically, beauty. As Semyon Vengerov aptly noted:

This Great *Pechal'* (sadness), permeating all of the new Russian literature, is in close organic connection with the entire Russian national character. The Russian landscape is sad, yet it was this very landscape that Nekrasov longed for amidst the magnificent nature of the South. The Russian song is sad, 'resembling a moan,' as Nekrasov described it. But there is an unspeakable beauty in this sadness. (Vengerov, 1919)

At the same time, Vengerov emphasises:

But under no circumstances should the Great *Pechal'* (sadness), the great melancholy of Russian literature, be confused with despondency. Despondency is a deadening force, while Russian *pechal'* (sadness) is a creative force. As I have mentioned elsewhere, the Great *Pechal'* (sadness) of Russian literature is best described by the beautiful old word *pechalovanie*, which encompasses the notion of active love and effective care. (Vengerov, 1919, p.15)

Irena Zhelvakova writes that

Herzen understood friendship as a 'great poetic reward.' He confessed that the best energies of his soul were devoted to friendship. In his diary, he frequently reflected on the joy of gaining friendships. On August 28, 1844, he wrote: '...not dreamy, not introspective, I sought pleasure among people, shared thoughts and *pechal'* (sadness) with them. Friendship led me to love. I did not transition from love to friendship, but from friendship to love. And this need for sympathy, exchange, respect, and recognition has remained in full force.' (Zhelvakova, 2010, p.173)

Among those whom Herzen considered close and whose lives were marked by *pechal'* (sadness) are:

- Alexander. Vitberg: “Five more years passed, I was far from the Sparrow Hills, but their Prometheus stood near me, grim and *pechal'nyy* (sad)” (Herzen, 1956a, p.82) – here the adjective *pechal'nyy* (sad) is intensified by the word “grim.” According to Efremova's New Dictionary of the Russian Language, “grim” correlates with the adjectives: a) unwelcoming, gloomy, severe; b) causing a sense of heaviness, bleak (Efremova, 2000). Prometheus, who embodies courage and philanthropy, compassion, and sympathy for humanity, is depicted by Herzen not only as mourning humanity's fate but also as disillusioned, recognising the futility of his own sacrifice.

- Amid these ugly and greasy, petty and repulsive faces and scenes, deeds and titles, in this bureaucratic frame and official setting, I recall the *pechal'nyy* (sad), noble features of the artist, crushed by the government with cold and unfeeling cruelty” – here we see the word *pechal'nyy* (sad) in the same semantic chain with the word “noble,” which emphasizes the meaning of *pechal'nyy* (sad) in Herzen’s interpretation: *pechal'* (sadness) is the lot of the chosen, those who rise above the “petty and repulsive faces and scenes” (Herzen, 1956a, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 8, p. 277).
- A Polish classmate of Herzen:
In 1832, a Pole, a student from our department, disappeared. Sent at the government’s expense, not of his own will, he was placed in our course. We got to know him; he behaved modestly and *pechal'nyy* (sad), we never heard a harsh word from him, but we also never heard a weak one (Herzen, 1956a, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 8, p.135)
With just a few strokes, the author introduces us to a restrained, virtuous person, yet strong in spirit. The adjective *pechal'nyy* (sad) immediately elevates his status to the level of Herzen’s circle, where *pechal'nyy* (sad) signifies fully understanding what is happening around.
- Vadim Passek: “*Pechal'no* (sadly) sat Vadim by the window, then got up, took his hat, and said he wanted to go for a walk.” (Herzen, 1956a, p. 141). The author describes a situation of despair caused by a lack of money, but the attempt not only to seek a specific solution but also to contemplate the situation on a broader scale is conveyed through the epithet *pechal'nyy* (sad).
- The next day, Ketcher, quiet and *pechal'nyy* (sorrowful), paced from corner to corner, fiercely puffing on his pipe...” (Herzen, 1956b, p. 230) and a few sentences later: “If no one appeared, Ketcher, harbouring deadly fear in his chest, went *pechal'no* (sorrowfully) to the café” (Herzen, 1956b, p.230). Herzen describes his friend’s state after a quarrel with friends, painting a portrait of an adult child, explosive and unrestrained, yet still evoking the author’s sympathy and affection.
- Olga Zherebtsova: “Her long, eventful life, with its terrifying wealth of encounters and conflicts, formed her haughty but by no means devoid of *pechal'naya* (sorrowful) loyalty in her gaze” (Herzen, 1956b, p.69) – in recounting her adventurous life, Herzen emphasizes her intellect and purity of soul with the phrase “sorrowful loyalty,” highlighting a soul that has remained true to itself, its beliefs, and principles.
- Timofey Granovsky: “I liked him for his noble, thoughtful appearance, his *pechal'nyy* (sorrowful) eyes with furrowed brows, and his sadly good-natured smile; he wore long hair at the time and a uniquely tailored blue Berlin coat with velvet lapels and woolen fasteners” (Herzen, 1956b, p.121). Here, too, the use of the word *pechal'nyy* (sorrowful) marks his belonging to “his people.” Their relationship grew into a close, deep friendship. But even at their first meeting, a sympathy arose, signalled by the use of *pechal'nyy* (sorrowful) in the portrait description.
- Petr Chaadayev: “The *pechal'naya* (sad) and distinctive figure of Chaadayev stands out sharply, with a certain sorrowful reproach against the faded and heavy backdrop of Moscow’s high life” (Herzen, 1956b, p.141) – the contrast between this charismatic

personality and the rest of Moscow society is heightened by the epithet *pechal'naya* (sad), as it expresses the ability of the described person to rise above what is happening around him. A few paragraphs later, the characterisation is repeated: "His grey-blue eyes were *pechal'nye* (sad) yet had something kind in them, while his thin lips, on the contrary, smiled ironically" (Herzen, 1956b, p.141). *Pechasssl'* (sadness) leaves a distinct mark on those who can feel and understand more subtly, more deeply than others. Lydia Ginzburg notes that "Herzen was the first to create historical portraits of the activists of the 1830s-40s, portraits where the uniquely personal is inseparably fused with the socio-characteristic, and every personal trait, even the details of appearance or clothing, becomes historically significant." (Ginzburg, 1957, p. 277). In Chaadayev's portrait, "external, physical features acquire symbolic meaning, embodying Herzen's expanded historical concept of the rift between two eras – the Decembrist and the Nicholas periods." (Ginzburg, 1957, p. 277). "Old and young alike felt uneasy around him; they were, for some reason, ashamed of his motionless face, his direct gaze, his *pechal'naya* (sad) mockery, and his caustic condescension." (Herzen, 1956b, p.142. The phrase *pechal'naya nasmeshka* (sad mockery) implies a remark that is hurtful and irritating, but the epithet *pechal'naya* (sad) leads us to consider what lies behind sharp, penetrating gaze of his grey-blue eyes.

Nothing in the world was more opposed to the Slavs than Chaadayev's hopeless gaze, with which he avenged Russian life, his deliberate, hard-earned curse upon it, with which he sealed his *pechal'noye* (sad) existence and the existence of an entire period in Russian history. (Herzen, 1956b, p.146)

The gaze that concluded the sad life of the hero had lost all glimmers of hope.

– Giuseppe Mazzini:

Mazzini, though he listened *pechal'no* (sadly), nevertheless agreed and was among the first to subscribe to two or three shares; active, concentrated thought sparkled in his *pechal'nyye* (sad) eyes; in them and in the wrinkles on his forehead – an abyss of will and stubbornness. (Herzen, 1956c, p.65.)

Here, too, *pechal'nyy* (sad) serves as a marker of belonging to "his people": a firm, strong-willed character is described, and the word *pechal'nyy* (sad) indicates his inclusion in Herzen's circle.

– Aleksei Orlov:

I saw him only once after that, exactly six years later. He was fading away. The sickly expression, the pensiveness, and a certain new angularity in his face struck me; he was *pechal'nyy* (sad), felt his decline, knew his affairs were in disarray – and saw no way out. He died about two months later; the blood had clotted in his veins. (Herzen, 1956a, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 8, p.178

Several of Herzen's characters experience *pechal'* (sadness) as they come to terms with the inevitability of leaving this world. The *pechal'* (sadness) described here is a premonition of imminent death. The sense of death permeating every moment

of life is very characteristic of the 19th-century intellectual. In this case, the character is saddened by the lack of an escape from his situation, the impossibility of correcting the current situation, but this outlook on life is also typical of other characters in the literary work, even those in less obviously “sad” circumstances.

- Vissarion Belinsky: “His face, especially the muscles around his lips, and his *pechal’nyy* (sad) gaze equally spoke of the intense work of the spirit and the rapid deterioration of the body.” (Herzen, 1956b, , p.34). Here, *pechal’* (sadness) is connected with the premonition of the inevitability of death and the futile resistance to it.
- Adam Mickiewicz: “The life of the great poet, who had outlived himself, ended *pechal’no* (sadly)” (Herzen, 1956c, p.42) – the tragedy of a life encapsulated in one phrase.

While *pechal’* (sadness) is often a marker of ‘kindred spirits’ in Herzen’s work, signalling emotional depth and an acute awareness of the world’s imperfections, it can also be used disingenuously. Herzen is keenly aware of the difference between genuine *pechal’* (sadness) and the contrived, theatrical versions displayed by those seeking personal gain or manipulation:

About Dmitrii Golitsyn Jr.: “After hearing the final question, I was sitting alone in a small room where we were writing. Suddenly, the door opened, and Golitsyn Jr. entered with a *pechal’nyy* (sad) and worried expression.” (Herzen, 1956a, p. 208. Golitsyn attempts to convince Herzen to testify against his friends, and here his *pechal’noye* (sad) demeanour appears contrived and theatrical: he is concerned with achieving the result he needs, and this is merely a *pechal’nyy* (sad) appearance – artificial and pretended.

About Georg Herwegh: Herwegh somehow reduced everything in the world to himself; he gave himself up selfishly, sought attention, was timidly vain, unsure of himself, and yet at the same time confident in his superiority. All of this made him coquettish, capricious, sometimes deliberately *pechal’nyy* (sad), attentive, or inattentive.” (Herzen, 1956c, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 10, p. 251).

The *pechal’* (sadness) here is artificial, theatrical, and insincere, just like Herwegh himself. In her essay, Kate Holland emphasises that Herzen, in *My Past and Thoughts*, attributes to Herwegh an affectedness and mannerisms borrowed from literary characters, making him appear doubly contrived, adopting poses from literary figures whose derivative he himself becomes. (Holland, 2007). “...he tossed out witticisms and barbs; Vogt rolled with laughter, while Herwegh *pechal’no* (sadly) looked out from under his brows (Herzen, 1956c, p. 339) – this highlights his inappropriate reaction to jokes, especially in contrast to Vogt’s genuine response.

Herzen also describes his own problematic situations through the lens of *pechal’* (sadness):

- On the divergence of views with friends: “This discovery filled me with deep *pechal’* (sadness); the threshold over which they stumbled, once brought to light, could no longer be overlooked.” (Herzen, 1956b, p. 203). The deep *pechal’* (sadness) is caused by the impossibility of maintaining closeness with those with whom it was once possible.

- On his reaction to political events: “My heart ached from these harsh truths; a difficult lesson in life had to be endured. ...I sat *pechal’no* (sadly) one day in gloomy, unpleasant Zurich, in my mother’s dining room” (Herzen, 1956c, p. 117) – the space and surroundings reflect the narrator’s emotional state.
- In discussing the fate of Matvey, a serf: “I looked at his future *pechal’no* (sadly).” (Herzen, 1956b, p. 104). The relationship between Herzen and Matvey resembled those between Italian artists and their apprentices. “The *pechal’naya* (sad) aspect of Matvey’s fate lay precisely in the rift that reckless development brought into his life and his inability to fill it, in the lack of strong will to overcome it” (Herzen, 1956b, p. 104)– Herzen takes a critical view of the relationships between the aristocracy and their servants, describing them as “vile,” yet he also reproaches Matvey for his inability to engage in systematic, persistent intellectual work despite having the capabilities. Herzen refers to Matvey’s development as “reckless,” highlighting the chasm into which he fell as he approached education – a privilege that was nearly impossible for the lower classes in the 19th century. Even for free citizens from the lower strata, education remained highly conditional; despite the existence of one-year church-parish schools and the possibility of transitioning to two-year district schools, attendance required motivation and effort, while they often preferred to focus on acquiring practical craft skills (Harris, 2010).
- On the persecution initiated by the Russian government and the attempt to find solace in nature:
- When the soul carries great *pechal’* (sadness), when a person has not yet reconciled with the past, has not yet found peace in understanding, they need distance and mountains, the sea and warm, gentle air. These are needed so that sadness does not turn into bitterness, into despair, so that the person does not become hardened (Herzen, 1956c, p. 109)

The soul is burdened with the weight of unrelenting *pechal’* (sadness), and the person is not in harmony with themselves.

- On experiencing a family tragedy:
- The Russian weakness of drinking out of grief is not as bad as it is said to be. A heavy sleep is better than a heavy sleepless night, and a hangover headache in the morning is better than deadening *pechal’* (sadness) on an empty stomach. (Herzen, 1956c, p. 267)

Intense *pechal’* (sadness) can be destructive, capable of corroding the soul to its core, and there is a desire to numb or dull this pain by any means available.

Herzen’s “Pechal’nye” Women: Sadness in Female Characters

The “sad women” in Herzen’s book deserve special attention: “... the temptation that subdued me and cost me much *pechal’* (sadness) and inner turmoil” (Herzen, 1956a, p. 333) – Herzen speaks of an affair he had while in exile with a married woman,

unhappy in her marriage, and he doubts his own moral righteousness in these relations. When he describes the heroine of this affair, she is "... *pechal'naya* (sad) and sickly," (Herzen, 1956a, p. 337) indicating from the very first description the potential of these relations. By using the word *pechal'naya* (sad) in her portrayal, the author, with a single stroke, includes her in his circle, justifying to himself the possibility of this romance.

The dialogue that took place before they became close is also marked by this word: "'I have fulfilled your wish,' she said at last. 'Now let me go... Goodbye... for God's sake, goodbye, go home as well,' she added in a *pechal'nyy* (sad) and pleading voice." (Herzen, 1956a, p. 340). After her husband's death, when she expected a logical proposal of marriage from Alexander, the *pechal'* (sadness) unexpectedly fades from her character: "Her *pechal'* (sadness) gradually subsided, she began to view her situation more firmly; then, little by little, other thoughts cleared her worried and gloomy face." (Herzen, 1956a, p. 342). Yet, as he anticipates the imminent end of his exile, feeling joy at the conclusion of a difficult period in his life, Alexander mentally returns to the image of the woman he had hurt and experiences pangs of conscience; in this recollection, the image, now so distant from him in reality, once again takes on "sad" features:

... as soon as I gave in to these dreams, the pale, *pechal'naya* (sad) figure of R., with tearful eyes and a gaze expressing pain and reproach, appeared on the other side of the carriage, and my joy was clouded, I felt sorry, deathly sorry for her. (Herzen, 1956a, p. 349)

In recounting her farewell letter, he once again makes her equal to himself, using the word *pechal'nyy* (sad) to describe the tone of the letter:

She wrote gently, nobly, and deeply *pechal'nyy* (sad); the flowers of my eloquence did not hide the asp in her conciliatory words; a hidden moan from a weak chest, a cry of pain, suppressed by extraordinary effort, could be heard. (Herzen, 1956a, p. 349)

Natalie was marked by the "seal of sadness" from an early age: "The child did not grow accustomed, and after a year was as much a stranger as on the first day, and even *pechal'nee* (sadder)." (Herzen, 1956a, p. 320). She felt cold, lonely, and uncomfortable in the house of the princess. The reason for this was the absence of love in the little girl's life; only the elderly nanny opened her heart to her: "Often in the evening, while undressing her, she would ask, 'But why are you, my young lady, so *pechal'naya* (sad)?" (Herzen, 1956a, p. 320)

Natalie herself describes her childhood using the word *pechal'noye* (sad):

My childhood was the saddest, the most bitter; how many tears were shed, unseen by anyone, how many times at night, not yet understanding what prayer was, I would secretly rise (not daring to pray at the wrong time) and ask God that someone would love me, caress me. (Herzen, 1956a, p. 321).

Longing and loneliness, tears shed in secret, and solace sought in prayer, yet the word *pechal'noye* (sad) seems to elevate the heroine above the events happening around her.

Describing their encounters, Alexander speaks of his inability to appreciate the girl's inner richness:

Until 1834, I still couldn't appreciate this rich existence unfolding beside me, even though it had been nine years since the princess introduced her, dressed in a long woolen dress, to my father. It's not difficult to explain. She was shy – I was distracted; I felt sorry for the child who always sat so *pechal'no* (sadly) and alone by the window, but we saw each other very rarely. (Herzen, 1956a, p. 322)

Natalie's only solace was her friendship with the extraordinarily refined, sensitive, but consumptive serf girl Sasha – could not help but carry a *pechal'nyy* (sad) tone: “The bleak, sorrowful friendship with the fading Sasha had a *pechal'nyy* (sad), mournful reflection.” (Herzen, 1956a, p. 329).

Describing life in Novgorod, Alexander emphasizes that Natasha is once again overcome by *pechal'* (sadness): “I was angry; a sorrowful mood was overtaking Natalie. Her tender nature, accustomed in childhood to *pechal'* (sadness) and tears, once again surrendered to a self-devouring melancholy.” (Herzen, 1956b, p. 92). But this sadness is not gentle or uplifting; it is “self-devouring,” corrosive from within, unproductive, and it provokes irritation in Herzen.

Describing Natalie's maturation and the reevaluation of her romantic-religious worldview: “She *pechal'no* (sadly) parted with her iconostasis, where so many cherished relics, soaked with tears of *pechal'* (sadness) and joy, had stood; she left them behind without blushing, as older girls blush at their doll from yesterday” (Herzen, 1956b, p. 99). This *pechal'* (sadness) reflects a painful and, to some extent, irreparable loss of something significant and important, yet one that is inevitable while choosing the singular path that, according to Lina Steiner, could keep the couple together – the development of a self-aware, humane individual (Steiner, 2007).

When Natalie, observing what was happening outside her window, writes that she cannot even wish for her children to be alive – because a terrible fate awaits them – Herzen comments:

And how could this not reflect on the soul of a woman, so unhappy, so deeply understanding all that is *pechal'* (sorrowful)... Even bright characters became gloomy, filled with bitterness – a kind of evil pain gnawed inside, and a deep sense of inherited shame weighed down on life.” (Herzen, 1956c, p. 225).

He notes that this feeling grew into grief, true and profound, having nothing in common with the regrets over lost romantic ideals:

“It was the crushing sorrow of a sister, a mother's lament on the *pechal'noye* (sorrowful) field of a just-ended battle.” (Herzen, 1956c, p. 226). Natalie writes in her diary: “My life was lost like a drop in the sea once, but now the sea is lost in the drop...” (Herzen, 1956c, p. 226). In his essay, Ilya Klinger comments on these lines: “Natal'ja is no longer a part of the sea of history; all that is left her is contemplation, sad or ironic,

compassionate but resigned. She is no longer in the sea but on the shore.” (Kliger, 2007, p.117).

The experience of the family drama is marked by “black *pechal*” (sadness) – a destructive and especially bitter sadness: “Natalie responded with lines of black *pechal*’ (sadness)” (Herzen, 1956c, p. 270). At the same time, she sought to ease Alexander’s pain: “Her subsequent letters were gently *pechal’nyy* (sad): she felt sorry for me, she wanted to heal my wounds, though she herself had so much to endure.” (Herzen, 1956c, p. 270). This mutual deep understanding of the situation brought the spouses closer: “Tears of *pechal*’ (sadness), still wet on our eyes, bound us together even more tightly – with a sense of deep compassion for one another.” (Herzen, 1956c, p. 273). And Natalie’s death, painted in white – the colour of purity and timelessness – was marked by the final stroke of Great *Pechal*’ (sadness) in her fate:

The deceased lay as if alive on a bed adorned with flowers beside the little one who had passed away that same night. The room was draped in white, strewn with flowers; the Italians’ refined taste in all things knows how to bring something gentle into the heart-wrenching *pechal*’ (sadness) of death. (Herzen, 1956c, p. 376)

CONCLUSIONS

The concept of *pechal*’/*pechal’nyy* (sadness/sorrowful) in Herzen’s *My Past and Thoughts* is far more than an emotional response – it serves as a key to understanding the intellectual and moral struggles of his characters and the broader cultural context of 19th-century Russia. Through the lens of *pechal*’, Herzen’s characters confront the imperfection of the world, weighed down by their inability to bring about meaningful change. This sadness is not passive but deeply reflective, revealing a heightened sensitivity to the complexities of life and the moral dilemmas of their time.

Pechal’ functions as a marker of those who are critically engaged with the world around them. It is a form of existential reflection that permeates both their actions and their inner lives. For Herzen, this sadness becomes a powerful narrative tool that underscores the tension between personal ideals and societal limitations, emphasising the inner turmoil of those who are attuned to the deeper flaws in the world.

At the same time, *pechal*’ reflects the burden of historical and political realities. Herzen’s characters, marked by this emotional depth, are individuals who grapple with the challenges of their era, yet their sorrow also reflects universal human concerns – disillusionment, moral responsibility, and the search for meaning in a world that resists change. This concept resonates not only within the specific cultural context of Russia but also extends to broader philosophical questions about the limits of individual agency and the persistent struggle between hope and resignation.

In this way, *pechal*’ in Herzen’s work bridges the personal and the collective, the emotional and the intellectual. It reveals a complex interplay of sadness, action,

and reflection, offering a profound insight into both the characters' inner worlds and the larger socio-political landscape. Through *pechal'*, Herzen's narrative captures the essence of the human struggle, marked by an acute awareness of the world's imperfections and the unyielding effort to confront them.

This study addresses an understudied aspect of Herzen's work: the way *sadness* functions as a framework for self-identification. In *My Past and Thoughts*, sadness serves as a means of interpreting historical experience, moral position, and the complexity of personal agency. It conveys a reflective state that shapes the characters' responses to their time and circumstances, linking emotional sensitivity with ethical reasoning and intellectual depth.

In the context of Russian culture, sadness carries cognitive and philosophical significance. In Herzen's narrative, it expresses a form of historical awareness and moral engagement, creating a space in which reflection, ethical judgment, and self-understanding emerge. Through this emotional lens, Herzen articulates a mode of experiencing the world that integrates personal feeling with cultural and historical insight.

Such use of emotional vocabulary corresponds to a broader Russian literary tradition in which sadness functions as a meaningful cultural and intellectual orientation. In this perspective, Herzen's treatment of sadness demonstrates how emotional language can shape philosophical inquiry and contribute to the construction of individual and collective identity.

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