

Political Exile and the Image of Siberia in
Anglo-Russian Contacts Prior to 1917

Ben Phillips
UCL

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I, Ben Phillips, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

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Date:

Abstract

From the time of Ermak's conquest in 1582, Siberia has both served and been envisaged as a carceral space, a land of exile and punishment. In the modern era, this image has proliferated and endured both within Russia itself and on the international stage. For many Russians and Westerners alike, Siberia has long provided fertile ground for mythmaking about Russia, and has become a byword for and synecdoche of political oppression and the evils of autocratic and totalitarian rule. In this thesis, I argue that representations of Siberian exile played a crucial role in transnationalising the Russian revolution during the decades prior to 1917. Throughout the nineteenth century, the image of Siberia as a vast prison camp – and, by extension, the birthplace of revolutionary heroes – was commonplace in the oral and literary traditions of Russia's radical intelligentsia and amongst Anglo-American progressives alike. In both cases, Siberia represented an indictment of the Tsarist state and, to some extent, prefigured Russia's post-autocratic future. From the 1880s onwards, a succession of Russian émigrés in Britain and the United States duly sought to capitalise on their hosts' fascination with Siberia by publicising dramatic tales of political exiles' mistreatment and heroism in captivity. Tracing the development of this discourse, I demonstrate that although it elevated several revolutionaries to international celebrity status and succeeded in securing considerable overseas support for their cause, it also exposed contradictions in how the revolution was understood inside and outside Russia. As Russian socialists used the rhetoric of punishment and protest to articulate their own ideological convictions, Britons and Americans romanticised and projected themselves upon the mythologised figure of the Siberian prisoner. In this sense, *fin de siècle* polemics over Siberian exile can be seen to anticipate Western anxieties over Russian oppositionists prevalent in our own time.

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In memory of Anne McAvoy, 1946-2016

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Note on translations, transliterations and abbreviations

I have translated all quotations from Russian sources, but have made a partial exception for poetry, where I have retained the Russian and included prosaic English translations in square brackets below. All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated. As is conventional, I have adopted the Library of Congress transliteration style throughout, but have used anglicised versions of regal names (e.g. Alexander rather than Aleksandr). Numbered citations from Russian archives adhere to the standard fond/opis'/delo format; other archival citations give the collection reference followed by the file or box number. Although several collections consulted herein are arranged somewhat unsystematically, I have given page numbers in archival citations wherever possible.

I have used the following abbreviations in the text and footnotes:

ed. – edited by

FR – *Free Russia: Organ of the Society of Friends of Russian Freedom*

GARF – Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi federatsii, Moscow

IISG – International Institute for Social History, Amsterdam

LC MSS – Manuscripts Division of the Library of Congress, Washington DC

LSE – Archives of the London School of Economics

PSS / SS – *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii / Sobranie sochinenii*

RGALI – Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv literatury i isskustva, Moscow

SFRF – Society of Friends of Russian Freedom

TNA – The National Archives, London

trans. – translated by

1. Introduction: Siberia and the mythology of exile

Exile is strangely compelling to think about, but terrible to experience.

– Edward Said¹

Late one afternoon in early November 1893, an unlikely meeting took place at a small cottage in the London suburb of Turnham Green: a British journalist paid a visit to a Russian political émigré and, for approximately half an hour, proceeded to interrogate him upon the finer points of Russian boys' games. As the interview drew to a close, the journalist's interest in the topic having abated, their conversation – the very circumstance of which may strike the modern reader as sufficiently peculiar in itself – took a curiously tangential turn:

- 'Boys', said I, 'in Russia are not oppressed, are they?'
- 'Oh yes, they are. At first the government of the Czar only put spies on students; now they put them on boys, so as to nip Nihilism in the bud, as they would say. Boys of fourteen are sent to Siberia. Three hundred young people are exiled there every year.'
- 'What an awful shame', I said; and I assured him that *Chums* readers would be heart and soul with me in this sentiment.²

¹ Edward W. Said, 'Reflections on Exile' in *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*, ed. Russell Ferguson (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), p. 357.

² 'Russian Boys and Their Games: A Chat with Stepniak, the Russian Nihilist', *Chums* (8 November 1893), p. 169. I am indebted to Sarah Young for having unearthed this particular gem some years ago.

The interviewer was one Frank Banfield, and his interviewee none other than the revolutionary publicist and former terrorist Sergei Stepniak-Kravchinskii, then the public face of the Russian émigré colony in London.³ Although remarkably superficial and reductive at face value, their exchange offers a fascinating distillation not only of Anglo-Russian relations in the late nineteenth century, but of Western perceptions of Russia and the cultural politics of the Russian revolutionary movement. The three central questions immediately arising from it – why two men with so little in common should ever have met at all, why the topic of political repression and Siberian exile should have featured in a conversation ostensibly concerned with Russian variations on conkers and tag, and why Kravchinskii, who himself had never been exiled to Siberia or even been there, should have instinctively answered Banfield's question with an exaggerated statistic he almost certainly knew to be false – are, in essence, the subject of this thesis.

Few places on earth are more closely associated with banishment and incarceration than Siberia. From the moment of the Cossack ataman Ermak Timofeevich's 1582 conquest of the Siberian khanate to the Soviet labour camps of the modern era, the region's expanses have provided Russia with a vast natural depository for all manner of exiles and prisoners. This aspect of Siberia's history is fundamental to its reputation. Envisaged as a carceral space, the region has figured prominently in the oral and literary traditions of Russian culture since the early modern period, and continues to do so today. Far from being exclusive to Russia, however, the enduring image of a dismal, snowbound penal colony has long circulated and thrived overseas too. Throughout the modern era, Siberia has often been regarded in the West as not only a synecdoche of the Russian penal system but a byword for the evils of autocratic and

³ See E. A. Taratuta, *S. M. Stepniak-Kravchinskii: revoliutsioner i pisatel'* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1973), Donald Senese, *S. M. Stepniak-Kravchinskii: The London Years* (Newtonville, MA: Oriental Research Partners, 1987) and James W. Hulse, *Revolutionists in London: A Study of Five Unorthodox Socialists* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), pp. 29-52.

totalitarian rule, the centrepiece of an established discourse about Russia's political and legal backwardness and civilisational 'otherness'. To this day, references to such modern-day Russian dissidents as Mikhail Khodorkovskii and Pussy Riot being 'exiled to Siberian gulags' remain ubiquitous in the Western media, situating the country's rulers and oppositionists alike within imagined continua of persecution and resistance and entrenching the notion of the Russian state's unchanging repressiveness.⁴ Given the enormous impact made by the Soviet camp regime on the modern consciousness, this international fascination with Siberia as a barren, snowbound place of punishment might naturally be taken for a Cold War invention. As this thesis shows, however, its origins lie not in the Soviet period, but in the long nineteenth century.

During the decades prior to the collapse of autocratic rule in 1917, this thesis argues, Siberian exile came both to symbolise the Russian revolution and provide a universal key to its interpretation. Mythologised as a carceral space both within Russia and internationally throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Siberia was central not only to how Russia's revolutionaries conceived of their own mission, but to how Western progressives understood and responded to it. For the former, Siberia represented both a vast prison camp and a *tabula rasa* upon which they could inscribe their hopes and dreams for Russia's future, thus symbolising the moral basis of their struggle with the autocracy. This liminal image was mirrored in the West, where Siberia seemed to underscore the tension between Russia's European and non-European identities by juxtaposing the sympathetic figure of the heroic political exile with an oppressive government that banished the flower of its youth to snowbound wastes.

⁴ See, for instance, 'Exile in Siberia', *Financial Times* (7 February 2008), <http://on.ft.com/2anmIAf> (accessed 10/09/2016) and 'Pussy Riot Sent to Siberia: Girlband Members Packed Off to Gulags', *Daily Mail* (23 October 2012), <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2221738/Pussy-Riot-members-sent-hellish-prison-camps-Siberia-losing-appeal.html> (accessed 10/09/2016).

Around the turn of the nineteenth century, these parallel discourses about Siberia intersected. Working together with a diverse array of sympathetic Anglo-American journalists, writers and activists, Russian political émigrés in Europe began to publicise dramatic tales of political exiles' mistreatment and heroism in Siberian captivity in an attempt, as Kravchinskii put it, to 'conquer the world for the Russian revolution; to throw upon the scales the huge weight of the public opinion of civilised nations'.⁵ Such propaganda campaigns transnationalised not only Siberia's carceral mythology, but the revolutionary struggle as a whole. The plight of those subjected to the purported horrors of Siberian exile captured the imagination of the Western public and became a *cause célèbre*, damaging the reputation of the Russian government and legitimising its radical opponents in the eyes of many. In short, Siberia became a metonym not only for the iniquities of autocratic rule, but for the vaunted heroism and self-sacrificial nobility of Russia's radical intelligentsia.

Popularised by Russian revolutionaries and Western progressives alike, and deeply rooted both in Western self-image and the oral and literary traditions of the Russian revolutionary movement, Siberia's carceral mythology was a joint enterprise in all respects. Consequently, it not only illuminated and problematised aspects of Western identity, but facilitated the construction and contestation of Russia's image on the international stage, serving as a proxy for a broader debate over the nation's relationship with Europe. Circulating across borders and languages, the literary paraphernalia of Siberian exile – revolutionaries' penal memoirs and letters, journalistic exposés and pamphlets – was appropriated and re-appropriated to serve a variety of different ends in different national contexts. Just as the experiences of political offenders in Siberia were seen by many in the West to vindicate the causes of Irish nationalists, British suffragists

⁵ S. Stepniak, 'What Americans Can Do for Russia', *The North American Review* 153.420 (1891), p. 600.

and American abolitionists, so Russia's revolutionaries repurposed foreign writing on the exile system to serve their own political and ideological priorities. Such transnational polemics thus often exposed serious tensions and contradictions in how the revolutionary movement was understood within and beyond Russia's borders. Adopting the cause of Russia's political prisoners – a steady stream of romanticised heroes with whom the international public could readily identify and upon whom they could inscribe their own values – allowed the revolution's overseas sympathisers to envisage the inevitable triumph of a universalised liberal democracy. Yet this perspective was not shared by the vast majority of Russian revolutionaries, and the genericised rhetoric of Siberian punishment and protest around which the two sides coalesced exposed such differences as often as it obfuscated them.

Before we proceed any further, it is important to provide a concise historical overview of the pre-revolutionary Siberian exile system as it functioned in practice, and thus contextualise the discussion that follows. This is not a simple task. For a variety of reasons – the short-termism that underpinned the system's development at every juncture, the lack of a single governmental authority charged with its administration, the fact that a very large percentage of the exile population was on the run at any given time, and the inevitable discrepancies between the policies of the imperial centre and their implementation on the periphery – Siberian exile was characterised by a near-constant state of epistemological crisis and a bewilderingly inconsistent taxonomy.⁶ As a result,

⁶ For useful discussions of these problems see Abby Schrader, *Languages of the Lash: Corporal Punishment and Identity in Imperial Russia* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2002), pp. 84-103 and Cathy Popkin, 'Chekhov as Ethnographer: Epistemological Crisis on Sakhalin Island', *Slavic Review* 51.1 (1992), pp. 36-51. Although the rate of vagrancy varied considerably between different periods

our understanding of the system's inner workings, particularly prior to the nineteenth century, remains patchy in several respects. Three things may nonetheless be said with certainty. Firstly, exile to Siberia began in the late sixteenth century, expanded exponentially in scale during the seventeenth and was subject to both systematisation and diversification throughout the imperial period (1721-1917). Secondly, all exiles fell into two broad categories: those sentenced by courts, and those banished by administrative order (*po administrativnomu poriadku*). Thirdly, the system represented, in Sarah Badcock's words, 'the antithesis of Foucault's modern prison'.⁷ This was true both in the obvious spatial sense – by 1900, the Main Prison Administration (*Glavnoe tiuremnoe upravlenie*) was willing to concede that Siberia had become a 'gigantic prison without a roof' (*obshirnaia tiur'ma bez kryshi*)⁸ – and in the sense that the system evolved primarily in response to economic and statist priorities, represented a means of commodifying imperial subjects and thus never reflected any coherent penology. Siberian exile endured for several centuries because it was cheaper than building a modern prison system, and the aim was always less to rehabilitate offenders than to colonise the land and bolster an economy that was increasingly dependent upon indentured serf labour.⁹ With these generalities in mind, we will briefly examine three distinct aspects of the exile system: the various categories of exile (*ssylka*) itself, hard labour (*katorga*), and the situation concerning political offenders.

and localities, escaped exiles were widely considered a blight on Siberian society by the late nineteenth century: see N. M. Iadrintsev, *Sibir' kak koloniia v geograficheskom, etnograficheskom i istoricheskom otnoshenii* (St Petersburg: Tipografiia M. M. Stasiulevicha, 1882), pp. 263-273. In the year 1898 alone, for example, between 70-80% of exiles in the Amurskaia and Primorskaia provinces were believed to have absconded: see A. D. Margolis, *Tiur'ma i ssylka v imperatorskoi Rossii: issledovaniia i arkhivnye nakhodki* (Moscow: Lanterna, 1995), pp. 36-37.

⁷ Sarah Badcock, *A Prison Without Walls? Eastern Siberian Exile in the Last Years of Tsarism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 1. I am indebted to the author for a pre-publication copy of this study.

⁸ A. P. Salomon, *Ssylka v Sibir': ocherk ee istorii i sovremennogo polozheniia* (St Petersburg: Tipografiia Sankt-Peterburgskoi tiur'my, 1900), p. 163.

⁹ See in general Andrew A. Gentes, *Exile to Siberia, 1590-1822: Corporeal Commodification and Administrative Systematization in Russia* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008). The case that early-modern Russia demanded a level of state service from its subjects unrivalled elsewhere in Europe is convincingly made by Marshall T. Poe, *A People Born to Slavery: Russia in Early Modern European Ethnography* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000).

The first Russian exiles, broadly defined, probably arrived in Siberia during the late 1580s or early 1590s. We know little of their origins or their legal status, but it is fair to surmise that the majority of them were essentially forced settlers (the residents of Uglich, who were banished to Tobol'sk along with their town bell by Boris Godunov in 1591 and have been described as the first political exiles, were one notable exception to this).¹⁰ For the most part, efforts to colonise Siberia with exiles remained piecemeal and uncoordinated in the decades following Ermak's conquest. In 1649, however, the Land Assembly (*Zemskii sobor*) under Tsar Alexis promulgated a series of laws (*sobornoe ulozhenie*) that codified both serfdom and Siberian exile for the first time. It was around this point that Russian officials in Siberia first began asking the central authorities to stop sending them exiles, suggesting that numbers increased significantly in the immediate aftermath of the *ulozhenie*.¹¹ Such requests mostly went unheeded, and exiles continued to play an important role in populating and, with varying degrees of success, colonising Siberia. The nineteenth-century historian Petr Slovtsov, himself a native of Krasnoiarsk, estimated that criminals, forced colonists and their dependents (*sledovavshie*) accounted for about 10% of the region's population by the late 1600s.¹² Since free migration to Siberia also began to increase significantly from this point onwards, it is hard to say for sure whether Slovtsov's estimate held true for the later period. Nonetheless, there are reasons to think that the ratio of exiles to voluntary migrants remained essentially stable for at least a century, the temporary redeployment of many Siberian convicts to *katonga* sites in European Russia during the reign of Peter I (1682-1725) notwithstanding.¹³ Alan Wood, for instance, suggests that there were around 60,000 exiles and *sledovavshie* in

¹⁰ Janet M. Hartley, *Siberia: A History of the People* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), p. 115.

¹¹ Gentes, *Exile to Siberia*, pp. 51-53.

¹² P. A. Slovtsov, *Istoricheskoe obozrenie Sibiri*, ed. V. A. Kreshchik (Novosibirsk: Ven-mer, 1995), p. 149.

¹³ Gentes, *Exile to Siberia*, pp. 86-90.

Siberia by the end of the 1700s, at which time the region's non-indigenous male population was just under 400,000.¹⁴

Much of the legal architecture of the late imperial exile system originated in a series of reforms undertaken by Elizabeth Petrovna during the years 1753-1754. In addition to temporarily renaming hard labour as 'exile to labour' (*ssylka na rabotu*) – a decision which reflected the increasing concentration of penal labourers in Siberia during the latter half of the eighteenth century – she created the categories of 'exile to settlement' (*ssylka na poselenie*) and 'exile to residence' (*na zhitie*), both of which could only be imposed by courts.¹⁵ Yet the most significant of Elizabeth's exile reforms was undoubtedly her decision in 1760 to grant both village communes and townspeople (*meshchanstvo*) the right to banish their members by extra-judicial administrative order for a series of ill-defined civil offences, chief amongst which were vagrancy (*brodiazhestvo*) and 'malign behaviour' (*durnoe povedenie*). During the latter half of the nineteenth century, administrative exile became notorious for its use by the central authorities in political cases. However, its deployment at the local level against petty criminals, debtors and vagrants was always far more widespread, and often considerably more mendacious.¹⁶ Over time, administrative exile assumed epic proportions. Over half of all exiles to arrive in Siberia during the years 1882-1898 – 77,158 from a total of 148,032 – were banished in this way, the overwhelming majority of them at the behest of

¹⁴ Alan Wood, 'Siberian Exile in the Eighteenth Century', *Sibirica* 1.1 (1990), pp. 56-59. On Siberia's population see V. M. Kubuzan and S. M. Troitskii, 'Dvizhenie naseleniia Sibiri v XVIII veke' in *Sibir' perioda feodalizma*, ed. V. I. Shunkov, 3 vols (Novosibirsk: Nauka, 1962-1968) I, p. 149.

¹⁵ Gentes, *Exile to Siberia*, pp. 105-108.

¹⁶ K. P. Pobedonostsev, who investigated the use of administrative exile in 1880, reported having been 'terrified by the unbelievable lawlessness' with which village communes exercised their powers: see Jonathan W. Daly, 'Criminal Punishment and Europeanization in Late Imperial Russia', *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 48.3 (2000), p. 356. By contrast, at least some representatives of the higher authorities appear to have seen their own use of administrative exile in political cases as a relatively humane means of combatting the revolutionary threat. P. N. Durnovo, the erstwhile head of the MVD's Police Department during the 1880s, once allegedly claimed that 'administrative exile saved numerous talented people': see A. I. Ivanchin-Pisarev, 'Vospominaniia o P. N. Durnovo', *Katorga i ssylka* 7 (1930), p. 57. This is debatable, since in practice the decision to remove political suspects by administrative order usually meant that there was simply insufficient evidence against them to secure a conviction. See George Kennan, *Siberia and the Exile System*, 2 vols (London: J. R. Osgood, 1891) II, pp. 29-59.

local authorities.¹⁷ By 1900, misuse of the practice had become so endemic that a government commission effectively abolished it, outlawing its use by the *meshchanstvo* and making village communes financially liable for their banished members' journeys into exile.¹⁸

The reforms of 1900 were necessitated by the considerable social and economic problems resulting from the enormous growth of Siberia's exile population throughout the nineteenth century. During the years 1807-1881, 635,319 exiles arrived in the region, with numbers highest during the reign of Nicholas I (1825-1855) and in the 1860s and 1870s.¹⁹ This surge was broadly in line with contemporary demographic trends. In the 1820s, for instance, 91,709 people were exiled to Siberia, as opposed to 173,039 during the 1870s, with the country's overall population having more than doubled during the same period.²⁰ Nonetheless, the expansion of Siberian exile was not solely the result of population growth. During the first half of the century, the Nicholaevan state's fixation with order and system led the authorities to depend upon exile as a means of cleansing society – a tendency codified by an 1845 *ulozhenie* that prescribed exile and *katorga* as punishment for an unprecedented range of criminal offences. In later decades, the immediate social effects of serf emancipation in 1861 worsened the situation still further.²¹ Whatever the causes, Siberia's penal infrastructure was woefully unequipped to deal with the resultant influx and began to buckle under the pressure, with the development of the Sakhalin penal colony after 1869 representing an ultimately

¹⁷ Margolis, *Tiur'ma i ssylka v imperatorskoi Rossii*, pp. 30-31.

¹⁸ Daly, 'Criminal Punishment and Europeanization', p. 357.

¹⁹ Margolis, *Tiur'ma i ssylka v imperatorskoi Rossii*, pp. 29-30.

²⁰ Ibid. Malcolm E. Falkus, *The Industrialisation of Russia 1700-1914* (London: Macmillan, 1972), p. 17 shows the empire's population growing from 35.5 million in 1800 to 74.1 million in 1860 and 126.4 million in 1897.

²¹ Andrew A. Gentes, *Exile, Murder and Madness in Siberia, 1823-1861* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 25-33, 61.

unsuccessful attempt to improve matters.²² By January 1898, according to the Main Prison Administration, there were 298,577 exiles of all types in Siberia and on Sakhalin.²³ Besides the *de facto* abolition of administrative exile, the 1900 reforms attempted to curb the rate of increase through an extensive prison-building programme in European Russia and by reassigning to *katorga* many of those formerly exiled to settlement and residence.²⁴ Nonetheless, such efforts ultimately proved futile. With the widespread social unrest that followed the 1905 revolution, Siberia's use as an exile destination actually increased during the final years of autocratic rule.²⁵

Katorga originated with the Petrine reforms of the late seventeenth century, and was both legally and geographically distinct from the exile system for several decades. The punishment was initially codified in November 1699 by an edict assigning a number of criminals to naval units on the Caspian Sea – the word *katorga* derived from *katerga*, a Greek term denoting convict galleys – and rapidly evolved to encompass almost all forced labour in government service. As with exile to settlement and residence, *katorga* was the preserve of civil and military courts. Conceived as ‘part and parcel of Russia’s transformation from principality to empire’, the punishment became synonymous with Peter’s state-building enterprises and was concentrated almost exclusively in European Russia during his reign.²⁶ Hard labour convicts (*katorzhniki*) played a major role in the building of St Petersburg after the city’s foundation in 1703, along with numerous harbours, factories and military fortifications across the western provinces.²⁷

After Peter’s death in 1725, *katorga*’s geographical locus moved inexorably eastwards. The eighteenth century saw growing interest in Siberia as a prosperous

²² Andrew A. Gentes, ‘No Kind of Liberal: Alexander II and the Sakhalin Penal Colony’, *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 54.3 (2006), pp. 321-344.

²³ Salomon, *Ssylka v Sibir'*, p. 137.

²⁴ Margolis, *Tiur'ma i ssylka v imperatorskoi Rossii*, pp. 14-25.

²⁵ Badcock, *A Prison Without Walls?*, pp. 11-15.

²⁶ Gentes, *Exile to Siberia*, p. 92.

²⁷ Margolis, *Tiur'ma i ssylka v imperatorskoi Rossii*, pp. 8-9.

mercantile colony open to exploitation by the imperial centre, an enthusiasm signified by Catherine II's decision in 1764 to rename the region the 'Siberian tsardom' (*Sibirskoe tsarstvo*), give it its own currency and relocate the capital from Tobol'sk to Irkutsk.²⁸ Accordingly, as the last of the large-scale Petrine construction projects in European Russia neared completion during the mid-century, many convict labourers were transferred to Siberia. By 1800, the Nerchinsk mining district near Chita had expanded to include seven prisons and twenty different mines, overtaking the Baltic naval base at Rogervik (now Paldiski in Estonia) as the empire's largest single *katorga* site during the mid-1760s. In 1756, around 2,000 *katorzhniki* were incarcerated at Nerchinsk; by the end of Catherine's reign in 1796, the figure had grown to 15,000.²⁹ During this period, *katorga* became inextricably intertwined with the exile system in general. Siberian administrators frequently ignored the formal distinction between the two, deploying ordinary exiles as penal labourers to compensate for manpower shortages and reassigning newly-convicted *katorzhniki* to settlement when prisons exceeded capacity.³⁰

Throughout the nineteenth century, the vast majority of those sentenced to *katorga* went to Eastern Siberia and, after 1869, to Sakhalin. By the 1890s, Siberia as a whole played host to approximately 11,000 *katorzhniki* from a total of 15,000 across the whole empire.³¹ Hard labour thus accounted for a fairly small part of both the region's exile population and the empire's overall carceral population. Nonetheless, it was during the late imperial period that it acquired a fearsome reputation and came to be seen as the very worst of the Russian penal system. One reason for this was the 1845 *ulozhenie*, which not only overprescribed *katorga* as punishment for numerous crimes but codified an internal

²⁸ S. G. Svatikov, *Rossia i Sibir': k istorii sibirskogo oblastnchestva v XIX veke* (Prague: Izd-vo obshchestva sibirskov, 1929), pp. 5-6.

²⁹ Gentes, *Exile to Siberia*, p. 125.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 95-96.

³¹ Margolis, *Tiur'ma i ssylka v imperatorskoi Rossii*, p. 37; Daly, 'Criminal Punishment and Europeanization', p. 351.

hierarchy of severity for the first time. From 1845, *katorga* was divided into three distinct administrations: factory (*zavodskaiia*), fortress (*krepostnaia*) and mine (*rudnaia*). Mine *katorga* was concentrated in Nerchinsk and fortress *katorga* in Western Siberia; the former was run by a state-owned commercial concern (the Nerchinsk Mining Command, or *Nerchinskoe gornoe vedomstvo*), the latter by the military. Factory *katorga* amounted to a vast network of semi-autonomous metallurgical plants, saltworks and vodka distilleries dotted across the whole of Siberia. The Nerchinsk mines were purportedly the hardest of the three regimes and thus intended for the most dangerous criminals, although both conditions and assignments varied wildly in practice.³²

The second – and, in all likelihood, more important – reason for nineteenth-century *katorga*'s notoriety is that it provided the raw material for Fedor Dostoevskii's semi-autobiographical novel *Zapiski iz mertvogo doma* (*Notes from a Dead House*), which was published in 1861 and can be considered the foundational text of the Russian prison-writing genre.³³ Dostoevskii was arrested in 1849 for participation in a discussion circle hosted by the socialist Mikhail Petrashevskii and, after being subjected to a mock execution, spent four years in *krepostnaia katorga* near Omsk. Some sense of what this actually involved on a daily basis can be gleaned from a letter written to his brother Mikhail shortly after his release in 1854:

I first encountered penal labourers in Tobol'sk, and in Omsk I lived with them for four years. They're rough, violent, embittered people. Their hatred for the gentry knows no bounds, and they therefore received us with the utmost hostility, gloating over our woe. They would have eaten us alive, had they been allowed

³² For an excellent overview of post-1845 *katorga* see Gentes, *Exile, Murder and Madness*, pp. 180-216.

³³ F. M. Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v tridtsati tomakh* (Moscow-Leningrad: Nauka, 1974-1990) IV, pp. 5-232. On Dostoevskii's influence on the development of this genre see Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Stir of Liberation, 1860-1865* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), pp. 217-220.

[...] They always sensed that we were above them, although they knew nothing of our crime, since we ourselves never spoke of it. They therefore never understood us, nor we them, and so we had to endure all the vengeance and persecution that they reserved for the gentry. Our lives were utterly dreadful [...] The work was hard, although not always, and I often ran out of strength in bad weather, in the muck and in the terrible winter frosts [...] The summer stuffiness was intolerable, the winter cold unbearable. The barrack-room floors were rotted through and thick with dirt [...] We lived like herrings in a barrel.³⁴

The sense of marginalisation Dostoevskii felt amongst the ordinary criminals (*ugolovnye*), both as a minor nobleman and as a political offender, is instructive. For reasons we shall examine shortly, political exiles have traditionally dominated not only popular conceptions of Siberian exile but the historiography too. Yet even during the late imperial period, they rarely amounted to more than a miniscule percentage of Siberia's overall exile population. Prior to the 1905 revolution and the ensuing years of reaction, 'politicals' typically accounted for 1-2% of all exiles; by 1900, owing to the aforementioned increase in penal and administrative exile in the final decades of the century, they accounted for 0.5%.³⁵ During the years 1905-1912 the figure soared to around 10%, something that reflected both the widespread and extreme violence of that period and the collapsing ontological and practical distinction between political and ordinary crime.³⁶ Here it should also be stressed that although a sizeable number of

³⁴ F. M. Dostoevskii to M. M. Dostoevskii, 30 January-22 February 1854, *PSS XXVIII.i*, pp. 169-170.

³⁵ Margolis, *Tiur'ma i ssylka v imperatorskoi Rossii*, pp. 40-41.

³⁶ This issue is discussed further in Chapter VI. Daly, 'Criminal Punishment and Europeanization', p. 357 notes that around 50,000 people were exiled by administrative order on political grounds during the years 1906-1910 alone. However, as Petr Kropotkin observed at the time, local authorities often used the unrest as an excuse to dispose of people they would have exiled with impunity prior to the 1900 reforms, and so a significant proportion of these cases were in fact vagrants and recidivist criminals punished on trumped-up political grounds. See P. Kropotkin, *The Terror in Russia: An Appeal to the British Nation* (London: Methuen, 1909), pp. 41-44. See also N. N. Shcherbakov, 'Chislennost' i sostav politicheskikh ssyl'nykh

political exiles from the Decembrists onwards were sentenced to *katorga*, very few of them before 1905 actually performed hard labour – in this sense, the experiences of the first Decembrists to arrive at Nerchinsk, and those of Dostoevskii in Omsk, were rather atypical.³⁷ The main reason for this was simply that most revolutionaries during the nineteenth century were drawn from the gentry (*dvorianstvo*) and the non-noble educated classes (*raznochintsy*), and were thus unwilling to entertain any such prospect. Siberian prison officers were rarely inclined to press the issue, since most *katorga* sites were enormously overpopulated and the opportunity to offload new arrivals on others was gladly accepted.³⁸ In 1879, for instance, many of the revolutionary populists convicted in the previous year's infamous 'trial of the hundred and ninety-three' (*bol'shoi protsess*) arrived at Nerchinsk to begin their sentences only to be politely asked to go away and live in local villages instead.³⁹

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, political exile mainly served as a means of disposing with perceived pretenders to the throne, courtiers who had fallen out of favour and religious schismatics such as the notorious rebel-priest Avvakum Petrovich, who spent over a decade in Siberia during the mid-seventeenth century.⁴⁰ From the early nineteenth century onwards, it became an important means of struggle against the nascent revolutionary movement. Nonetheless, throughout the Nicholaevan era and the early

Sibiri 1907-1917 gg.' in *Ssyl'nye revoliutsionery v Sibiri*, ed. N. N. Shcherbakov (Irkutsk: Irkutskii gosudarstvennyi universitet, 1973), p. 207. I am grateful to Sarah Badcock for sending me a copy of this article.

³⁷ A number of Decembrists spent the first few months of their sentences performing actual penal labour in the Nerchinsk mines and nearby factories before their transfer to Chita in 1827. Although the other members of Petrashevskii's circle were sentenced to *katorga* along with Dostoevskii, most of them were sent not to Omsk but Nerchinsk, where they lived in private quarters within the prison grounds and were not subjected to the ordinary criminals' regime. A similar exception was made for Nikolai Chernyshevskii after his conviction and exile in 1864. See M. N. Gernet, *Istoriia tsarskoi tiur'my*, 5 vols (Moscow: Gos. izd-vo iuridicheskoi literatury, 1960-1963) II, pp. 172-176, 238-239, 293-294.

³⁸ Gentes, *Exile, Murder and Madness*, pp. 180-181.

³⁹ E. K. Breshko-Breshkovskaia, *Hidden Springs of the Russian Revolution* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1931), p. 191; L. E. Shishko, 'Iz vospominanii proshlogo' in *Pamiatii Leonida Emmanuilovicha Shishko*, ed. F. V. Volkhovskii (Paris: Izd-vo tsentral'nogo komiteta partii sotsialistov-revoliutsionerov, 1910), pp. 53-55.

⁴⁰ *The Life of the Archpriest Avvakum by Himself*, trans. Jane Harrison and Hope Mirrlees (London: Hogarth, 1924). Avvakum's case is discussed further in Chapter 2.

years of Alexander II's reign (1855-1881), Siberian exile was used sporadically and was generally reserved for high-profile cases. Most famously, over one hundred participants in the Decembrist revolt were sentenced to *katorga* in 1826, as were Petrashevskii's circle in 1849, many of the Polish insurrectionists of 1830 and 1863, and the radical publicist Nikolai Chernyshevskii in 1864.

From the late 1870s onwards, the use of exile as a political weapon accelerated dramatically as the revolutionary situation became increasingly serious and emergency legislation began to proliferate. In 1875, there had been 260 political exiles across the whole empire; by 1880, there were nearly 1200, of whom approximately 230 were in Siberia.⁴¹ Many of them were merely suspected of 'political unreliability' (*politicheskaia neblagonadezhnost'*) and accordingly banished by administrative order, a power routinely exercised by military and civil governors, the Interior Ministry (*Ministerstvo vnutrennykh del*, or MVD), the gendarmes of the Third Section (*Tret'e otdelenie*) and the Tsar himself by the beginning of the 1880s.⁴² This growing preference for the use of administrative exile in political cases largely resulted from a series of disastrous jury trials – most famously that of Vera Zasulich in April 1878, as well as the aforementioned *bol'shoi protsess* – in which the accused revolutionaries outright denied the legitimacy of the courts and used their testimony to condemn the authorities.⁴³ After Alexander II's assassination in March 1881, administrative exile became entrenched as a means of

⁴¹ Margolis, *Tiur'ma i ssylka v imperatorskoi Rossii*, p. 110.

⁴² P. A. Zaionchkovskii, *Krizis samoderzhavii na rubezhe 1870-1880-kh godov* (Moscow: Izd-vo Moskovskogo universiteta, 1964), pp. 182-186. See also Jonathan W. Daly, *Autocracy Under Siege: Security Police and Opposition in Russia, 1866-1905* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1998), pp. 17-33.

⁴³ Jonathan W. Daly, 'Political Crime in Late Imperial Russia', *Journal of Modern History* 74.1 (2002), pp. 76-78. In general, see N. A. Troitskii, *Narodnaia volia pered tsarskim sudom, 1880-1891* (Saratov: Izd-vo Saratovskogo universiteta, 1971).

struggle against the radical opposition. During the years 1881-1900, no fewer than 12,479 political suspects were banished in this way, 4,794 of them to Siberia.⁴⁴

The late nineteenth century also saw a substantial increase in nominal *katorga* sentences for political crimes, many of which were handed down by military rather than civil courts.⁴⁵ In the years 1861-1893, there were 403 such sentences, the vast majority of which came in the late 1870s and early 1880s; the peak years were 1878 and 1883, in which 117 and 34 political offenders were condemned to *katorga* respectively.⁴⁶ Such numbers, of course, constituted a very small part of the overall picture so far as political exiles were concerned. Nonetheless, revolutionaries who served hard labour terms (*politkatorzhane*) enjoyed a legendary reputation at the time and during the Soviet era, and to some extent became synonymous with both the iniquities of the Tsarist penal system and the revolutionary struggle in general.⁴⁷ It is certainly true that *politkatorzhane*, at least during the late nineteenth century, represented the revolutionary hardcore in microcosm. As Aleksandr Margolis points out, an above-average number of them – 18.4% during the 1870s and 28.7% in the years 1882-1893, as compared to 3-4% of all political cases – were professional revolutionaries, a somewhat arbitrary category mainly comprised of participants in the 1873 ‘movement to the people’ (*khozhdenie v narod*) and the leaders of the *Zemlia i volia* (Land and Liberty) and *Narodnaia volia* (People’s Will) groups. During the same period, 23.4% had had death sentences commuted to *katorga*,

⁴⁴ Margolis, *Tiur'ma i ssylka v imperatorskoi Rossii*, pp. 115-116. Zaionchkovskii, *Rossiiskoe samoderzhavie v kontse XIX stoletii* (Moscow: Izd-vo ‘Mysl’, 1970), p. 168 and *Krizis samoderzhavii*, p. 184, estimates a near-fourfold increase in the number of administrative exiles across the empire during the final decades of the nineteenth century, from 1,200 in 1880 to 4,113 in 1901. George Kennan thought there were approximately 400 political exiles of all types in Siberia during his visit in 1885-1886, which if true (based on Margolis’s 1880 figure of 230 exiles in Siberia) would confirm this approximate rate of increase. See Kennan, *Siberia and the Exile System II*, p. 458.

⁴⁵ Daly, ‘Political Crime in Late Imperial Russia’, p. 77.

⁴⁶ Margolis, *Tiur'ma i ssylka v imperatorskoi Rossii*, p. 184. These sentences were overwhelmingly connected with the *bol'shoi protsess* in the first instance and with Sergei Degaev’s betrayal of Vera Figner’s Kharkov underground circle in the second.

⁴⁷ See, for example, V. D. Vilenskii, *Politkatorzhane: katorga i ssylka v russkoi revoliutsii* (Moscow: Izd-vo politkatorzhan, 1925).

while 13.2% were originally administrative exiles re-assigned to *katorga* by regional military courts for having continued their revolutionary activities whilst in Siberia.⁴⁸

As noted earlier, political exile to Siberia reached its pre-revolutionary zenith in the decade following 1905. In general terms, the autocratic penal system exhibited more change than continuity during this period, and this was especially true of the situation concerning political offenders. As Badcock argues, the combination of a vastly more punitive state, the dawning era of mass politics and the consequently diverse socio-economic profile of political exiles all make this period difficult to analyse in terms of what went before.⁴⁹ Between 1907 and 1912, during which time there were approximately 30,000 political exiles of all types across the empire, over 6,000 *politkatorzhane* arrived in Siberia, with another 6,000 sent to the region by administrative order.⁵⁰ The elimination of the earlier numerical disparity between *katorga* and administrative exile reflects not only the dramatic expansion of the former in the aftermath of the 1900 reforms – the total number of *katorzhniki* across the empire increased from 6,123 in 1905 to 31,748 in 1915⁵¹ – but the newfound determination of the government to punish political offenders in a similar way to ordinary criminals. It has occasionally been argued that the final decade of autocratic rule in Russia, insofar as it was characterised by a dramatic upsurge in revolutionary violence and government repression, anticipated many features of the early Soviet period.⁵² This transitional phase was nowhere more evident than in the Siberian exile system.

⁴⁸ Margolis, *Tiur'ma i ssylka v imperatorskoi Rossii*, pp. 188-189.

⁴⁹ Badcock, *A Prison Without Walls?*, pp. 3-4.

⁵⁰ Shcherbakov, 'Chislennost' i sostav politicheskikh ssyl'nykh', pp. 212-215.

⁵¹ Badcock, *A Prison Without Walls?*, pp. 28-29. This also had the effect of dispersing new *katorzhniki* across the empire rather than concentrating them in Eastern Siberia, as had previously been the case. From 1907 onwards, several prisons in European Russia, including the hitherto-defunct Shlissel'burg fortress and Moscow's Butyrka transfer prison, were converted into temporary *katorga* 'centrals' in an attempt to cope with rising convict numbers. See Gernet, *Istoriia tsarskoi tiur'my V*, pp. 21-27, 252-257.

⁵² This argument is made in *Krov' po sovesti: terrorizm v Rossii. Dokumenty i biografii*, ed. O. V. Budnitskii (Rostov-on-Don: Izd-vo RGPU, 1994). Some specific continuities in penal practice are

A good deal has been written on the history of pre-revolutionary *katorga* and exile by Russian and Western historians alike. Nonetheless, the scholarship remains flawed in many respects. In the years following the revolution and civil war, numerous prison memoirs written by former revolutionaries were published in Soviet journals and party newspapers; one journal, *Katorga i ssylka (Hard Labour and Exile)*, was founded in 1921 for the sole purpose of documenting the history of political prison and exile.⁵³ This body of literature set the trend for the overwhelming majority of Soviet research on the subject, which painted an undifferentiated picture of autocratic brutality and focused almost without exception on the experiences of political prisoners. This shortcoming was closely connected to Soviet historians' teleological propensity for writing about the exile system (as about much else) exclusively in terms of the Marxist-Leninist dialectic, something that resulted in countless studies of Lenin's time in Siberia and equally innumerable attempts to demonstrate the influence of political exiles on the region's revolutionary development.⁵⁴ Deprived of access to Siberia's archives, Western researchers were in no position to challenge this consensus. Prior to 1991, few wrote on the subject, and those

highlighted by Anne Applebaum, *Gulag: A History of the Soviet Camps* (London: Penguin, 2004), pp. 15-18.

⁵³ *Katorga i ssylka* was the official journal of the All-Union Society of Former Political Hard Labour Convicts and Exile-Settlers (*Vsesoiuznoe obshchestvo byvshikh politkatorzhan i ssyl'noposelentsev*) and ran to 116 volumes in the years 1921-1935. See Mark Iunge, *Revoliutsionery na pensii: vsesoiuznoe obshchestvo politkatorzhan i ssyl'no-poselentsev, 1921-1935* (Moscow: AIRO-XXI, 2015).

⁵⁴ The most valuable studies produced by Soviet historians are *Politicheskie ssyl'nye v Sibiri*, ed. L. M. Goriushkin (Novosibirsk: Nauka, 1983) and the book series *Ssyl'nye revoliutsionery v Sibiri*, ed. N. N. Shcherbakov, 12 vols (Irkutsk: Izd-vo Irkutskogo universiteta, 1973-1991). M. Moskalev, *V. I. Lenin v Sibiri: istoricheskii ocherk v dokumentakh i vospominaniakh* (Moscow: Gospolizdat, 1957) and *V. I. Lenin i revoliutsionnoe podpol'e v Sibiri*, ed. V. M. Samosudov (Omsk: Omskoe knizhnoe izd-vo, 1983) are characteristic of the more explicitly Bolshevised scholarship.

who did – most notably Alan Wood – were obliged to depend almost entirely on published and secondary sources.⁵⁵

That the image of Siberian exile bequeathed by Soviet scholarship is fundamentally imbalanced and myopic has long been widely acknowledged. It is only since the collapse of communism, however, that historians have begun to undermine notions of a monolithic system of top-down state repression and produce a more realistic picture. At the time of writing, Andrew Gentes remains the only one to have attempted a general history of the exile system from its early-modern origins to the end of autocratic rule: two volumes (covering the periods between 1590-1822 and 1823-1861) have thus far emerged, with the status of the third and final volume currently unclear. Gentes' admirable efforts have recently been supplemented by those of Sarah Badcock and Daniel Beer, whose monographs deal with the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries respectively.⁵⁶ Mention should also be made of Aleksandr Margolis – the one Soviet historian of note to have studied the experiences of ordinary criminals under Tsarism – and of Pavel Kazarian, whose work on exiles in Yakutsk follows the conventions of Soviet historiography in focusing exclusively on political offenders but is nonetheless eminently readable and non-ideological.⁵⁷ Elsewhere, Gentes and Beer have used Siberian exile as a case study in the limitations of autocratic power, stressing the opportunities for resistance with which the system presented ordinary criminals and political offenders alike.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Alan Wood, 'Avvakum's Siberian Exile, 1653-1664' in *The Development of Siberia: People and Resources*, ed. Alan Wood and R. A. French (London: Macmillan, 1989), pp. 11-34 and 'Russia's Wild East: Exile, Vagrancy and Crime in Nineteenth-Century Siberia' in *The History of Siberia: From Russian Conquest to Revolution*, ed. Alan Wood (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 117-137.

⁵⁶ Badcock, *A Prison Without Walls?*; Daniel Beer, *The House of the Dead: Siberian Exile Under the Tsars* (London: Allen Lane, 2016).

⁵⁷ Margolis, *Tiur'ma i ssylka v imperatorskoi Rossii*; P. L. Kazarian, *Iakutiia v sisteme politicheskoi ssylki Rossii 1826-1917 gg* (Yakutsk: Sakhapoligrafizdat, 1998).

⁵⁸ Andrew A. Gentes, 'Vagabondage and the Tsarist Siberian Exile System: Power and Resistance in the Penal Landscape', *Central Asian Survey* 30.3-4 (2011), pp. 407-421; Daniel Beer, 'The Exile, the Patron, and the Pardon: The Voyage of the Dawn (1877) and the Politics of Punishment in an Age of Nationalism and Empire', *Kritika* 14.1 (2013), pp. 5-30 and 'Penal Deportation to Siberia and the Limits of State Power, 1801-81', *Kritika* 16.3 (2015), pp. 621-650.

Finally, scholars such as Bruce Adams and Jonathan Daly have attempted to place the nineteenth-century Tsarist penal system in comparative context, arguing that Russian carceral practices – far from being *sui generis* – were in essence no more brutal, repressive or inefficient than those of other European empires at the time.⁵⁹

Taken together, these studies represent a concerted and long-overdue attempt to demystify and demythologise both Siberian exile and the Tsarist penal system in general. Nonetheless, the fundamental question they raise – why Siberian exile has so often been seen internationally as a singularly draconian form of punishment – remains largely unanswered. Various historians do acknowledge in passing that the exile system had an extremely negative reputation amongst many Europeans and Americans from the late nineteenth century onwards, and generally attribute this to the propaganda produced by Kravchinskii, Petr Kropotkin and other Russian émigrés.⁶⁰ Likewise, a small number of studies have addressed the fascination of the nineteenth-century Anglo-American public with Siberian horror stories, variously relating the phenomenon to the foundational narratives of American liberalism and the dynamics of contemporary imperialism.⁶¹ Yet such accounts tell only half the story, since they generally assume the modern mythology of Siberian exile to have been solely a reflection of Western self-image, and thus consider neither the extent to which that mythology also had deep roots in Russian culture nor the ways in which this fact allowed for the construction and contestation of Russia's image

⁵⁹ Bruce Adams, *The Politics of Punishment: Prison Reform in Russia* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1996); Daly, 'Criminal Punishment and Europeanization'. It should be noted that although Daly does exonerate the Russian penal system of excessive cruelty and injustice, he acknowledges that it may indeed have been more arbitrary in dealing with political cases than other European states: see 'Political Crime in Late Imperial Russia', pp. 87-93.

⁶⁰ See, for instance, Adams, *The Politics of Punishment*, pp. 4-6; Badcock, *A Prison Without Walls?*, pp. 18-19; Senese, *S. M. Stepniak-Kravchinskii: The London Years*, pp. 91-94 and Keith Neilson, *Britain and the Last Tsar: British Policy and Russia, 1894-1917* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 90-95.

⁶¹ Frederick F. Travis, *George Kennan and the American-Russian Relationship, 1865-1924* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1990); Thomas M. Barrett, 'Thrills of Horror: Siberia and the American Melodramatic Imagination' in *The Siberian Saga: A History of Russia's Wild East*, ed. Eva-Maria Stolberg (Frankfurt-am-Main: Peter Lang, 2005), pp. 131-144 and Choi Chatterjee, 'Imperial Incarcerations: Ekaterina Breshko-Breshkovskaia, Vinayak Savarkar and the Original Sins of Modernity', *Slavic Review* 74.4 (2015), pp. 850-872.

on the international stage. In short, no comprehensive study of the modern myth of Siberian exile has yet been written, and this thesis aims first and foremost to meet this need.

The relative paucity of research on the topic is indicative of a much broader historiographical deficiency, for while it is widely acknowledged that Russians have traditionally constructed their own identity both in opposition to Europe and as an extension of it, the inverse proposition – that Russia itself has frequently provided Europeans and Americans with a ‘constitutive other’ – remains comparatively unexplored. This oversight is a curious one. In recent years, the unfettered access to provincial archives facilitated by the collapse of communism has led not only to a resurgence of borderland history amongst Russian specialists in the West but a vigorous debate on the value of postcolonial methodology – and, in particular, the applicability of Edward Said’s notion of ‘orientalism’ – in studying Russia’s imperial situation.⁶² Yet while this debate has remained predominantly focused on Russia and her own colonial ‘others’, scholars elsewhere in the field of Slavic studies have successfully utilised many of Said’s ideas in exploring the centrality of the ‘second world’ to Western conceptions of the self. Larry Wolff and Maria Todorova have produced compelling accounts of the quasi-orientalist discourses through which Europeans and Americans have described, provincialised and othered Eastern Europe and the Balkans, while others such as Milica Bakić-Hayden and Timothy Garton-Ash have discussed the ways in which the post-

⁶² Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York, NY: Random House, 1978). The recent literature is extensive. See Yuri Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors: Russia and the Small Peoples of the North* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994); Susan Layton, *Russian Literature and Empire: Conquest of the Caucasus from Pushkin to Tolstoy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); *Russia’s Orient: Imperial Borderlands and Peoples, 1700-1917*, ed. Daniel R. Brower and Edward J. Lazzerini (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997); Robert P. Geraci, *Window on the East: National and Imperial Identities in Late Tsarist Russia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001); David Chioni Moore, ‘Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet? Toward a Global Postcolonial Critique’, *PMLA* 116.1 (2001), pp. 111-128; Vera Tolz, ‘Orientalism, Nationalism and Ethnic Diversity in Late Imperial Russia’, *Historical Journal* 48.1 (2005), pp. 127-150, David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Russian Orientalism: Asia in the Russian Mind from Peter the Great to the Emigration* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010) and Alexander Etkind, *Internal Colonization: Russia’s Imperial Experience* (Cambridge: Polity, 2011).

communist intelligentsias of Eastern and Central Europe tend themselves to deploy such discourses in staking their claims to European identity.⁶³ Western historians of Russia, however, have been reluctant to follow suit. The reasons for this are not altogether clear. One factor may be an understandable sensitivity towards Said's critique of corporatised academia in the service of political power, although another is undoubtedly the difficulty of conceptualising Russia – historically a vast imperial power in its own right – within intellectual frameworks originally designed to recover the lost voices of Europe's colonial subalterns.⁶⁴

The problem of preserving Russia's historical specificities while accounting for its undoubted impact on modern Western self-image has led some scholars to alight upon the theme of liminality, locating Russia somewhere between traditional conceptions of the occidental self and oriental other. Two studies deserve particular mention. Firstly, Ezequiel Adamovsky's study of 'euro-orientalism', which focuses on French liberals' fascination with Russia during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, shows the latter as having been defined less in terms of outright difference than as a liminal zone.⁶⁵ Adamovsky argues that Russia, perceived by Westerners as 'neither fully Asiatic nor sufficiently European, neither entirely civilised nor completely barbarous', was

⁶³ Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994); Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press USA, 1997); Milica Bakić-Hayden and Robert Hayden, 'Orientalist Variations on the Theme 'Balkans' in Symbolic Geography in Recent Yugoslav Cultural Politics', *Slavic Review* 51.1 (1992), pp. 1-15; Milica Bakić-Hayden, 'Nesting Orientalisms: The Case of Former Yugoslavia', *Slavic Review* 54.4 (1995), pp. 917-931; Timothy Garton-Ash, 'Does Central Europe Exist?' in idem., *The Uses of Adversity* (Cambridge: Granta, 1989), pp. 161-191 and 'Mitteleuropa', *Daedalus* 119.1 (1990), pp. 1-21.

⁶⁴ Adeeb Khalid, Nathaniel Knight and Maria Todorova, 'Russian History and the Debate over Orientalism' et al, *Kritika* 1.4 (2000), pp. 691-727. Although various studies have addressed Western perceptions of Russia in general terms, they have tended either to adopt overly descriptive approaches or to function more as polemical refutations of clichés and misconceptions about Russia than as analyses of Russia's role as a mirror on the Western self. See, for instance, Martin Malia, *Russia Under Western Eyes: From the Bronze Horseman to the Lenin Mausoleum* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999). Perhaps unsurprisingly, more has been written on Russian perceptions of the West. See David Hecht, *Russian Radicals Look to America, 1825-1894* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1947) and Max M. Laserson, *The American Impact on Russia, Diplomatic and Ideological* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1950).

⁶⁵ Ezequiel Adamovsky, *Euro-Orientalism: Liberal Ideology and the Image of Russia in France, c. 1740-1880* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2006).

conceptualised dualistically as both the ‘space of the possible’ – a modernising European nation receptive to the crowning glories of the French enlightenment – and as the ‘land of absence’, an irredeemably barbarous wasteland.⁶⁶ Secondly, David Foglesong has recently demonstrated that American efforts to liberate and remake Russia in the image of the United States from the late nineteenth century to the present day were closely related to the ease with which Russia could be both included in and excluded from the ambit of the civilised world in quick succession.⁶⁷

Herein lies Siberia’s significance for this thesis. If Russia as a whole has traditionally represented a liminal zone in the eyes of Westerners, its vast Asiatic expanses have long held a comparable status for Russians themselves. Siberia has never had a geographically concrete existence within the Russian state: the region which appears on today’s map does not exactly match that of the late imperial period, bears only a passing resemblance to the *Sibirskoe tsarstvo* of the eighteenth century and none whatsoever to the comparatively small territory on the banks of the Irtysh river conquered by Ermak in the 1580s.⁶⁸ As a Russian colony, moreover, Siberia has often been utilised in conflicting and contradictory ways. From the early modern period onwards, its status as an exile destination sat uncomfortably alongside both repeated attempts to integrate it with the European metropolis and its reputation as a refuge for those fleeing serfdom – in the words of the nineteenth-century regionalist Nikolai Iadrintsev, an ‘escape route from disorder, trouble and oppression’.⁶⁹ Consequently, Siberianists have long been at pains to relate the spatial and socio-political ambiguities of the region’s history to its persistent depiction in Russian culture as not just the nation’s heart of darkness, a place of exile and

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 19, 36.

⁶⁷ David S. Foglesong, *The American Mission and the Evil Empire: The Crusade for a ‘Free Russia’ since 1881* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

⁶⁸ Svatikov, *Rossiia i Sibir’*, pp. 1-23; Emma Widdis, ‘Russia as Space’ in *National Identity in Russian Culture*, ed. Simon Franklin and Emma Widdis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 30-49.

⁶⁹ Iadrintsev, *Sibir’ kak koloniia*, p. 190. See in general Mark Bassin, ‘Inventing Siberia: Visions of the Russian East in the Early Nineteenth Century’, *American Historical Review* 96.3 (1991), pp. 763-794.

punishment, but as an invigorating and transformative land of freedom and rebirth.⁷⁰ During the nineteenth century, this liminal image was central to the way in which Russia's revolutionaries envisaged Siberia as a place of both captivity and freedom and, because of this, gradually gained currency in the West through émigré contacts too. For this reason, the construction of Siberia's image within and beyond Russia's borders during the pre-revolutionary period offers the historian a simultaneous insight into processes of both Russian and Western identity-making in close proximity.

The aim of this thesis, in essence, is to weave together a number of threads – the histories of the Russian revolutionary movement, of Western perceptions of Russia and of Russia's relationship with the West – and explore how they intersected through the transnational fashioning of Siberia's carceral mythology. Although it is written primarily from the perspective of a cultural historian, it is intended neither as a broad-based cultural history of Siberian exile nor as a survey of everything written by foreigners on the subject during the period in question. Beyond this introduction, no attempt is made to offset Siberia's carceral mythology against the system as it functioned in practice. My objective is not to draw attention to misconceptions and inaccuracies, but rather to show how representations of Siberian exile related to and underpinned broader discourses about Russian and Western identity. I have relied predominantly upon published sources, and in particular have made extensive use of contemporary newspapers, periodicals and

⁷⁰ *Between Heaven and Hell: The Myth of Siberia in Russian Culture*, ed. Galya Diment and Yuri Slezkine (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 1993). It might be argued that these shifting representations of Siberia, and the recurrent image of the region as a type of purgatory, are a manifestation of the 'binary models' identified by Iurii Lotman and Boris Uspenskii as central to Russian culture: see Ju. M. Lotman and B. A. Uspenskij, 'The Role of Dual Models in the Dynamics of Russian Culture (Up to the End of the Eighteenth Century)' in idem., *The Semiotics of Russian Culture*, ed. Ann Shukman (Ann Arbor, MI: Michigan Slavic Contributions, 1984), pp. 3-35.

pamphlets, journalistic exposés of Siberian exile, political prisoners' memoirs and the letters of Russian émigrés. Throughout the latter half of the thesis, I have also drawn upon archival materials, many of them hitherto unpublished.

My primary focus throughout, for two reasons, is on Anglo-Russian contacts. The first reason for this is that London was, for all intents and purposes, the most important European hub of the Russian revolutionary emigration during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For several decades, successive British governments' unparalleled tolerance of – if not affection for – political refugees from the continent drew all manner of revolutionary outcasts, thinkers, writers and agitators to the banks of the Thames.⁷¹ Few national constituencies did more to shape this extraordinary milieu than the Russians. In the 1850s and 1860s, Aleksandr Gertsen and Nikolai Ogarev based their Free Russian Press (*Vol'naiia russkaia tipografiia*) in Bloomsbury, as Petr Lavrov did his influential journal *Vpered!* (*Forward!*) in the 1870s. Around the turn of the century, Lenin, Vera Zasulich and other Social Democrats published the newspaper *Iskra* (*The Spark*) in London and held several party conferences there.⁷²

The London emigration was thus distinguished from other important Russian émigré colonies on the continent – most notably those in Paris and Geneva – by not only

⁷¹ The classic account is Bernard Porter, *The Refugee Question in Mid-Victorian Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979). See also *Exiles from European Revolutions: Refugees in Mid-Victorian England*, ed. Sabine Freitag (New York, NY: Berghahn, 2003).

⁷² *From the Other Shore: Russian Political Emigrants in Britain, 1880-1917*, ed. John Slatter (London: Routledge, 1984) is a valuable collection of essays on the topic. See also N. V. Ivanova, 'Iz istorii russko-angliiskikh kul'turnykh svyazei v 80-90 gg. XIX veka', *Uchenye zapiski Kurskogo gosudarstvennogo pedagogicheskogo instituta* xxvi (1966), pp. 142-163 and 'Russkaia revoliutsionnaia emigratsiia i razvitie russko-angliiskikh obshchestvennykh svyazei v 80-90-e gody XIX veka', *Uchenye zapiski Kurskogo gosudarstvennogo pedagogicheskogo instituta* xliii (1967), pp. 81-113; Michael G. Hamburg, 'The London Emigration and the Russian Liberation Movement: The Problem of Unity, 1889-1897', *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 25.3 (1977), pp. 321-339; David Saunders, 'Vladimir Burtsev and the Russian Revolutionary Emigration, 1888-1905', *European Studies Review* 13 (1983), pp. 39-62 and Robert Service, 'Russian Marxism and its London Colony Before the October 1917 Revolution', *Slavonic and East European Review* 88.1-2 (2010), pp. 359-376. For the Russian emigration's influence on British socialism see Walter Kendall, *The Revolutionary Movement in Britain 1900-21: The Origins of British Communism* (London: Wiedenfeld & Nicolson, 1969), pp. 77-82. For a comprehensive bibliography of Russian émigré publishing ventures in London prior to 1917 see John Slatter, 'The Russian Émigré Press in Britain, 1853-1917', *Slavonic and East European Review* 73.4 (1995), pp. 716-747.

its longevity, but the stature of many of the individual émigrés it attracted. Yet it was also distinguished from its continental counterparts by its energetic cultivation of local public opinion, and this is my second reason for focusing on Anglo-Russian contacts. While most Russian refugees who settled in London prior to 1917 undoubtedly led the introverted, cliquish lives normally associated with political émigrés, many others strove vigorously to enlist the sympathies of their British hosts in support of the revolutionary cause, and did so with no little success. The role played by Kravchinskii and the émigré-led Society of Friends of Russian Freedom (SFRF) during the 1880s and 1890s has been well documented.⁷³ Others, such as the famous anarchist Petr Kropotkin and the populist stalwart Feliks Volkhovskii, took great care to maintain visible public profiles while in emigration,⁷⁴ while Gertsen, decades earlier, was more closely engaged with the British public than has sometimes been acknowledged.⁷⁵ Well into the twentieth century and the final years of autocratic rule in Russia, London continued to attract and guarantee an audience for high-profile revolutionaries of all parties and none. It was therefore primarily on the London stage, so to speak, that the Russian revolution first came to international attention.

It should be noted, however, that the term ‘Anglo-Russian’ as I use it here refers not just to Britain, but to the Anglosphere in general and American contacts in particular. It is not an exaggeration to say that many turn of the century American progressives overwhelmingly shared the worldview and moral certainties of their Victorian counterparts: they consumed the same news, read the same publications, inhabited largely

⁷³ Barry Hollingsworth, ‘The Society of Friends of Russian Freedom: English Liberals and Russian Socialists, 1890-1917’, *Oxford Slavonic Papers* 3 (1970), pp. 45-64; Ron Grant, ‘The Society of Friends of Russian Freedom 1890-1917: A Case Study in Internationalism’, *Journal of the Scottish Labour History Society* 3 (1970), pp. 3-24.

⁷⁴ Haia Shpayer-Makov, ‘The Reception of Peter Kropotkin in Britain, 1886-1917’, *Albion* 19.3 (1987), pp. 373-390; John Slatter, ‘The Correspondence of P. A. Kropotkin as Historical Source Material’, *Slavonic and East European Review* 72.2 (1994), pp. 277-288 and Donald Senese, ‘Felix Volkhovskii in London, 1890-1914’ in *From the Other Shore*, pp. 67-78.

⁷⁵ Monica Partridge, ‘Alexander Herzen and the English Press’, *Slavonic and East European Review* 36.87 (1958), pp. 453-470.

the same socio-cultural universe and, as a result, responded to matters Russian in very much the same way. This point, moreover, was not lost on the Russian émigrés primarily responsible for publicising tales of Siberian horrors overseas. Although far fewer Russians emigrated to the United States than to Europe for obvious geographical reasons, Kravchinskii, Volkhovskii, Egor Lazarev and other émigrés based in London often wrote for the American press and visited the United States to conduct their propaganda campaigns. Conversely, other revolutionary celebrities more explicitly associated with the United States – most notably Ekaterina Breshko-Breshkovskaia, the self-styled ‘grandmother of the revolution’ – received considerable publicity in Britain as well. It would therefore be extremely problematic to exclude American contacts from our discussion. One cannot, for instance, discuss British perceptions of Siberia without reference to the pioneering American journalist and George Kennan, whose 1887-1889 exposé of the exile system created an international sensation.

The structure of my argument is broadly chronological and effectively divided into two halves, with the first two chapters outlining the respective Russian and Anglo-American narratives underpinning Siberia’s carceral mythology and the latter two exploring the intersection of these narratives around the turn of the nineteenth century. Chapter 2 traces the development of Siberia’s image in Russian revolutionary literature during the period 1825-1873, and illustrates the ways in which a variety of radical writers and publicists – some of whom were exiled to Siberia, and some of whom were not – adapted the ‘behavioural texts’ bequeathed by the Decembrist exiles of 1826 to articulate not only their own revolutionary identities, but their differing visions of Russia’s post-autocratic future. Chapter 3, in turn, reveals the contemporaneous existence of a parallel and superficially similar discourse in Victorian Britain, in which representations of Siberian exile played a crucial role in the prevailing liberal critique of Russia. Seen as

synonymous both with the iniquities of autocratic rule and, by virtue of its close identification with the Polish national cause, with the ideals of patriotism and freedom, Siberia was depicted by Britons and Polish émigré propagandists alike as a battleground upon which the forces of civilisation confronted the barbarism of the Russian autocracy and contested Russia's future as a European (or non-European) nation.

In the late 1880s and early 1890s, these two Siberian narratives intersected when Russian revolutionary émigrés in London, working closely with the aforementioned George Kennan, began to publicise dramatic tales of political exiles' mistreatment in Siberian captivity as a means of attracting overseas support for their cause. The ensuing transnational campaign against the exile system, partially orchestrated from Siberia itself and most active in Britain and the United States, forms the subject of Chapter 4. During this period, I argue, the façade of common cause between Russia's revolutionaries and their overseas allies resulting from the shared preoccupation with Siberian exile served to conceal serious contradictions in how the revolutionary movement was understood within and beyond Russia's borders. As Anglo-American progressives projected themselves upon the malleable figure of the Siberian martyr-hero, thereby reducing the revolutionary movement to an anodyne struggle for liberty, so Russian émigrés translated and repurposed Western writing about Siberia to serve their own distinct political and ideological priorities. These tensions are further illustrated in Chapter 6, which focuses on the international reception afforded to Russian revolutionary celebrities during the final years of autocratic rule and explores the ways in which high-profile political prisoners such as Breshkovskaia and Vera Figner were not only lionised in Britain and America, but sanitised as moderate advocates for constitutional reform and responsible government. In sum, I demonstrate that the transnationalisation of revolutionary

martyrologies allowed Russians and Westerners alike to contest both the legacies of individual revolutionaries and the meaning of the revolution as a whole.

One proviso is necessary here, lest the reader think I have simply omitted or forgotten Chapter 5. For obvious reasons, attempts by Russian political émigrés to exert pressure on the autocracy by way of overseas propaganda campaigns generally coincided with periods of disarray and defeat in the history of the revolutionary movement. As a result, the transnational campaigns against the Siberian exile system discussed in this thesis essentially took place in two waves: one in the years between the defeat of *Narodnaia volia* in the mid-1880s and the revolutionary resurgence of the following decade, the other during the period immediately following the failure of the 1905 revolution. I have discussed these periods in Chapters 4 and 6 respectively, and between them have included a short overview of developments in the history of the revolutionary movement and of shifting Western perceptions of Siberia during the years 1896-1904. I have done this not only for reasons of chronological consistency, but to briefly illustrate the fact that Western representations of Siberia were neither exclusively nor necessarily pejorative. On the contrary, Siberia's image always reflected perceptions of Russia generally: when Russia was seen less as a backward despotism than a modernising European empire, Siberia duly appeared not as a vast prison camp but a land of opportunity and prosperity.

The events of 1917 represent a natural end point for our discussion. The Soviet era ushered in a wholly new political and ideological context for Western perceptions of Russia, a new chapter in the history of the Russian emigration and, most crucially, a penal regime that – although it would eventually rank second only to the Holocaust amongst the horrors of the modern era – remained substantially hidden from international view until

the latter half of the twentieth century.⁷⁶ All these factors place Soviet continuities beyond our remit. In one respect, however, this thesis does take a long view. As will become clear, the chapters that follow relate not only the origin story of Siberia's modern image as a vast natural prison but, in a very real sense, the origin story of the latter-day Russian dissident. In the mythologised figure of the heroic revolutionary of the nineteenth century, we can trace the unmistakable outline of this stock modern character, endlessly fated to carry the West's nebulous dreams of a 'free Russia'.

⁷⁶ Although many Gulag memoirs were published overseas from the 1920s onwards, it was not until the appearance of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *Odin den' Ivana Denisovicha* (*One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*) in English translation in 1963 and his multi-volume study *Arkhipelag Gulag* (*The Gulag Archipelago*) in French translation ten years later that the Soviet camp regime became a topic of international debate. See Applebaum, *Gulag*, pp. 19-22; Denis Kozlov, *The Readers of Novyi Mir: Coming to Terms with the Stalinist Past* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), pp. 209-238; Jan Plamper, 'Foucault's Gulag', *Kritika* 3.2 (2002), pp. 255-280; Claude Durand, 'Le choc Soljénitsyne', *L'Histoire* 223 (1998), 66-68 and Pierre Grémion, 'Mai 68 et le choc de Goulag', *Esprit* 263.5 (2000), pp. 41-46. See also Sarah J. Young's extensive bibliography of Gulag memoirs, collated online at <http://sarahjyoung.com/site/gulag-bibliography/> (accessed 10/09/2016).

2. Siberia and the Russian revolutionary movement, 1825-1873

Ему судьба готовила
 Путь славный, имя громкое
 Народного заступника,
 Чахотку и Сибирь.

[Fate prepared a glorious path: great renown as a defender of the people, consumption and Siberia.]

- Nikolai Nekrasov¹

During the century prior to the revolutions of 1917, Siberian exile formed a crucial part of many Russian revolutionaries' identity, both real and imagined. At face value, this may seem peculiar, given that – as we have seen – Siberia was neither exclusively a penal colony nor the only part of the Russian Empire to which exiles were sent, and political offenders never accounted for more than a small fraction of the region's overall exile population. Nonetheless, the name, imagery and symbolism of Siberia became a fixture in the oral and literary traditions of the radical intelligentsia. Throughout the long nineteenth century, revolutionary letters, memoirs and publicistic works consistently portrayed Siberia as a synecdoche not just of the Russian penal system, but of the revolutionary struggle in general, and framed political exile as a rite of passage for aspiring revolutionaries. Some regarded a spell in Siberia as the mark of a true revolutionary: one influential radical of the late nineteenth century, Vladimir Burtsev, wrote that 'having just

¹ N. A. Nekrasov, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem*, ed. V. E. Evgen'ev-Maksimov, A. M. Egolin and K. I. Chukovskii, 12 vols (Moscow: Gos. izd-vo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1948-1953) III, p. 386.

escaped from Siberia, nobody could accuse me of being a reactionary or an enemy of the revolution'.² Numerous revolutionaries who endured Siberian exile and hard labour contributed to a body of memoir literature on the subject that remains unrivalled for scale and depth in the annals of global prison writing and which made Siberia a byword for political oppression, martyrdom and sacrifice both within and beyond Russia's borders.³ 'For most political activists,' one scholar has recently concluded, 'prison and exile were a must.'⁴

The significance ascribed to Siberian exile by Russia's revolutionaries was, in essence, a reification of the liminal space occupied by the region in relation to Russian society and culture generally since the time of Ermak's conquest. Both contiguous with and largely unknown to the metropolis, Siberia – as we have already noted – had traditionally been depicted as part heaven and part hell, an object of fantasy, terror and imaginative excess upon which Russians projected themselves. By the nineteenth century, this bifurcated image had crystallised into a distinct 'Siberian theme' in Russian literature, with the region's topos portrayed as the intermediate stage of an initiation rite,

² V. L. Burtsev, *Bor'ba za svobodnuiu Rossiiu: moi vospominaniia, 1882-1924 gg*, ed. T. L. Panteleeva (St Petersburg: Izd-vo N. I. Novikova, 2012), p. 53.

³ Many examples of this truly enormous oeuvre, which spans the entire history of the revolutionary movement, are cited individually throughout this thesis. The modern origins of political prison and exile writing in Russia are traceable to the Decembrists' memoirs, which were first published by Aleksandr Gertsen during his London émigré period: see *Zapiski dekabristov*, ed. A. I. Gertsen (London: Vol'naia russkaia tipografiia, 1862-1863), a collection featuring the reminiscences of Trubetskoi, Iakushkin and Pushchin. During the late imperial period, other examples were published both overseas and, after the 1906 press reforms, in Russia itself: see, for example, Petr Kropotkin, *In Russian and French Prisons* (London: Ward & Downey, 1887), L. G. Deich, *Shestnadsat' let v Sibiri* (St Petersburg: Izd-vo N. Glagoleva, 1906) and V. G. Korolenko, *Istoriia moego sovremennika*, 2 vols (St Petersburg: Izd-vo vrozozhdenie, 1909). The vast majority of revolutionaries' carceral memoirs, however, were written and published during the early Soviet period under the auspices of the aforementioned All-Union Society of Former Political Hard Labour Convicts and Exile-Settlers, which was founded in the early 1920s with the aim of documenting the history of the pre-revolutionary prison and exile system. See, for instance, *Na zhenskoi katorge: sbornik vospominanii*, ed. V. N. Figner (Moscow: Izd-vo politkatorzhan, 1930) and *Desiat' let, 1921-1931: sbornik statei i vospominanii*, ed. L. Starr, V. Pleskov and G. Kramarov (Moscow: Izd-vo politkatorzhan, 1931). While numerous such memoirs were published in *Katorga i ssylka*, a number of academic and party journals also devoted considerable effort to publishing prison literature during this period, notably *Krasnyi arkhiv* (1922-1941) and *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia* (1921-1941). Further examples of the genre written by anti-Bolshevik socialist émigrés, such as V. M. Zenzinov, *Iz zhizni revoliutsionera* (Paris: Tipografiia Irirakhovskogo, 1919), pp. 24-37 and E. E. Lazarev, *Moia zhizn': vospominaniia, stat'i, pis'ma, materialy* (Prague: Tipografiia Legiografiia, 1935), continued to be published overseas for many years.

⁴ Daly, 'Political Crime in Late Imperial Russia', p. 93.

a state of death holding forth the possibility of rebirth.⁵ ‘Life on the banks of the Ienisei began with a groan’, Anton Chekhov wrote in 1890, ‘and will end with such prowess as we can’t even dream of.’⁶ The implications of this literary trope for the nascent cult of the revolutionary hero were obvious to radical propagandists from an early stage. Much has recently been written on the hereditary ‘behavioural texts’ of the Russian revolutionary movement, with a succession of scholars demonstrating the extent to which many revolutionaries’ actions closely conformed to idealised literary models.⁷ In this chapter, I argue that the notion, deeply engrained in Russian culture since Muscovite times, of Siberia as a liminal zone – a land of both captivity and freedom, simultaneously part of and separate from Russia as a whole – gave rise to a consistent and broadly coherent ‘Siberian text’ in the revolutionary culture of the nineteenth century.⁸

Confining my discussion to what one might term the formative decades of the Russian revolutionary movement – that is, from the liberal-democratic gentry of the early Nicholaevan era to the *raznochintsy* of the 1870s – I advance three central arguments. Firstly, I demonstrate that the notion of Siberia as a liminal space was politicised by the

⁵ Valerii Tiupa, ‘The Mythologeme of Siberia: On the Concept of a Siberian Motif in Russian Literature’, trans. Elena McDonnell, *Orbis Litterarum* 61.6 (2006), pp. 443–460.

⁶ A. P. Chekhov, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v tridtsati tomakh* (Moscow: Nauka, 1974-1983) XIV-XV, p. 35.

⁷ The first and undoubtedly most important study of this type is Ju. M. Lotman, ‘The Decembrist in Everyday Life’ in *The Semiotics of Russian Culture*, pp. 71-123. Various scholars have subsequently developed Lotman’s approach: see Rufus W. Mathewson, *The Positive Hero in Russian Literature* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1958); Sally A. Boniece, ‘The Spiridonova Case, 1906: Terror, Myth, and Martyrdom’, *Kritika* 4.3 (2003), pp. 571-606 and Lynn Ellen Patyk, ‘Remembering “The Terrorism”: Sergei Stepniak-Kravchinskii’s Underground Russia’, *Slavic Review* 68.4 (2009), pp. 758-781. Most recently, Daniel Beer, ‘Decembrists, Rebels, and Martyrs in Siberian Exile: The “Zerentui Conspiracy” of 1828 and the Fashioning of a Revolutionary Genealogy’, *Slavic Review* 72.3 (2013), pp. 528-551, takes a similar approach to the study of the Siberian exile system, but focuses on one particular case study. In this chapter, by contrast, I trace the genesis, development and general outline of the revolutionary ‘Siberian text’.

⁸ My focus is essentially on what Marina Mogil’ner describes as ‘Underground Russia’, a broad cross-section of the Russian intelligentsia that extended from professional revolutionaries and members of left-wing political organisations to radical writers and publicists and which achieved internal coherence through its shared opposition to the legal state. Although Mogil’ner’s chronology postdates that of this chapter, extending from the early 1880s to the immediate aftermath of the 1905 revolution, her conceptual framework seems equally applicable to the earlier period. See Marina Mogil’ner, *Mifologija podpol’nogo cheloveka: radikal’nyi mikrokozmos v Rossii nachala XX veka kak predmet semioticheskogo analiza* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 1999).

Decembrists' exile in 1826. After the Decembrists, Siberia was seen, on the one hand, as a place of punishment and injustice, which could be shown to undermine the legitimacy of autocratic rule. On the other, it presented opportunities for protest, a stage for the performance of heroic deeds and defiance in the face of government oppression, and a *tabula rasa* upon which revolutionaries – banished and otherwise – could inscribe their hopes and dreams for Russia's future. Secondly, I show that although these tropes proved remarkably enduring, they were also eminently flexible, with later revolutionary writers and propagandists such as Aleksandr Gertsen, Mikhail Bakunin and Nikolai Nekrasov regularly reworking Siberia's image in accordance with their own political priorities. Thirdly, I argue that both sides of the region's image were, from the perspective of the revolutionary movement, mutually reinforcing and largely inseparable: the more Siberia was used as a destination for political exiles throughout the nineteenth century, the more it was perceived as a transformative frontier upon which revolutionary heroes were born and Russia itself renewed.

2.1. Between captivity and freedom: the Decembrists in Siberia

The essential features of Siberia's literary topos were firmly established in Russia by the beginning of the nineteenth century. For most educated Russians of the time, Siberia was first and foremost a place of exile, and was usually seen as a barren wilderness. The decline of the region's lucrative fur trade during the final decades of the eighteenth century largely deprived it of its former imperial prestige and economic significance, while years of exploration and research by Russian navigators, adventurers, scientists and ethnographers promoted it from the status of outright *terra incognita* to that of an

uncivilised and inhospitable backwater.⁹ As the writer Ivan Goncharov, who travelled across Siberia in 1852, put it:

An educated man can't do anything in these primitive conditions. He would have to be a true poet to enjoy a thousand miles of dreary silence, or be a savage himself to think of these mountains, rocks and trees as the furnishings of his home, regard the bears as his comrades and the game as his sustenance.¹⁰

With Siberia thus seen as an essentially foreign land, Russian writers were free to repurpose it as a stage for triumphs of human endeavour, developing a distinctive 'poetic formula' typical of early nineteenth-century romanticism in which heroic protagonists found themselves exiled to Siberia and confronted with a harsh climate and unforgiving natural environment.¹¹ The following lines from 'Voinarovskii', a historical epic published in 1824 by the poet and future Decembrist leader Kondratii Ryleev, are fairly representative:

Никто страны сей безотрадной,
 Обширной узников тюрьмы,
 Не посетит, боясь зимы
 И продолжительной, и хладной.
 Однообразно дни ведет
 Якутска житель одичалый;

⁹ Bassin, 'Inventing Siberia', pp. 767-775; L. K. Chukovskaia, *Dekabristy: issledovateli Sibiri* (Moscow: Geografiz, 1951), p. 27.

¹⁰ I. A. Goncharov, *Fregat 'Pallada'*, 2 vols (Moscow: Gos. izd-vo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1957) II, p. 338.

¹¹ M. K. Azadovskii, 'Poetika giblogo mesta: iz istorii sibirskogo peizazha v russkoi literature' in idem., *Ocherki literatury i kul'tury Sibiri* (Irkutsk: OGIZ, 1947), pp. 165-200.

Лишь раз или дважды в круглый год,
 С толпой преступников усталой,
 Дружина воинов придет [...]

[Nobody will visit this dismal land, this vast prison, fearful of the long, cold winter. The native inhabitant of Iakutsk passes his days monotonously; the Cossacks arrive with a party of weary criminals but once or twice a year.]¹²

This romantic topos, however, was overlain with political meaning. Because of its carceral associations, Siberia often adorned and provided a backdrop to expressions of political dissent in the literature of the early nineteenth century. In 1824, Aleksandr Pushkin composed an imagined conversation with Alexander I in which he found himself banished to Siberia for writing revolutionary poetry.¹³ Similarly, the writer Pavel Katenin, after being expelled from government service in 1820, wrote to a friend that he had been exiled ‘not far from Siberia’ – by which he meant the town of Kostroma, near Moscow.¹⁴ In Ryleev’s poetry, the Siberian wilderness provides a setting for feats of civic virtue and amplifies the rhetoric of political opposition. The eponymous hero of ‘Voinarovskii’, a fictionalised version of a Ukrainian Cossack who rebelled against Russian authority in 1708, finds himself ‘banished to the distant snows for an affair of honour and fatherland’.¹⁵ Another of Ryleev’s protagonists, the eighteenth-century memoirist Nataliia Dolgorukova, is seen following her husband into Siberian exile, forgetting ‘her native

¹² K. F. Ryleev, *Sochineniia*, ed. S. A. Fomichov (Leningrad: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1987), p. 168.

¹³ A. S. Pushkin, ‘Vooobrazaemyi razgovor s Aleksandrom pervym’, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 10-kh tomakh*, ed. D. D. Blagoi (Leningrad: Nauka, 1977-1979) VIII, pp. 51-52.

¹⁴ Lotman, ‘The Decembrist in Everyday Life’, p. 86.

¹⁵ Ryleev, *Sochineniia*, p. 174.

home, wealth, honour and fame to share the Siberian cold with him, and to experience the vicissitudes of fate'.¹⁶

Such political allusions amounted to little in themselves and, in any case, were hardly out of kilter with the moral profile of the typical Byronic hero. Nonetheless, so far as Siberia was concerned, they set an important precedent: after the events of 14 December 1825, both the Decembrists and their contemporaries exploited the region's extant literary topos to proclaim a specifically revolutionary message. The facts of the Decembrist insurrection are familiar, but may be briefly recapped here.¹⁷ In the midst of a succession crisis precipitated by the sudden death of Alexander I and the lack of a clear heir to the throne, a cohort of young officers of liberal political persuasion marched into the centre of Petersburg at the head of several thousand elite troops and refused to swear allegiance to the new tsar, Nicholas I, demanding instead the accession of his brother

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 142. On the historical Dolgorukova (Dolgorukaia) see *Svoeruchnye zapiski kniagini Natalii Borisovny Dolgorukoi, docheri g. Fel'dmarshala Borisa Petrovicha Sheremeteva* (St Petersburg: Izd-vo liubitelei drevnei pis'mennosti, 1913).

¹⁷ The literature on the Decembrists is extensive. General overviews may be found in Anatole Mazour, *The First Russian Revolution, 1825* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1937) and Marc Raeff, *The Decembrist Movement* (Englewood, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1966). Scholarly interpretations of the Decembrists have shifted considerably in the years since the collapse of communism. Constrained by the ideological strictures of the party dictatorship, Soviet historians tended to obfuscate the differences between Decembrism's liberal and radical tendencies, instead stressing the movement's internal coherence and identifying a sanitised 'noble revolutionism' (*dvorianskaia revoliutsionnost'*) as a principal source of the revolutionary dialectic. The most influential such study remains M. V. Nechkina, *Dvizhenie dekabristov*, 2 vols (Moscow: Izd-vo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1955), although note should also be made of Lenin's own appraisal of the Decembrists: see V. I. Lenin, 'Pamiati Gertsena' in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 55 vols (Moscow: Gos. izd-vo iuridicheskoi literatury, 1958-1965) XXI, pp. 255-262. More recent research, by contrast, has adopted a more nuanced stance, reasserting the importance of the individual conspirators' personalities (and thus the diversity of their political views) and locating Decembrism more precisely within the context of Alexandrine liberalism, thereby downplaying the traditional notion of the insurrection as the alpha and omega of opposition to autocratic rule. See, for example, T. V. Andreeva, *Tainye obshchestva v Rossii v pervoi treti XIX veka: pravitel'stvennaia politika i obshchestvennoe mnenie* (St Petersburg: Liki Rossii, 2009). On the evolution of Decembrist studies (*dekabristovedenie*) over the past century, see John Gooding, 'The Decembrists in the Soviet Union', *Soviet Studies* 40.2 (1988), pp. 196-209 and Patrick O'Meara, 'Recent Russian Historiography on the Decembrists: From 'Liberation Movement' to 'Public Opinion'', *Kritika* 14.4 (2013), pp. 805-822. For detailed studies of the investigation, trial and sentencing see Gernet, *Istoriia tsarskoi tiur'my* II, pp. 95-111, *Ssyl'nye dekabristy v Sibiri*, ed. L. M. Goriushkin (Novosibirsk: Nauka, 1985) and Patrick O'Meara, *Vreden sever: The Decembrists' Memories of the Peter-Paul Fortress* in *St Petersburg 1703-1825*, ed. Anthony Cross (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 165-189. On the conspirators' enduring legacy in Russian literature and culture – of particular relevance to this chapter – see *Dekabristy i russkaia kul'tura*, ed. D. D. Blagoi, T. B. Kniazevskaia and B. S. Meilakh (Leningrad: Nauka, 1975); L. G. Frizman, *Dekabristy i russkaia literatura* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1988) and Ludmilla A. Trigos, *The Decembrist Myth in Russian Culture* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

Constantine and the establishment of a constitutional monarchy. The insurrection was rapidly crushed, the participants arrested and an investigative commission established under Nicholas' personal direction; in May the following year, over one hundred conspirators were convicted of treason. The five ringleaders – Ryleev, Pestel', Kakhovskii, Murav'ev-Apostol and Bestuzhev-Riumin – were sentenced to death and executed in the Petropavlovskaiia fortress on the morning of 13 July. The remainder, sentenced to hard labour and exile, set off for Siberia at various points throughout the summer. Some were followed by their wives, who renounced rank and privilege to endure exile alongside the men, having apparently been inspired by Ryleev's Dolgorukova.¹⁸ Both the revolt and the scale of the ensuing political repression had a chilling effect on educated society. 'The hanged are hanged', Pushkin wrote in 1826, 'but hard labour for 120 friends, brothers and comrades is appalling'.¹⁹

Writing of the Decembrists' seminal influence on the moral profile of later Russian revolutionaries, the semiotician and cultural historian Iurii Lotman observed that 'so close did they come to an approximation of the norm and the ideal that their contribution is comparable with that of Pushkin to Russian poetry'.²⁰ This judgement applies perforce to the mode of behaviour in Siberian exile that the conspirators helped to standardise. Although the mere fact of their banishment provided a heroic example for others to follow in itself, several of the literary texts that originally depicted the exiled Decembrists as martyrs in the late 1820s went further, framing Siberia as a place of subversion and resistance – a land where incarceration and freedom were closely related concepts and, to some extent, indistinguishable. Here we shall adduce two well-known but nonetheless important examples: Pushkin's so-called 'Poslanie v Sibir' ('Epistle to

¹⁸ Lotman, 'The Decembrist in Everyday Life', pp. 93-95.

¹⁹ Pushkin to P. A. Viazemskii, 14 August 1826, *PSS X*, pp. 163-164. For a discussion of Pushkin's relationship with the conspirators see Trigos, *The Decembrist Myth in Russian Culture*, pp. 2-12.

²⁰ Lotman, 'The Decembrist in Everyday Life', p. 114.

Siberia'), written in 1827, and 'A. S. Pushkinu' ('To A. S. Pushkin'), written in response to the former by the Decembrist Aleksandr Odoevskii in 1828. 'Poslanie v Sibir', which was conveyed to the Decembrist exiles by Nikita Murav'ev's wife shortly after Pushkin wrote it,²¹ utilises several established Siberian tropes. The harsh natural environment and the noble romantic protagonist both appear, and Ryleev's 'Voinarovskii' provides an immediately apparent intertext: echoing Voinarovskii's lament that 'like the Siberian climate, I have become cruel and cold in my soul; nothing can cheer me, love and friendship are alien to me', Pushkin assures the Decembrists that 'in the dark of the underground, hope will bring you cheer and joy [...] Love and friendship will reach you through the prison locks'.²² Yet he reworks these familiar elements into an explicit political statement, exhorting his friends to defy the state's authority in prison and exile:

Во глубине сибирских руд
 Храните гордое терпение.
 Не пропадет ваш скорбный труд,
 И дум высокое стремление.

[In the depths of the Siberian mines, maintain your proud forbearance; your mournful labour and the high aspiration of your thoughts will not pass.]²³

The final stanza resembles the postliminal phase of an initiation rite, envisaging the Decembrists' return from exile as conquering heroes and, implicitly, the collapse of autocratic rule:

²¹ Trigos, *The Decembrist Myth in Russian Culture*, pp. 8-9.

²² Ryleev, *Sochineniia*, p. 173; Pushkin, *PSS* III, p. 7.

²³ Pushkin, *PSS*, III, p. 7.

Оковы тяжкие падут,
 Темницы рухнут – и свобода
 Вас примет радостно у входа,
 И братья меч вам отдадут.

[Your heavy fetters will fall away, your dungeons collapse – and freedom will greet you in the light, and brothers give you back the sword.]²⁴

Odoevskii's reply the following year closely mirrors Pushkin's epistle both in content and structure: like 'Poslanie v Sibir', it consists of four stanzas, the last of which is a postliminal projection. Odoevskii affirms Pushkin's political message, emphasising the extent to which the Decembrists retain their defiant militancy in Siberia:

Но будь спокоен, бард - цепями,
 Своей судьбой гордимся мы,
 И за затворами тюрьмы
 В душе смеемся над царями.

[Be calm, bard – we are proud of our chains and our fate; in our souls, behind the prison locks, we laugh at the tsars.]²⁵

Once again, the transformation of exile into a site of protest and resistance presages the ultimate triumph of their cause:

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ A. I. Odoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie stikhotvorenii i pisem*, ed. I. A. Kubasov and D. D. Blagoi (Moscow-Leningrad: Akademiia, 1934), p. 116.

Мечи скуем мы из цепей
 И вновь зажжем огонь свободы,
 И с ней грянем на царей,
 И радостно вздохнут народы.

[We shall forge swords from our chains, and once more light the fire of freedom;
 we shall burst upon the tsars, and the peoples shall breathe freely.]²⁶

This politicisation of Siberia's romantic literary topos is a recurrent device throughout the exiled Decembrists' writings, with the imagery of chains, prisons and snowbound tundra framing and valourising their 'proud forbearance' and defence of political and civic ideals.²⁷ 'I am fated to die far from freedom and the motherland', wrote Aleksandr Bestuzhev-Marlinskii, the foremost of the Decembrist litterateurs, from his Yakutsk exile in 1829.²⁸ 'In captivity', Odoevskii wrote the following year, 'we sing praises to our sacred Russia and sacred freedom.'²⁹ Yet for all the Decembrists' overt adherence to the conventions of the romantic genre, they always saw literature as first and foremost programmatic, a means to a didactic end, as Ryleev's famous dedication of 'Voinarovskii' to Bestuzhev-Marlinskii with the disclaimer that he considered himself 'not a poet, but a citizen' implies.³⁰ Accordingly, exile provided them not only with the raw materials of literary self-stylisation, but with a vast mission field – a petri dish for liberal reform. Envisaging Siberia as a second United States and recasting themselves in

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ M. A. Briskman, 'Liricheskii geroi dekabristskoi poezii perioda katorgi i ssylki' in *Dekabristy i russkaia kul'tura*, pp. 169-184.

²⁸ A. Marlinskii, *Polnoe sobranie stikhotvorenii*, ed. M. A. Briskman (Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel', 1961), p. 173.

²⁹ Odoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie stikhotvorenii*, p. 191.

³⁰ Ryleev, *Sochineniia*, p. 163. For a detailed exegesis of Ryleev's civic poetry see Patrick O'Meara, *K. F. Ryleev: A Political Biography of the Decembrist Poet* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 155-199.

the image of the Founding Fathers, the Decembrists sought to achieve in exile the egalitarian society they had previously envisioned for Russia.

Even before the conspirators' departure from Petersburg in 1826, members of the investigative commission who knew many of them well were fully aware, and tried to persuade Nicholas, that Siberia's economy and administration would benefit from their considerable talents. As Admiral Nikolai Mordvinov wrote, the Decembrists possessed 'all that is necessary to once again become people useful to the state, and the knowledge they possess could serve other, still greater purposes [...] Engineering, physics, mineralogy and geology might all enable Siberia to flourish'.³¹ Although Nicholas (who suspected the liberal Mordvinov of personal complicity in the conspiracy) rejected this advice out of hand,³² there is no doubt that the exiles nonetheless made a major contribution to Siberian life in all respects. The verdict of one eminent Decembrist scholar of the Soviet period, Lidiia Chukovskaia, is instructive:

They mustered all their years of scientific preparation, in freedom and in prison, in order to study the new land that now opened before their eyes. And the more they contemplated the needs of the region to which destiny had bought them, fell in love and become one with it, the more palpable and fruitful were the results of the Decembrists' scientific and social activities [...] The Decembrists' gifts did not perish in Siberia. They studied its life, morals, language, devotion, religion, the songs of its native peoples; they studied its climate, nature, flora and fauna; they introduced improvements in its fields and factories. For Siberia's population, they were teachers, doctors and *kulturträger*.³³

³¹ Mordvinov quoted in Glynn Barratt, 'A Note on N. A. Bestuzhev and the Academy of Chita', *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 12.1 (1970), p. 54.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Chukovskaia, *Dekabristy*, pp. 23-24.

For the Decembrists, Siberia was thus considerably more than a land of exile: it became a *tabula rasa* upon which to inscribe their hopes and dreams for Russia's future. Both during their time at Chita and Petrovskii Zavod from 1826-1839 and after their release to settlement, the exiles' educational activities lifted numerous Siberian peasants out of poverty and alcoholism, while the academy they founded at Chita and the arrival of their wives throughout the late 1820s contributed enormously to the growth of urban culture in towns such as Irkutsk and Krasnoiarsk.³⁴ Several Decembrists – in particular Dmitrii Zavalishin, of whom more later – went on to command considerable influence in administrative roles and upon the development of colonial policy in Siberia.³⁵ 'It was perhaps providence', Andrei Rozen wrote, 'that appointed many of my fellow exiles the founders and builders of a better future for Siberia, which – beyond all its gold, precious metals and stones and material wealth – will in due course present a priceless treasure-trove for the improvement of citizenship (*dlia blagoustroennoi grazhdanstvennosti*)'.³⁶ In this respect, as in many others, later political exiles drew inspiration from the Decembrists' example. 'You know very well', Mikhail Bakunin reminded Aleksandr Gertsen in 1860, 'how harmoniously and sacredly the Decembrists lived in Petrovskii Zavod – all were equally great and equally sacred; indeed, all were equal.'³⁷

The resultant portrayal of Siberia as a youthful, invigorating land of opportunity, blessed with qualities conspicuous by their absence from European Russia, occurs in the Decembrist exiles' writings and memoirs as frequently as the image of a dismal penal colony. Far from being juxtaposed, however, the two tropes were usually seen as

³⁴ Gentes, *Exile, Murder and Madness in Siberia*, pp. 84-101.

³⁵ Anatole Mazour, 'Dimitry Zavalishin: Dreamer of a Russian-American Empire', *Pacific Historical Review* 5.1 (1936), pp. 26-37.

³⁶ A. E. Rozen, *Zapiski dekabrista* (Irkutsk: Vostochno-sibirskoe knizhnoe izd-vo, 1984), p. 320.

³⁷ M. A. Bakunin to Gertsen, 7 November 1860 in *Pis'ma M. A. Bakunina k A. I. Gertsenu i N. P. Ogarevu*, ed. M. P. Dragomanov (Geneva: Ukrainskaia tipografiia, 1896), p. 142.

inextricably linked. Bestuzhev-Marlinskii, who described himself as an ‘involuntary guest in the land of wonders’ during his time in Yakutsk, also wrote glowing tributes to the fortitude and tenacity of the Siberian peasant.³⁸ Others who compared Siberia to the United States did so not only because both countries covered vast territories, embodied a vigorous frontier spirit and appeared poised to break free of their European colonial past, but because both had initially been exile destinations – an analysis that, tellingly, saw more of Siberia in the United States than was perhaps accurate. Rozen postulated that Siberia was ‘destined to serve, in its own way, the role of North America, where people banished for political and religious views also settled and created, by prayer and by labour, all of those blessings which the old, experienced world continues to seek in vain.’³⁹ Nikolai Basargin took a similar view:

The further we travelled into Siberia, the more it gained in my estimation. The common people seemed to me freer, more intelligent and even better educated than our Russian peasants and landowners. They better understood the dignity of man and valued their rights more. Later on, I happened more than once to hear from those who had visited and lived in the United States that Siberians and Americans had much in common in terms of morals, habits and even their way of life. As a land of exile, Siberia welcomes everyone indulgently and without discrimination. When an exile arrives at the Siberian border, nobody asks him why he’s there, or what crime he’s committed.⁴⁰

In sum, the exiled Decembrists seized upon both Siberia’s liminal position in relation to Russian state and society and the pre-existing conventions of Siberian literature to

³⁸ Chukovskaia, *Dekabristy*, pp. 39-43.

³⁹ Rozen, *Zapiski dekabrista*, p. 320.

⁴⁰ N. V. Basargin, *Zapiski* (Krasnoiarsk: Krasnoiarskoe knizhnoe izd-vo, 1985), pp. 99-100.

produce a dualistic image of the region with far-reaching implications for the nascent revolutionary movement. Just as the depiction of Siberia as a place of incarceration and punishment enabled the conspirators to showcase their revolutionary spirit and militant adherence to their political beliefs, so the inverse of this image – a place of rebirth and a source of untapped strength offering a glimpse of an idealised post-autocratic Russia – showed them working to realise their civic ideals in prison and exile, achieving in Siberia what they could not in Russia and thus, in a parallel act of defiance, placing themselves beyond the reach of the government that sought to oppress them. By politicising the region's liminality, the Decembrists wove Siberian exile into the oral and literary traditions of Russian radicalism and wrote the preface to the Siberian text that numerous later revolutionaries would follow. Among the first to do so was Aleksandr Gertsen, Russia's foremost political activist of the mid-nineteenth century; it is to him that we now turn.

2.2. 'Here all are exiles and all are equal'

Aleksandr Gertsen has been referred to as the Decembrists' foremost mythmaker and hagiographer, credited with creating 'the first holistic conception of Decembrism as a socio-historical and ideological phenomenon'.⁴¹ This he achieved both as a historian and as a memoirist. After his arrival in London as a political émigré in 1852, Gertsen began to solicit and publish a wide range of historical materials pertaining to the 1825 insurrection in his journal *Poliarnaia zvezda* (*The Polar Star*, a continuation of Ryleev and Bestuzhev-Marlinskii's almanac from the early 1820s that bore the executed conspirators' portraits

⁴¹ Frizman, *Dekabristy i russkaia literatura*, p. 155. See also S. E. Erlikh, 'Istoriia mifa: dekabristskaia legenda Gertsena' in idem., *Rossiiia koldunov* (Kishinev: Vyshaia antropologicheskaia shkola, 2003), pp. 191-437.

on its front cover), while his Bloomsbury-based publishing enterprise, the Free Russian Press (*Vol'naia russkaia tipografiia*), printed several of the Decembrists' own memoirs for the first time.⁴² Yet the Decembrists were also crucial to the development of Gertsen's own identity as a revolutionary and, by extension, the creation of his textual self in his famous memoir *Byloe i dumy* (*My Past and Thoughts*), upon which he began work during the same period.⁴³ In the foreword to *14 dekabria i imperator Nikolai* (*14 December and the Emperor Nicholas*), an alternative history of the insurrection published by the Free Russian Press in 1857, he wrote that the radicals of his generation traced their 'spiritual lineage' from the Decembrists, whose 'voices and example awakened us in life and sustained us through our entire existence'.⁴⁴ This idea is central to the early sections of *Byloe i dumy*, in which Gertsen 'plots his own historical personality in relation to the Decembrists, re-evaluating his life's milestones', thus ensuring their remembrance through the narration of his own words and deeds.⁴⁵ News of the insurrection's failure reveals to him 'a new world that increasingly became the focal point of my whole moral existence [...] I felt that I was not on the side of the grapeshot and victory, the prisons and chains'. Later, he and his friend Nikolai Ogarev meet on Moscow's Sparrow Hills and swear to carry on the executed Decembrists' cause, the conspiratorial secrecy of the rendezvous elevating them to the status of *bona fide* revolutionaries.⁴⁶

It was initially through this tendency to illuminate his own life and political trajectory with the symbolic paraphernalia of Decembrism that Gertsen developed the

⁴² The Free Russian Press was established in 1853, and *Poliarnaia zvezda* in 1855. See A. I. Gertsen, 'Vol'noe russkoe knigopechatanie v Londone: brat'iam na Rusi' and 'Ob'iavlenie o Poliarnoi zvezde', *Sobranie sochinenii v tridsati tomakh* (Moscow: Izd-vo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1954-1966) XII, pp. 64, 265-271. See also N. Ia. Eidel'man, 'Tainye korrespondenty Poliarnoi zvezdi' in idem., *Svobodnoe slovo Gertsena* (Moscow: Editorial URSS, 1999), pp. 19-194.

⁴³ *Byloe i dumy* was written in several instalments throughout the final two decades of Gertsen's life (1852-1867), with the first two volumes finished by the summer of 1854. See L. Ginzburg, 'Byloe i dumy' *Gertsena* (Leningrad: Gos. izd-vo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1957), pp. 364-373.

⁴⁴ Gertsen, 'Predislovie k knige '14 dekabria i imperator Nikolai'', *SS XIII*, p. 67.

⁴⁵ Trigou, *The Decembrist Myth in Russian Culture*, pp. 16-17.

⁴⁶ Gertsen, *SS VIII*, p. 61, 81.

dualistic image of Siberia bequeathed by the exiled conspirators to later revolutionaries. Although he neither visited Siberia nor ever found himself exiled there, he referred to the region persistently throughout the first two volumes of his memoirs, devoted respectively to his childhood and education and to his first experiences of arrest and internal exile in the 1830s. In *Byloe i dumy*, Siberia is a metonym for the Decembrists' fate. A byword for suffering and political martyrdom, it fulfils a similar function to that which it serves in the Decembrist exiles' poetry by providing a backdrop to the growth of Gertsen's youthful revolutionary militancy. Shortly after the failed uprising, he imagines himself in the role of the Marquis of Posa from Friedrich Schiller's play *Don Carlos*:

In a hundred different ways, I imagined how I would speak to Nicholas, and how he would then have me executed or sent to the mines. The strange thing is that virtually all of these dreams ended in Siberia or in death, and rarely if ever in victory. Was this really a peculiarly Russian type of fantasy (*ruskii sklad fantazii*), or was it the reflection of Petersburg, of the five gallows and hard labour, on the young generation?⁴⁷

Later recalling his courtship of his future wife, Nataliia, in the early 1830s, he envisages her emulating the Decembrist wives' famous act of self-renunciation:

She wrote me poems, I wrote her whole dissertations in prose, and together we dreamed of the future, of prison and exile [...] I often imagined how she would accompany me to the Siberian mines.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 84.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 331.

As a memoirist, therefore, Gertsen exploited Siberia's carceral connotations to illustrate his development as a revolutionary and to portray himself as an heir to the Decembrists' legacy. Elsewhere in his writings, however, the inverse of this image – Siberia as a *tabula rasa* – played an important role, as one episode from his early career illustrates.

On 21 July 1834, Gertsen was arrested on suspicion of having associated with an anti-government circle in Moscow. Despite the near-complete lack of evidence against him, he spent nearly a year in prison before the gendarmes investigating his case advised that, although he was not implicated in sedition as things stood, he might conceivably pose a threat to the autocracy in future and should consequently be assigned to government service in some provincial town. This turned out to be Perm', and subsequently Viatka, both of which were situated in the western foothills of the Urals and were thus close enough to Siberia to satisfy Gertsen's imagination. He left Moscow in April 1835, and spent the following five years in the comfortable – if, for someone of his metropolitan background, somewhat tedious – position of a provincial administrator.⁴⁹

In *Byloe i dumy*, this period occupies the whole of the second volume, *Tiur'ma i ssylka (Prison and Exile)*, where it is presented in retrospect as the fulfilment of the young Gertsen's carceral fantasies, with Perm' and Viatka standing in for Siberia. A chance conversation at the home of his friend, Vadim Passek, serves as a prophecy of his impending fate. Passek was born in Tobol'sk, where his father had been exiled during the reign of Paul I. His mother, while recounting her experiences in Siberia to Gertsen, suddenly declares that 'you and your friends are walking a certain path to death [...] for you, there is no other way' – a prediction, he observes, that quickly came true.⁵⁰ Upon his departure for Perm' the following year, Gertsen illustrates his journey into exile with the symbolism of the 'Vladimirka', the famous highway leading east from Moscow to the

⁴⁹ Aileen M. Kelly, *The Discovery of Chance: The Life and Thought of Alexander Herzen* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), pp. 119-123.

⁵⁰ Gertsen, *SS VIII*, pp. 171-172.

Urals via Vladimir. As he travels east, he quotes Dante's *Inferno* to himself, finding the poem 'as apt for the great Siberian road as for the gates of hell':

Per me si va nella città dolente

Per me si va nel eterno dolore.

[Through me you go to the grief-wracked city and to everlasting pain.]⁵¹

Such imagery adheres closely to the liminal topography established by Ryleev, Pushkin and the Decembrist exiles – a body of work with which Gertsen, like many of his contemporaries, had long been familiar.⁵² Nonetheless, it features in *Byloe i dumy* largely as a retrospective exercise in literary self-stylisation, and is not an accurate reflection of his view of Siberia at the time. In a letter to his Moscow friends in July 1835, written shortly after his arrival in Viatka, he depicted the region in strikingly different terms:

Perm' is strange [...] It isn't a provincial capital, and neither the centre nor the focal point of the region. All life is completely absent. But it is the foreword (*avant-propos*) of Siberia, and what is Siberia? Here is a country you really do not know at all. I breathed the icy air of the Urals – it's cold, but fresh and healthy. You know, Siberia really is a completely new country, an America *sui generis*, precisely because it lacks aristocratic origins – on the contrary, it's the daughter of

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 219. The lyric is from the beginning of *Inferno*, canto III. Best known today as the subject of an 1892 landscape painting by I. I. Levitan, the 'Vladimirka' (*Vladimirskii trakt*) became synonymous with Siberia and exile in eighteenth and nineteenth-century Russian culture. See N. A. Vitashevskii, 'Po Vladimirke: doroga, po kotoroi shli politzakliuchennye v Sibir', *Nasha strana* 1 (1907), pp. 377-398. It should be noted that Gertsen's interpolation of Dante at this stage of his memoir may represent a further Decembrist reference in itself, since the conspirators D. I. Zavalishin and P. I. Falenberg also used lines from *Inferno* to describe their arrivals at the Petropavlovskaya fortress in their own memoirs: see O'Meara, 'The Decembrists' Memories of the Peter-Paul Fortress', p. 172.

⁵² In *SS VIII*, p. 79, Gertsen discusses reading both Pushkin and Ryleev's unpublished poems together with Ogarev during his teenage years.

Cossack robber-bandits, a country which has forgotten all notion of kinship, where people are renewed and turn their backs on their past existence, which was no more than a dark prison, chains, a long road and the knout. Here all are exiles and all are equal.⁵³

This letter offers a fascinating view of the two recurrent tropes of the revolutionary movement's Siberian text in close proximity. On the one hand, the very mention of Siberia defines the region as a carceral space, representing as it does an implicit reference to the Decembrists, an attempt to negate the reality of Gertsen's personal situation and valorise his status as a political exile – it would, of course, have been known to his correspondents that Perm' and Viatka were not in Siberia. On the other, this rhetorical exercise sees Siberia relinquish its carceral connotations and emerge instead as the land of the future, with European Russia demoted to the status of a 'dark prison'. Gertsen's interest in the United States and consequent comparison of Siberia thereto – an analogy that, as we shall see, would later become very important for him – probably owed less to the Decembrists' liberal imaginings than to Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, which he read during his time in exile, and a general attraction to federalist principles based in part upon his early fascination with the utopian socialism of Fourier, Proudhon and Louis Blanc.⁵⁴ Nonetheless, his use of the trope was very similar to its deployment in the Decembrists' writings. By projecting his nascent radicalism onto Siberia, Gertsen envisaged it as a prelapsarian land of freedom, a refuge for Russians fleeing the injustices of autocratic rule.

⁵³ Gertsen to N. I. Sazonov and N. Kh. Ketcher, 18 July 1835, *ibid.* XXI, p. 45.

⁵⁴ Dimitri Sergius von Mohrenschildt, *Toward a United States of Siberia: Plans and Projects of Federal Reconstruction of Russia in the Nineteenth Century* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1981), pp. 168-170.

This adolescent vision of a vigorous, egalitarian Siberia is generally occluded from *Byloe i dumy*, the central narrative of which – as we have seen – requires the region to primarily represent a land of exile and suffering. That Gertsen’s early impressions of Viatka and the Urals had not slipped his mind during the intervening decades is evident from his recollections of the Siberian native Passek, whom he retrospectively imbues with many of the same characteristics. ‘Siberia had left its own mark on him’, he writes. ‘He had none of our shallow vulgarity, exuded good health and a fine temperament, and was savage (*dichok*) in comparison to us – his prowess was of a different sort, heroic (*bogatyrskaiia*) and arrogant.’⁵⁵ By the end of the 1850s, this enduring association of Siberia with historical youth and creativity had come to dominate his attitude not only towards the region itself but, in a sense, towards Russia as a whole.

The gradual evolution of Gertsen’s social and political views during the 1840s and 1850s is well known, and extensively documented elsewhere.⁵⁶ For our purposes, it will suffice to say that he ceased to be the archetypical Westerniser he had been during his Moscow student days and in Viatka and became instead increasingly nativist and introspective, pessimistic and utopian by turns. From the early 1840s onwards, his growing fixation with the Russian peasant commune (*obshchina*) – ironically, under the influence of the German economist August von Haxthausen – brought him close to certain aspects of Slavophile thought and fuelled his interest in a specifically Russian path of development that could circumnavigate the necessity of capitalism. In 1847, he emigrated from Russia along with his family and entourage. In France and Italy, he witnessed the failures of the 1848 revolutions and became disenchanted with the selfish materialism of

⁵⁵ Gertsen, *SS VIII*, p. 136.

⁵⁶ See primarily Martin Malia, *Alexander Herzen and the Birth of Russian Socialism, 1812-1855* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1961), pp. 335-415 and Isaiah Berlin, ‘Alexander Herzen’ in *idem., Russian Thinkers*, ed. Henry Hardy and Aileen M. Kelly (London: Hogarth, 1978), pp. 186-209. On Gertsen’s emigration see in general E. H. Carr, *The Romantic Exiles: A Nineteenth Century Portrait Gallery* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1933).

the European bourgeoisie; from London, in 1853, he watched the outbreak of the Crimean War. All these events persuaded him that Europe was stagnant, decrepit and incapable of historical action – his philosophical *sine qua non* since the 1840s – and dented his conviction that Russia's future lay in an individualistic, legalistic Western type of progress. In short, Gertsen began the 1850s in search of a compelling social, political and historical vision capable of simultaneously accommodating his revolutionary-democratic instincts, his newfound faith in the proto-socialist Russian peasantry, and his disaffection with Europe. By the end of the decade, events in Siberia appeared to provide it.

The death of Nicholas I and the accession of his son Alexander II in March 1855, and the end of the Crimean War a year later, ushered in an unprecedented era of liberalisation and reform in Russia. The 1861 emancipation of the serfs was followed by sweeping changes to the judiciary and local government in 1864.⁵⁷ Just as importantly, from the late 1850s onwards, the relaxation of the imperial censorship stimulated civic culture and allowed for the development of the radical intelligentsia *en masse*.⁵⁸ With the temporary decline of political repression, Siberia relinquished its carceral connotations in the eyes of many revolutionaries and progressives. In 1856, shortly before the surviving Decembrists were amnestied and allowed to return to European Russia, the radical publicist Nikolai Dobroliubov celebrated the end of the war with a poem dedicated to Alexander, who did not wish to 'detain thinking men in prison and in Siberia'.⁵⁹ Five years later, the young Petr Kropotkin – then a junior officer with idealistic political views – declined a prestigious commission in a guards regiment in order to serve with a Cossack unit in the Transbaikal, hoping to find in Siberia 'an immense field for the application of

⁵⁷ W. Bruce Lincoln, *The Great Reforms: Autocracy, Bureaucracy and the Politics of Change in Imperial Russia* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1990); *Russia's Great Reforms 1855-1881*, ed. Ben Eklof, John Bushell and Larissa Zakharova (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994).

⁵⁸ Charles A. Ruud, *Fighting Words: Imperial Censorship and the Russian Press, 1804-1906* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), p. 97-136.

⁵⁹ N. A. Dobroliubov, *Sobranie sochinenii v 9-kh tomakh*, ed. B. I. Bursov (Moscow-Leningrad: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1961-1964) VIII, p. 37.

the great reforms which have been made or are coming'. During his time in Irkutsk, Kropotkin regularly met with other young officers to discuss the possibility of establishing a 'United States of Siberia', federated with the North American states across the Pacific.⁶⁰ No longer cast as a vast penal colony, the region was increasingly portrayed as a battlefield upon which the future of the rapidly-emerging new Russia was to be contested.

The historical significance Siberia appeared to assume during the late 1850s and early 1860s was closely connected to Russia's colonisation of the region to the north and east of the Amur river basin, a notorious episode which became known as the *Amurskoe delo* (Amur affair).⁶¹ From the late 1840s onwards, the merits of territorial expansion in the Far East had been a matter of intense debate in governmental circles and, after 1856, in the public sphere too. Appointed to his position in 1847, the high-profile governor-general of Eastern Siberia, Nikolai Murav'ev, was a particularly zealous advocate of seizing the Amur from Chinese control and, in 1854, had received permission from Nicholas to begin pursuing an aggressive annexation policy, transporting thousands of Cossacks and convict labourers to settle and militarise the river's left bank whilst pressing the Chinese for negotiations. The latter duly began in 1855 and concluded in May 1858 with the Treaty of Aigun, which granted Russia navigation rights on the Amur and thus direct access to the Pacific Ocean. Writing later that year in his famous émigré journal *Kolokol* (*The Bell*), Gertsen hailed the Amur's annexation as a triumph for Russia, a break from the autocratic 'Petersburg tradition' and the fulfilment of all his hopes and dreams:

⁶⁰ P. Kropotkin, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, 2 vols (London: A. P. Watt & Son, 1899) I, p. 155, 169.

⁶¹ See S. V. Maksimov, *Na vostoke: poezdka na Amur* (St Petersburg: S. V. Zvonarev, 1871); D. I. Zavalishin, 'Amurskoe delo i vliianie ego na vostochnuiu Sibir' i gosudarstvo', *Russkaia starina* 32.9 (1881), pp. 75-100 and, more recently, Mark Bassin, *Imperial Visions: Nationalist Imagination and Geographical Expansion in the Russian Far East, 1840-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

When the [American] railway to the Pacific is finished and Russia, on its side, has an open shore on the Pacific, Russians and Americans can calmly turn their backs on Europe, extend one another the hand of friendship across the ocean, and the very name of the Pacific will signify the union of the future [...] In the imminent struggle that will surely envelop Europe, Russia need not play any active role. We have nothing at stake, and are tied to the destiny of that world neither by our memories nor our hopes for the future. If Russia is to be liberated from the Petersburg tradition, she will have but one ally: the United States [...] Prior to the Crimean War, nobody suspected what was happening within Russia: everyone supposed that behind her mute mouth lay a mute mind and heart, and yet all the while the ideas propagated by 14 December matured, took root and undermined the walls of the Nicholaevan fortress [...] And now everything we had foreseen, from the inevitable liberation of the peasants from the land to our chosen union with the United States, is happening before our very eyes.⁶²

Mark Bassin has identified this as a ‘Siberianisation’ of Gertsen’s nativist turn, with the qualities he had identified as quintessentially Siberian while in exile in Viatka two decades earlier – on the basis of which he had then compared Siberia to the United States – being applied to Russia as a whole.⁶³ Both America and Russia, Gertsen wrote, ‘overflow with power, plasticity, the spirit of organisation and a perseverance that knows no limits. Both lack history, both start with a complete break from tradition, both fade away into endless valleys in search of their own borders, both pass through the most dreadful expanses on their way to the shores of the Pacific, everywhere marking the way

⁶² ‘Amerika i Sibir’, *Kolokol* 29 (December 1858), p. 233. The first line is Gertsen paraphrasing an article in a Philadelphia newspaper that praised the Russian annexation of the Amur.

⁶³ Bassin, ‘Inventing Siberia’, p. 788.

with towns, villages and colonies.’⁶⁴ Tellingly, Siberia itself did not warrant a mention except in the title of the article (‘America and Siberia’), where it stood as a synecdoche of Russia and her resurgent national character.

Gertsen thus adhered closely to the bifurcated image of Siberia established by his Decembrist heroes. In his memoirs, Siberia was synonymous with hard labour and exile, the liminal phase in the career path of the professional revolutionary. As a publicist, however, he favoured the notion of an ‘America *sui generis*’, envisaging Siberia as a staging post for the historical creativity that would see Russia freed from autocratic rule. Towards the end of his active revolutionary life, it was this latter image that came to dominate his thinking about the region. Nonetheless, Gertsen’s representation of Siberia as a *tabula rasa* was somewhat ambiguous. During the 1830s, he depicted it as separate from and imbued with characteristics antithetical to Russia; two decades later, he clearly saw it as part of Russia, the epitome of her best qualities. Around the same time, this very contradiction characterised the attempts of his erstwhile friend and sometime rival, Mikhail Bakunin, to act out Russia’s revolutionary future on the Siberian stage.

2.3. Mikhail Bakunin and the *Amurskoe delo*

By the end of the 1850s, Mikhail Bakunin was the most famous political exile in Siberia. Arrested in Dresden during the suppression of the 1848 uprising, he was handed over to the Russian authorities early in 1851 and, after nearly seven years spent in the Petropavlovskaya and Shlissel’burg fortresses, found himself exiled to settlement in 1857. Arriving in Tomsk later that year, he immediately appealed to the city’s ranking

⁶⁴ ‘Amerika i Sibir’, p. 234.

gendarme for greater freedom of movement, arguing that Siberia's invigorating, transformative environment would make him a useful member of society once again:

All that is now left for me is to devote the remaining days of my life to my family [...] and Siberia, if I am not mistaken, opens before me a vast field for the fulfilment of this aim. Siberia is a blessed land that contains immense wealth, new and inexhaustible power and a great future, and which today presents us with endless moral, intellectual and material interest. Siberia can renew a man as if she had been given to Russia by Providence to reconstruct the destiny, dignity and happiness of her wayward sons who, amongst their criminal fraternity, yet preserve within themselves the strength and will for a new, correct life. Such was my first impression of Siberia [...] and such are my hopes and desires.⁶⁵

Such hyperbole, of course, resulted as much from naked opportunism as revolutionary idealism.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, Bakunin largely remained true to the spirit of these words throughout his four years in Siberia, during which he came to envisage and pursue a chimerical new Russia situated on the shores of the Pacific.

In late 1860, Bakunin became enthusiastically embroiled in a public controversy, primarily played out in the pages of Gertsen's *Kolokol*, concerning the aforementioned Murav'ev (by then Murav'ev-Amurskii, the honorific having been granted him shortly after the 1858 annexation). Murav'ev was a highly divisive figure amongst Russia's radicals and revolutionaries, regarded as a narcissistic tyrant by some and an eminently

⁶⁵ M. A. Bakunin to Ia. D. Kazimirskii, 12 August 1857, *Sobranie sochinenii i pisem, 1828-1876*, ed. Iu. M. Steklov, 4 vols (Moscow: Izd-vo politkatorzhan, 1934-1935) IV, p. 94.

⁶⁶ Bakunin's plan at this point was apparently to involve himself with the Lena gold trade, which he considered both an eminently respectable profession and one with much potential for bankrolling his various revolutionary enterprises. See E. H. Carr, *Michael Bakunin* (London: Macmillan, 1937), pp. 225-226.

admirable democrat by others. Despite having enjoyed the trust of both Nicholas I and Alexander II in equal measure, he had been amongst the first high-ranking officials to give serious thought to the abolition of serfdom whilst governor of the Tula region in the mid-1840s, and had thus acquired a progressive reputation early in his career.⁶⁷ The initial years of his administration in Siberia were likewise characterised by liberal governmental reforms, moves towards a free press and an indulgent attitude towards political exiles, some of whom ended up working for him.⁶⁸ Kropotkin, who admired and served under Murav'ev, described him as 'very intelligent, very active, extremely amiable and desirous to work for the good of the country. Like all men of action of the governmental school he was a despot at the bottom of his heart, but he held advanced opinions, and a democratic republic would not quite have satisfied him.'⁶⁹

Others dissented from this view. In the years following the Treaty of Aigun, Murav'ev faced two main accusations from his detractors in Siberia: firstly, that he was an inveterate reactionary masquerading as a liberal to advance his career, and secondly that his attempts to colonise Russia's newly acquired territories were hopelessly misconceived. His most implacable opponent was the aforementioned Dmitrii Zavalishin, who had long been regarded as an expert on Siberian affairs and whose negative influence on public opinion concerning the Amur ultimately became such that, in 1863, he became the only person in Russian history to be re-exiled from Siberia to European Russia.⁷⁰ Zavalishin considered Murav'ev 'a man given entirely to self-interest, and a charlatan besides'.⁷¹ From late 1858 onwards, he began to attack the governor-general's administration in the Russian and Siberian press, arguing that the Amur was not suitable

⁶⁷ N. I. Dubinina, 'Murav'ev-Amurskii, Nikolai Nikolaevich' in *Bol'shaia rossiiskaia entsiklopediia*, ed. Iu. S. Osipov (Moscow: Nauchnoe izd-vo 'Bol'shaia rossiiskaia entsiklopediia', 2004-2013), pp. 457-458.

⁶⁸ D. I. Zavalishin, *Zapiski dekabrista* (Munich: J. Marchlewski, 1904), pp. 310-313.

⁶⁹ Kropotkin, *Memoirs*, p. 169. On Murav'ev's somewhat enigmatic public persona see Bassin, *Imperial Visions*, pp. 106-112.

⁷⁰ Chukovskaia, *Dekabristy*, pp. 130-131.

⁷¹ Zavalishin, *Zapiski dekabrista*, pp. 314-317.

for commercial navigation and that Murav'ev's forced settlement policies had brought the agriculturally-barren region to the brink of famine.⁷² In 1860, Mikhail Petrashevskii – who had completed his *katorga* term several years earlier – joined the attack.⁷³ Petrashevskii had personally benefited from Murav'ev's patronage after his release from prison, having received permission to settle in Irkutsk and write for the local press.⁷⁴ Nonetheless, their relationship had soured at the end of the decade when Petrashevskii, like Zavalishin, began to expose the corruption and mismanagement of operations in the Far East in the pages of *Amur*, the first editorially-independent newspaper ever published in Russia. Murav'ev considered this an indulgence too far and promptly resettled the former revolutionary some three hundred miles north of Krasnoiarsk. By way of response, Petrashevskii complained bitterly of Murav'ev's actions in a letter to *Kolokol* in which he accused the governor-general of being 'full of hatred' and abusing his power.⁷⁵

Bakunin, who had befriended Murav'ev shortly after relocating to Irkutsk two years earlier, responded furiously to these allegations with a series of missives to Gertsen in London apparently written at the governor-general's personal request. At great length, he accused Petrashevskii of being an opportunist, a gambling addict and a Third Section informant, and Zavalishin of spreading misinformation about the Amur situation. 'In Moscow and Petersburg', he wrote, 'they are convinced that the Amur is a fraud, that even small boats cannot sail on it, that Blagoveshchensk, Nikolaevsk and the other settlements exist only in Murav'ev's imagination and his reports, that the Amur has

⁷² See D. I. Zavalishin, 'Po povodu statei ob Amure', *Morskoi sbornik* 38 (November 1858), pp. 34-48; 'Amur, stat'ia pervaia. Kogo obmanyvaiut i kto okonchatel'no ostaetsia obmanutym', *Vestnik promyshlennosti* 4.10 (1859), pp. 41-83; 'Otvét g. Romanovu na ego vozrazheniia na stat'iu pod zaglaviiem: po povodu statei ob Amure', *Morskoi sbornik* 40.5 (1859), pp. 1-20 and 'Otvét g. Nazimovu po povodu stat'i ob Amure', *Morskoi sbornik* 40.6 (1859), pp. 101-119.

⁷³ Gernet, *Istoriia tsarskoi tiur'my*, pp. 238-239.

⁷⁴ Bassin, *Imperial Visions*, pp. 256-257.

⁷⁵ M. V. Petrashevskii, 'Tiranstvo sibirskogo Murav'eva', *Kolokol* 82 (October 1860), p. 688; see also 'Pros'ba M. V. Petrashevskogo ego vysokoprevoskhoditel'stvu gospodinu ministru vnutrennykh del', *Kolokol* 92 (March 1861), p. 783.

ruined Russia, that millions of rubles and thousands of lives have been wasted on it.⁷⁶ On the contrary, Bakunin insisted, Russia's colonial adventures in the Far East had been a complete success. The thousands of Transbaikalian peasants and hard labour convicts Murav'ev had forcibly resettled along the banks of the Amur – having hitherto been 'ten times as broken, oppressed and unhappy as the most downtrodden serf' – were now far better off, and Russia was paying no higher a price in human lives for the Amur than other colonial empires paid for their territories: 'Do you really not know', he demanded of Gertsen, 'how many Englishmen died in Afghanistan, how many Americans on the plains and in the Rockies?'⁷⁷

Bakunin considered such questions of colonial administration wholly inseparable from the contested issue of Murav'ev's political allegiance. The governor-general, he reported to Gertsen, was 'assuredly one of us (*krepko nash*)', the one man 'amongst all those who wield power and authority in Russia that we can and should unconditionally call our own'.⁷⁸

For thirteen years, one of the best men in Russia, imbued with a truly democratic and liberal soul, has worked with the sweat of his brow to humanise, improve and elevate the region entrusted to him [...] With paltry funds, without any help or support, almost in defiance of Petersburg, he has annexed to the Russian tsardom an enormous, blessed land [...] For thirteen years he has struggled – and not without success – for the rights of the Siberian people, trying to free them [...] He has succeeded in humanising Siberia: one may boldly say that in no other Russian

⁷⁶ Bakunin to Gertsen, 7 November 1860 in *Pis'ma Bakunina*, p. 121.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 127-131. Bakunin's assurances concerning the Amur were largely nonsense. The reality of the situation is better encapsulated by a series of reports written by Kropotkin to M. N. Katkov from the vicinity of Khabarovsk in late 1864: see 'Korrespondentsii P. A. Kropotkina iz Irkutskia o puteshestvii po vostochnoi Sibiri', GARF f. 1129.1.99, pp. 1-60.

⁷⁸ Bakunin to Gertsen, 8 December 1860 in *Pis'ma Bakunina*, pp. 187-188.

province is there such freedom of movement and of life generally as in Eastern Siberia, and in no other provincial town is life so free, easy and humane as in Irkutsk.⁷⁹

Bakunin had obvious personal motivations to defend Murav'ev from the charges against him. The governor-general was both a second cousin and his relative 'by many character traits',⁸⁰ and his judicious exercise of patronage had considerably improved Bakunin's quality of life after his arrival in Siberia in 1857. In particular, Murav'ev had secured him a job with a local commercial concern and granted him the freedom of movement that, in 1861, allowed him to escape from exile with considerable ease, merely boarding an American steamer off the coast of Sakhalin and convincing the captain to take him to Japan.⁸¹ Yet these considerations alone explain neither the zeal with which Bakunin sprang to Murav'ev's defence nor his willingness to identify the latter's supposed revolutionary credentials with Russia's imperial expansionism. Murav'ev in fact represented, in E. H. Carr's words, 'a definite stage in the development of Bakunin's political thought'.⁸² The veteran revolutionary's intervention in the debate over the governor-general and the *Amurskoe delo* was inextricably linked to a characteristically utopian political project he had been pursuing consistently throughout his long years in prison and exile. Like Gertsen, Bakunin saw in Murav'ev and Siberia the imminent fulfilment of his plans for the nation's future.

⁷⁹ Bakunin to Gertsen, 1 December 1860 in *ibid.*, p. 163.

⁸⁰ Svatikov, *Rossia i Sibir'*, p. 35.

⁸¹ Iu. M. Steklov, *Mikhail Aleksandrovich Bakunin: ego zhizn' i deiatel'nost', 1814-1876*, 3 vols (Moscow: Tipografiia I. D. Sytina, 1920-1927) I, pp. 383-384.

⁸² Carr, *Bakunin*, p. 230. Others have assigned Bakunin's encounter with Murav'ev somewhat less significance, but have nonetheless seen it as psychologically revealing, indicative of his fascination with revolutionary dictatorship and inability to overcome the idealist predilections of his youth. See, for instance, Aileen Kelly, *Mikhail Bakunin: A Study in the Psychology and Politics of Utopianism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987), pp. 146-150.

Bakunin's political views during the mid-nineteenth century can best be described as a type of revolutionary Panslavism. Like Gertsen, he had endured the spiritual crisis of the late 1830s and early 1840s, when Russia's nascent radical intelligentsia temporarily wilted under the combined fatalisms of the Nicholaevan police state and Hegelian historicism.⁸³ Unlike Gertsen – from whom he was always distinguished by an impetuous, conspiratorial temperament – the escape route Bakunin chose was one of militancy. In 1848, he boasted of fighting on the Dresden barricades 'in the interests of the Slavic revolution'.⁸⁴ From then until his outright conversion to anarchism at the League of Peace and Freedom's 1867 Geneva congress, virtually all Bakunin's political activity in word and deed was directed towards the arguably far-fetched aim of establishing a revolutionary Russian dictatorship to wage wars of liberation on behalf of the Slavic peoples of Eastern Europe.⁸⁵ His clearest articulation of this Panslav programme came in a notorious letter, better known as his 'confession', written to Nicholas I from the Petropavlovskiaia fortress in 1851 in which he affected to recant from revolutionary activity. Because this document was written at the tsar's invitation, scholarly opinions on the extent to which it reflected Bakunin's actual views at the time differ sharply. Nonetheless, there is broad agreement that its Panslav overtures, at least, were sincerely expressed.⁸⁶ One section in particular is worth quoting at length:

I asked myself: what purpose do all these conquests serve for Russia? If half the world submitted to her authority, would she then be happier, freer or richer; would

⁸³ On the 'reconciliation with reality' see Malia, *Alexander Herzen*, p. 205.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 288.

⁸⁵ Roman Rosdolskii, 'Democratic Panslavism: Engels contra Bakunin', *Critique: Journal of Socialist Theory* 18.1 (1991), pp. 156-178.

⁸⁶ Franco Venturi, *The Roots of Revolution: A History of the Populist and Socialist Movements in Nineteenth Century Russia*, trans. Francis Hackett (London: Wiedenfield & Nicholson, 1960), pp. 54-58 takes the view that Bakunin was motivated by expediency; Steklov, *Bakunin*, pp. 292-324 is more charitable. For a useful potted history of this episode see also James Goodwin, *Confronting Dostoevsky's Demons: Anarchism and the Specter of Bakunin in Twentieth Century Russia* (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2010), pp. 33-64.

she be more powerful? And if the mighty Russian tsardom, already so vast as to be nearly inestimable, does not disintegrate, where else can her borders extend? What is the point of her expansion? What does it bring to these enslaved peoples in place of their stolen nationality, to say nothing of their freedom, enlightenment and welfare? Is it really just Russia's own nationality, a form of slavery? Can Russian, or rather Great Russian nationality (*rusaskaia ili, vernee, velikorossiiskaia national'nost'*) truly become the nationality of all the world? [...] Thus I convinced myself that Russia, in order to salvage her honour and her future, would stage a revolution, deposing [...] the tsarist authorities, destroying monarchical rule, and – thus liberating herself from her internal slavery – would become the head of the Slavic movement, turning her arms against the Austrian emperor, the Prussian king and the Turkish sultan, and if necessary against the Germans and Hungarians – in a word, against the whole world to liberate the Slavic tribes.⁸⁷

It was precisely this programme – or, in the somewhat less charitable view of his Soviet biographer Iurii Steklov, a ‘Panslavic daydream’⁸⁸ – with which Bakunin came to associate Murav’ev just under a decade later. In a letter to Gertsen, he wrote that the governor-general, whom he termed a ‘Napoleon *sui generis*’, had resolved to ‘accept nothing less than a radical governmental system’ in which the peasants would be freed from the land, corrupt officials subjected to the people’s summary justice and Russia itself decentralised. In Petersburg, Bakunin declared, there would be ‘neither a

⁸⁷ M. A. Bakunin, *Ispoved' i pis'mo Aleksandru II* (Moscow: Gos. izd-vo, 1921), pp. 89-91.

⁸⁸ Steklov, *Bakunin*, p. 362.

constitution nor a parliament, but an iron dictatorship to liberate the Slavs, beginning with a reunited Poland and a fight to the death with Austria and Turkey'.⁸⁹

At face value, none of this had much to do with Siberia itself, and there is certainly some truth in the historian Sergei Svatikov's verdict that Bakunin's dalliance with Murav'ev amounted to little more than both men cynically exploiting the Russian public's fascination with the region for personal and political gain.⁹⁰ In one important respect, however, Siberia was indeed fundamental to Bakunin's scheming. Like Gertsen, his chimerical alternative to the Russian autocracy took the form of a geographical other. The laboured differentiation between Russian nationality and the 'Russian tsardom' in his 1851 letter to Nicholas had much in common with Gertsen's contemporaneous rejection of the 'Petersburg tradition' in favour of a youthful Russia imbued with distinctly Siberian characteristics. Both men rejected the decrepit 'old world' and envisaged the wholesale reconstruction of Russia in Siberia's image – or, at any rate, the image of Siberia as they perceived it. Thus in Bakunin's analysis, the region's imminent liberation from Petersburg's authority by Murav'ev's revolutionary dictatorship would precipitate Russia's liberation from autocratic rule in general. As he explained to Gertsen:

Whether it was the Americans' doing or the Russians', Siberia has reached the [Pacific] and has ceased to be an isolated desert. We can already feel the influence of this: in Irkutsk, for example, we are closer to Europe than they are in Tomsk [...] There is no question that, in due course, the Amur will pull Siberia away from Russia and grant her independence and self-sufficiency. In Petersburg they are terrified of this outcome; others still are terrified that Murav'ev will not proclaim the independence of Siberia, but such an independence as is impossible

⁸⁹ Bakunin to Gertsen, 8 December 1860 in *Pis'ma Bakunina*, pp. 177-178.

⁹⁰ Svatikov, *Rossia i Sibir'*, pp. 32-36.

now but, in the near future, will become quite necessary [...] Can Russia really remain a violent, clumsy monarchy much longer? Mustn't it dissolve into a Slavic federation?⁹¹

None of this, of course, ever came to pass. Zavalishin and Petrashevskii's attacks upon Murav'ev's administration and character were a harbinger of the decline of his standing and of increasingly widespread antipathy to the *Amurskoe delo* upon which his reputation was staked. By the beginning of 1861, he had fallen out of favour in Petersburg, and was unceremoniously replaced.⁹² 'Murav'ev's fate, like Siberia's, is remarkable', Kropotkin wrote shortly afterwards. 'Nowadays, after our all-encompassing euphorias, you rarely if ever meet anyone with a good word to say for him.'⁹³ Bakunin, too, escaped Irkutsk and fled across the Pacific in the months following Murav'ev's departure, having been deprived of his influential patron and his cherished Siberian dreams in one fell swoop.⁹⁴

Despite Bakunin's bombastic rhetoric, there is little evidence that either he or Gertsen gave serious thought to the idea of Siberian independence at any stage. The first published iteration of his revolutionary Panslav programme, written in 1862, made no mention of any autonomy for the region, and he seems to have had no links with the Siberian regionalist networks that developed during his time in exile.⁹⁵ Yet independence for Siberia was never the objective: the region's value was as a liminal zone. So long as it was considered to be both part of and separate from the European metropolis, Siberia –

⁹¹ Bakunin to Gertsen, 7 November 1860 in *Pis'ma Bakunina*, p. 123. Although Bakunin was again exaggerating here, it should be noted that various high-ranking officials during this period were apparently alive to the potential ramifications of exiling dangerous revolutionaries to a region that was meant to serve Russia as a loyal and prosperous colony. One wrote that 'we cannot send republicans to the Amur and Siberia: they will develop it in their own spirit, and Siberia will break off from us': see Svatikov, *Rossiiia i Sibir'*, p. 31 and Margolis, *Tiur'ma i ssylka v imperatorskoi Rossii*, pp. 107-108.

⁹² Bassin, *Imperial Visions*, pp. 255-260.

⁹³ P. A. Kropotkin, *Dnevnik*, ed. A. A. Borovoi (Moscow: Gos. izd-vo, 1923), p. 92.

⁹⁴ Bakunin's reasons for fleeing were to some extent personal and financial too: he had spent the past year on gardening leave after his employers at the Amur Company recognised that his talents as a commercial agent did not match his skill as a revolutionary agitator. See Carr, *Bakunin*, pp. 232-235.

⁹⁵ Mohrenschildt, *Toward a United States of Siberia*, p. 182.

whether envisaged as Gertsen's fountain of historical youth or as the cradle of Bakunin's Panslavic federation – could serve as the staging post for all manner of utopian fantasies, and revolutionaries' exalted panegyrics to the transformative dynamism of the taiga could safely assume that such qualities, far from setting Siberia free, would ultimately serve to renew Russia itself.

2.4. Avvakum Petrovich, Nikolai Nekrasov and the sacralisation of Siberian exile

The 1860s witnessed not only the end of Russia's short-lived reform era, but a changing of the revolutionary guard. Gertsen's star waned steadily throughout the decade: he relinquished most of his influence over Russia's liberals and socialists through his support for the Polish insurrection of 1863 and preference for peaceful propaganda respectively, ceased publication of *Kolokol* in 1867, and died three years later having 'outlived his political importance'.⁹⁶ Bakunin soldiered on in emigration after his escape from Siberia and remained a militant source of inspiration for some in Russia, yet could only hope to influence events from afar.⁹⁷ As the liberal-democratic gentry of the Nicholaevan era retreated into the background, a new generation, the *raznochintsy* – university-educated non-nobles of both metropolitan and provincial extraction – took their place. From 1861 to 1864, the original version of the *Zemlia i volia* group gave this 'ardent youth' an organisational structure and the first semblance of a political programme. In 1866, the reaction that followed Dmitrii Karakozov's attempt on the life of Alexander II saw the

⁹⁶ Carr, *The Romantic Exiles*, p. 274.

⁹⁷ Goodwin, *Confronting Dostoevsky's Demons*, pp. 34-42.

majority of oppositional activity rapidly forced underground.⁹⁸ The revolutionary struggle of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was beginning in earnest.

During this period, the relaxation of the imperial censorship opened a number of hitherto suppressed topics to public discussion for the first time. Amongst these was the Siberian exile system, which began to generate significant interest among the reading public after Dostoevskii's *Zapiski iz mertvogo doma* was published in 1861.⁹⁹ In the years that followed, several other documentary and fictional accounts of hard labour and exile appeared both in monograph form and in the legal press.¹⁰⁰ Both for reasons of political sensitivity and, to some extent, because of Dostoevskii's chosen approach to the subject, the majority of these focused primarily on the plight of ordinary criminals rather than political offenders.¹⁰¹ One notable exception to this, however, was *Zhitie Protopopa Avvakuma im samim napisannoe* (*The Life of the Archpriest Avvakum, Written by Himself*), the memoir of a seventeenth-century schismatic banished to Siberia in 1653 for having opposed the Nikonian church reforms. The author, Avvakum Petrovich, spent approximately eleven years in exile, initially in Tobol'sk and later in Eastern Siberia, and composed his memoir in the early 1670s, shortly before he was burned at the stake for

⁹⁸ On the onset of reaction following Karakozov's failed assassination attempt see Abbott Gleason, *Young Russia: The Genesis of Russian Radicalism in the 1860s* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 332-336. On Karakozov himself see Claudia Verhoeven, *The Odd Man Karakozov: Imperial Russia, Modernity, and the Birth of Terrorism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009).

⁹⁹ Dostoevskii, *PSS* IV, pp. 5-232. In Chapter III, I discuss the influence of subsequent English translations of *Zapiski iz mertvogo doma* on the image of Siberia in late Victorian Britain.

¹⁰⁰ See, for example, F. N. L'vov, 'Vyderzhki iz vospominanii ssyl'no-katorzhnogo', *Sovremennik* 89.9 (1861), pp. 107-28 and 91.2 (1862), pp. 643-62; N. S. Leskov, 'Strastnaia subбота v tiur'me' and 'Za vorotami tiur'my', *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v tridsati tomakh* (Moscow: Terra, 1996-2000) I, pp. 465-507, 508-518; S. V. Maksimov, *Sibir' i katorga*, 3 vols (St Petersburg: Tipografiia A. Transhelia, 1871) and N. M. Iadrntsev, *Russkaia obshchina v tiur'me i ssylke* (St Petersburg: Tipografiia A. Morigerovskogo, 1872).

¹⁰¹ These two issues are arguably connected, since Dostoevskii may have superficially framed his protagonist, Gorianchikov, as a wife-murderer rather than as a political offender for the purposes of evading the censorship: see Frank, *The Stir of Liberation, 1860-1865*, pp. 217-220. For a discussion of the centrality of ordinary criminal exiles to literary representations of Siberian exile in the late nineteenth century see Sarah J. Young, *Russia's Carceral Literature from Avvakum to Pussy Riot* (forthcoming, 2018).

heresy.¹⁰² Following his death, the text spent the best part of two centuries circulating as an underground classic amongst merchants and Old Believer communities across the empire's outlying regions until a copy of the manuscript found its way to a noted literary historian, Nikolai Tikhonravov, who published it in late 1861.¹⁰³ The *Zhitie* was a major success, quickly attracting a large and diverse readership both in established literary circles and amongst the revolutionary *raznochintsy*.¹⁰⁴

Much in Avvakum's memoir would have been familiar to his nineteenth-century readership. The *Zhitie* is probably the earliest example in Russian literature of the bifurcated image of Siberia as both heaven and hell that had become standard by the beginning of the nineteenth century, and for this reason has been claimed as the 'genesis of Siberian literature'.¹⁰⁵ The portion of the memoir devoted to the author's time in exile – which comprises approximately two fifths of the whole text – is primarily taken up by a series of anecdotes drawn from several years' experiences in the Transbaikal, where he was attached to a Cossack expeditionary force. Avvakum portrays Siberia, first and foremost, as a place of torment. After the Cossack commander, Afanasii Pashkov, orders him savagely beaten for a minor transgression, he is incarcerated in a fortress on the Angara river:

[They] flung me into a dungeon, and gave me straw to lie upon. And there I lay till Advent, in a freezing tower; these are the seasons when winter reigns, but God kept me warm, and that without garments. Like a poor dog I lay on the straw; and

¹⁰² Beyond *Life of the Archpriest Avvakum*, see Wood, 'Avvakum's Siberian Exile, 1653-1664', pp. 11-34. On the origins of his famous memoir, see N. S. Demkova, *Zhitie Protopopa Avvakuma: tvorcheskaia istoriia proizvedeniia* (Leningrad: Izd-vo Leningradskogo universiteta, 1974).

¹⁰³ Margaret Ziolkowski, *Hagiography and Modern Russian Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), pp. 199-201.

¹⁰⁴ On Avvakum's nineteenth-century reception see A. N. Robinson, 'Tvorchestvo Avvakuma v istoriko-funktional'nom otnoshenii' in *Russkaia literatura v istorio-funktional'nom osveshchenii*, ed. N. V. Osmakov (Moscow: Nauka, 1979), pp. 98-181.

¹⁰⁵ Bruce T. Holl, 'Avvakum and the Genesis of Siberian Literature' in *Between Heaven and Hell*, pp. 33-45.

sometimes they fed me, and sometimes they did not [...] I lay all the time on my belly, my back was covered with sores, and of fleas and lice there was abundance. I would fain have cried on Pashkov to pardon me, but it would have been contrary to God's will – it was ordained that I should endure.¹⁰⁶

As the expedition resumes the following summer, famine looms. 'The folk began to die of hunger and from ceaseless working', Avvakum writes, painting a vivid tableau of woe and human suffering. 'Shallow was the river, heavy were the rafts, merciless were the taskmasters, stout were the sticks, gnarled were the cudgels, cutting were the knouts, cruel were the sufferings – fire and wrack [...] Ah, me! What a time!'¹⁰⁷ Later still, his wife – who has followed him into exile – asks how long their ordeal will last, to which he replies 'until our death'.¹⁰⁸ Such references to Siberia as hell on earth continue to dominate the narrative until Avvakum's eventual return to European Russia. As he reaches Lake Baikal, he discovers an unspoilt natural paradise, far from both the heresies of Moscow and the brutalities of his exile:

The place was surrounded by high mountains: I have wandered over the face of the earth twenty thousand versts and more, but never have I seen their like. On their summit are tents and earthen huts, portals and towers, stone walls and courts, all neatly fashioned. Onions grow on them and garlic, bigger than the Romanov onion and exceeding sweet to the taste; there also grows wild hemp, and in the gardens fine grass and exceeding fragrant flowers, and there is a great quantity of birds – geese and swans that fly over the lake like snow [...] The fish in [the lake] are of a great weight, the sturgeon and salmon-trout are exceeding fleshy – they

¹⁰⁶ *Life of the Archpriest Avvakum*, p. 69.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

are not for frying, for it would be naught but fat. And all this has been fashioned by our sweet Christ for man so that [...] he might give praise to God.¹⁰⁹

The *Zhitie* can thus be seen to have anticipated – and, once legally published, to have perpetuated – the tropes common to revolutionary writing about Siberia during the nineteenth century. Like the Decembrist exiles and, in their respective ways, Gertsen and Bakunin, Avvakum arrived in Siberia as an exile and initially equated the region with his punishment, only to discover there something akin to God’s kingdom on earth.

For the nihilists and populists (*narodniki*) of the 1860s and 1870s, Avvakum was an inspiration. As a rebel and martyr from an earlier age, his life and sufferings seemed profoundly relevant to their own situation. Responses to the *Zhitie* during this period not only lionised the author but, in some cases, traced a line from him to his putative modern-day counterparts. Two years after its publication, radical criticism of Nikolai Chernyshevskii’s novel *Chto delat'?* (*What Is To Be Done?*) likened one character, the cartoonishly steadfast revolutionary Rakhmetov, to Avvakum.¹¹⁰ During his own time as a political exile in Siberia, Chernyshevskii himself reportedly drew inspiration from Avvakum’s example, reminding fellow prisoners that the latter had ‘retained his pride while in the underground, never once turning to jelly’.¹¹¹ In later years, Vera Figner, a senior member of *Narodnaia volia*, wrote of her comrade Aleksandr Mikhailov that ‘one felt in him something unique to him alone, something of the Archpriest Avvakum and the Boiarynia Morozova [...] both of whom, when I read of them, impacted my whole consciousness and never once left my mind during all my years in Shlissel’burg’.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 97.

¹¹⁰ Ziolkowski, *Hagiography and Modern Russian Literature*, p. 202.

¹¹¹ V. Ia. Kokosov, ‘K vospominaniiam o N. G. Chernyshevskom’ in idem., *Rasskazy o kariiskoi katorge* (St Petersburg: Obshchestvennaia pol’za, 1907), p. 307.

¹¹² Figner quoted in Robinson, ‘Tvorchestvo Avvakuma’, p. 127. F. P. Morozova was an Old Believer and contemporary of Avvakum’s later immortalised in a famous 1887 painting by V. I. Surikov.

Thus recast as a freedom fighter in the image of the revolutionary *raznochintsy*, Avvakum provided a compelling example of sacrifice and, in essence, a further heroic text to follow – one to which the proud and unbending endurance of Siberian exile, as in the Decembrists’ case, was crucial. There was, however, one significant difference between the Decembrists’ Siberia and Avvakum’s. As Harriet Murav has demonstrated, the literary topos mapped by the Decembrist exiles and their contemporaries was essentially secular, a backdrop to the accomplishment of civic and political feats.¹¹³ In the *Zhitie*, by contrast, Siberia is sacralised. Avvakum is seen to endure the tribulations of exile by the will of God alone, and the Baikal scene, in turn, can be read as the alleviation of his sufferings. We have already noted that this trope of Siberian exile as the liminal phase of an initiation rite had been firmly entrenched in Russian culture long before the nineteenth century. In Avvakum’s case, however, it illuminates not only his historical identity as a rebel and the political context of his memoir, but his chosen genre of spiritual autobiography (in Russian, the word *zhitie* refers specifically to saints’ lives). It is reasonable to suppose that Avvakum’s reconciliation of political militancy with religion played a major role in his popularity amongst the young revolutionaries of the day, many of whom had roots in the provincial clergy and had rejected their childhood faith in favour of socialism and philosophical materialism.¹¹⁴

¹¹³ Harriet Murav, ‘Vo glubine sibirskikh rud: Siberia and the Myth of Exile’ in *Between Heaven and Hell*, p. 100.

¹¹⁴ Dostoevskii wrote in the early 1870s that he had ‘found the enemy of Russia – it’s the seminarians’: see ‘Zapisnaia tetrad’ 1872-1875’, *Literaturnoe nasledstvo* 83 (1971), p. 316. Several decades later, L. D. Trotskii described one participant in the July Days as a ‘revolutionary of the old type, one of the seminarians’: see *Istoriia russkoi revoliutsii*, 2 vols (Moscow: Respublika, 1997) II.i, p. 37. The image of the revolutionary *popovich* (clergyman’s son) appears frequently in nineteenth-century Russian literature and culture, with the two most famous examples being the prototypical nihilist Bazarov in I. S. Turgenev’s 1862 novel *Otsy i deti* (*Fathers and Sons*) and Grisha, the protagonist of Nikolai Nekrasov’s 1865-1877 poem ‘Komu na Rusi zhit’ khorosho?’ (‘Who is Happy in Russia?’). As Laurie Manchester, *Holy Fathers, Secular Sons: Clergy, Intelligentsia and the Modern Self in Revolutionary Russia* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2008), pp. 14-37 has argued, the religious backgrounds of many *raznochintsy* exerted significant influence on the development of the radical intelligentsia from the 1860s onwards. Both Chernyshevskii and Dobroliubov were seminarians, and the former appears to have used saintly prototypes in writing Rakhmetov’s character: see Andrew M. Drozd, *Chernyshevskii’s What Is To Be Done?: A Reevaluation* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2001), pp. 119-120. Religious figures

In this sense, the publication of the *Zhitie* provided an important precedent for the undoubted zenith of the Siberian theme in nineteenth-century revolutionary literature, and the culmination of this chapter's discussion: Nikolai Nekrasov's historical epic, 'Russkie zhenshchiny' ('Russian Women'). Published in two separate parts in Nekrasov's journal *Otechestvennye zapiski (Notes of the Fatherland)* in April 1872 and January 1873, 'Russkie zhenshchiny' narrates the Siberian odysseys and politico-religious conversions of two of the aforementioned Decembrist wives, Ekaterina Trubetskaia and Mariia Volkonskaia. The mythology of the women's moral feat (*podvig*) in following their husbands to Siberia has attained a status in modern Russian culture comparable to that of the Decembrists themselves: in the words of one historian, they 'acquired an aura of profound political and social martyrdom' through their act of self-renunciation, inspiring many of the female revolutionaries of later decades.¹¹⁵ This assessment of their influence, although broadly accurate, is wide of the mark in one important respect, since it was not the women themselves so much as Nekrasov's fictionalisation of them that provided later revolutionaries' model for action.

By the beginning of the 1870s, the events of 1825-1826 were an increasingly obvious topic for literary treatment. Public interest in the Decembrists had been steadily accumulating for the best part of two decades, stimulated initially by Gertsen's émigré publishing ventures and the survivors' return from Siberia after the 1856 amnesty, and thereafter by the relaxation of the censorship. In 1871, two respected journals – *Russkii arkhiv (Russian Archive)* and *Russkaia starina (Russian Antiquity)* – began to legally

continued to hold a fascination for many radicals and revolutionaries well into the twentieth century: see, for instance, Simon Dixon, 'Archimandrite Mikhail (Semenov) and Russian Christian Socialism', *Historical Journal* 51.3 (2008), pp 689-718. It should also be noted that the autohagiographical aspect of Avvakum's writing may have contributed to its success outside radical circles as well, since Dostoevskii's *Zapiski iz mertvogo doma* can likewise be classified as spiritual autobiography: see Gary Rosenshield, 'The Realization of the Collective Self: The Rebirth of Religious Autobiography in Dostoevskii's *Zapiski iz mertvogo doma*', *Slavic Review* 50.2 (1991), pp. 317-327.

¹¹⁵ Anatole Mazour, *Women in Exile: Wives of the Decembrists* (Tallahassee, FL: Diplomatic, 1975), pp. 94-95. See also Anna Biel, 'Sacrifice in the Name of Sacred Duty: The Representations of the Decembrist Wives in Russian Culture, 1825-present' (unpublished PhD thesis, SUNY Albany, 2011).

publish the conspirators' memoirs for the first time.¹¹⁶ Yet while such considerations alone would have been reason enough for Nekrasov to turn his attention to the subject, there seems little doubt that his motivations for doing so were primarily political in nature. By the time he wrote 'Russkie zhenshchiny', he was firmly established as a patron of the nascent revolutionary movement. As editor of the journal *Sovremennik* (*The Contemporary*) during the 1850s and 1860s, he had published work by Gertsen, Chernyshevskii and Dobroliubov, among many others. At the same time, his poetry – much of which drew upon the theme of popular suffering that saw Dostoevskii dub him the 'miserablist of the people's woe (*pechal'nik goria narodnogo*)¹¹⁷ – served as an education for many aspiring populists. One participant in the 1870s revival of *Zemlia i volia*, Lev Deich, later wrote that Nekrasov 'met the aspirations of the young avant-garde and taught us, above all, to become citizens who strove for the freedom and happiness of our native land.'¹¹⁸

Such didactic aims underpinned Nekrasov's attempt to trace a line between the Decembrists and their latter-day counterparts. After Gertsen began to defend and promote their legacy in the 1850s, the conspirators came not only to hold a fascination for young Russian radicals, but to provide them with a powerful moral and spiritual example.¹¹⁹ At Nekrasov's funeral in December 1877, the young Georgii Plekhanov, speaking on behalf of the large *Zemlia i volia* contingent who had come to pay their respects, opined that the poet's great achievement was to have 'eulogised the Decembrists, the predecessors of the revolutionary struggle of our own day, for the first time in the legal Russian press'.¹²⁰ Nekrasov first touched upon this imagined political lineage in his 1870 poem 'Dedushka'

¹¹⁶ Trigos, *The Decembrist Myth in Russian Culture*, p. 37.

¹¹⁷ Dostoevskii, 'Pushkin, Lermontov i Nekrasov', *PSS XXVI*, p. 117.

¹¹⁸ L. G. Deich, 'N. A. Nekrasov i semidesiatniki', *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia* 3 (1921), p. 7.

¹¹⁹ Frizman, *Dekabristy i russkaia literatura*, p. 204.

¹²⁰ G. V. Plekhanov, 'Pokhorony N. A. Nekrasova' in idem., *Literatura i estetika*, 2 vols (Moscow: Gos. izd-vo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1958) II, p. 208.

(‘Grandfather’), which depicts a young man’s political awakening after his Decembrist grandfather’s return from Siberia. In ‘Dedushka’, as in the Decembrists’ own poetry, Siberian exile is framed as a rite of passage, the liminal phase in the development of the professional revolutionary. The protagonist, Sasha, hears his grandfather speak of ‘barren wastes and iron chains’, of his comrades ‘wasting away in the wild, distant wilderness’, and of ‘miraculous beauties with angelic light in their eyes’ who follow them into exile.¹²¹ By the final stanza, Sasha has been radicalised by the Decembrists’ example and, with the reference to Chita, it is implied that their fate awaits him too:

Бойко на карте покажет
 И Петербург, и Читу,
 Лучше большого расскажет
 Многое в русском быту.

[He shall boldly point out Petersburg and Chita on the map and, better than anyone, relate much of Russian life.]¹²²

As the poem ends, his grandfather reflects that Sasha will, in the near future, ‘come to know this tale of grief’ (*pechal'naia byl'*) for himself.¹²³

Through its depiction of the *raznochintsy* as the Decembrists’ revolutionary inheritors, ‘Dedushka’ constitutes a prelude of sorts to ‘Russkie zhenshchiny’. Much of the latter’s didactic purpose can be inferred from Nekrasov’s substitution of its original working title, ‘Dekabristki’ (Decembrist women), and from the lowbrow style of

¹²¹ Nekrasov, *PSS* III, p. 17.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 19.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

expression employed throughout.¹²⁴ By decentring his protagonists' aristocratic origins and rewriting their narrative voices as those of the common people, he clearly implied that the heroic characteristics described in the poem were not those of the Decembrist wives alone, but rather of all Russian women. In 'Russkie zhenshchiny', Nekrasov interwove the heroic Siberian text bequeathed by the Decembrists and their epigones with the revolutionary populist programme of the 1870s.

Partially because of the circumstances in which the two halves of 'Russkie zhenshchiny' were written – Nekrasov had access to Volkonskaia's then-unpublished memoirs via her son Mikhail, but had little historical source material upon which to base his depiction of Trubetskaia¹²⁵ – the poem is a somewhat imbalanced composition, with the initial Trubetskaia section overshadowed both in length and detail by the subsequent account of Volkonskaia's journey to Siberia. The two parts are further distinguished by contrasting political and religious themes comparable to those in Avvakum's *Zhitie*. Trubetskaia is shown following her husband into exile and thereby emerging as a politically-conscious revolutionary, while Volkonskaia does not share her husband's political views but nonetheless joins him in Siberia to alleviate his suffering, a process which ultimately sees them both depicted as Christian martyrs. Nonetheless, the image of Siberia that emerges from the poem is essentially consistent, and indeed reminiscent of that originally bequeathed by the Decembrists and their contemporaries. Although depicted first and foremost a place of exile, it also appears as a liminal site of heroic deeds and anti-autocratic struggle from which revolutionaries return triumphant and emboldened.

¹²⁴ Anna Biel, 'Nikolai Nekrasov's Representation of the Decembrist Wives', *Australian Slavonic and East European Studies* 25.1-2 (2011), pp. 39-59.

¹²⁵ M. S. Volkonskii, 'Predislovie k zapiskam kniagini Marii Nikolaevny Volkonskoi' in *N. A. Nekrasov v vospominaniakh sovremennikov*, ed. G. V. Krasnov and N. M. Fortunatov (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1971), pp. 358-360.

By depicting the women's journeys into exile in terms of an initiation rite, Nekrasov draws upon the generic conventions of Siberian writing as established by the Decembrists and Gertsen's memoirs. As she leaves Petersburg in a solitary carriage, 'dressed all in black and mortally pale', Trubetskaia laments the necessity of her decision to join her husband in exile: 'My path is long and hard', she proclaims, 'and my fate terrible'.¹²⁶ After she crosses the Urals, such familiar liminal motifs come to dominate the narrative, with Siberia once more portrayed as a metaphorical state of death:

Пропали горы – началась
 Равнина без конца.
 Еще мертвей! Не встретит глаз
 Живого деревца [...]
 Трудна добыча на реке,
 Болота страшны в зной,
 Но хуже, хуже в рудинке,
 Глубоко под землей!
 Там гробовая тишина,
 Там безрассветный мрак,
 Зачем, проклятая страна,
 Нашел тебя Ермак?

[The mountains fell away, and so began a ravine without end – deathlier still, with not a single living tree to be seen [...]. Hard was the work on the river, and terrible the swamps in the heat, but worse, still worse were the mines, deep underground!

¹²⁶ Nekrasov, *PSS III*, pp. 24-25.

All there was silent as the grave, unbroken gloom; oh why, accursed land, did Ermak discover you?]¹²⁷

The climax of the Trubetskaia section, immediately following the above, can be seen as the postliminal phase of the protagonist's journey. Her social conscience having been aroused *en route* by encounters with the Russian people's sufferings, Trubetskaia emerges from her Siberian journey bearing a distinct resemblance to the populist women of the 1870s – in effect, transformed from *dekabristka* to *rusaskaia zhenshchina*. As she arrives in Irkutsk and confronts the local governor, who tries in vain to persuade her to return to Petersburg through a combination of trickery, guile and intimidation, her fiery political rhetoric reiterates the themes central to the Decembrist exiles' poetry of the 1820s. Rejecting the governor's pleas, she first equates Siberia with certain death ('Let death be my sentence, I shall not complain!'), thereafter raising the possibility of defying and undermining the autocratic state while in exile:

Приняв обет в душе моей
 Исполнить до конца
 Мой долг – я слез не принесу
 В проклятую тюрьму –
 Я гордость, гордость в нем спасу,
 И силы дам ему!
 Презрение к нашим палачам
 Сознание правоты
 Опорой верной будет нам.

¹²⁷ Ibid., pp. 30-31.

[By swearing in my soul to fulfil my duty to the end - no tears shall I bring to the accursed prison – his pride, his pride I shall save, and strength upon him bestow! Through contempt for our executioners and consciousness of the righteousness of our cause, we will surely endure.]¹²⁸

Highly fictionalised and essentially a distillation of the author's own revolutionary mindset, Nekrasov's Trubetskaia inhabits the Decembrists' secular Siberian topos, following her husband into exile as an act of political rebellion and civic virtue. Towards the end of her confrontation with the governor, however, there is a clear allusion to the sacralised Siberian topos described in Avvakum's *Zhitie*. As the governor again attempts to persuade her to return home, she responds that, although Petersburg 'was once a heaven on earth', it has since been 'cleaned away by Nicholas' careful hand', implying that it is Siberia which is now closer to heaven.¹²⁹ Although somewhat incongruous in the context of Trubetskaia's militant rhetoric, this notion is developed in the Volkonskaia section that brings 'Russkie zhenshchiny' to a close, in which Siberia's secular and religious topoi are presented as inextricably linked.

Volkonskaia's decision to follow her husband into exile is explicitly presented as an act of Christian salvation. By way of convincing her family to let her leave Petersburg, she reasons that having shared the joys of marriage with her husband, she 'must share his prison too – such is the will of God' (*tak nebu ugodno*). In recounting a meeting with him in the Petropavlovskaia fortress shortly before his departure for Siberia, she describes him literally transfigured as Christ ('a crown of thorns above his head, and heavenly love in

¹²⁸ Ibid., pp. 40-41.

¹²⁹ Ibid., p.42.

his eyes').¹³⁰ As she travels eastwards, however, this religious script becomes interwoven with the political one followed by Trubetskaia. Volkonskaia's journey is likewise framed as an initiation rite ('I shall never know joy', she reflects; 'I go to meet my torments').¹³¹ The rite reaches its climax on New Year's Eve when, trapped in a snowstorm, unable to see the road ahead and apparently far from any human habitation, she fears imminent death. Yet as midnight passes, the weather suddenly clears, the road reappears and her carriage arrives safely at a mining colony.¹³² Following this liminal episode, Volkonskaia, like Trubetskaia, attains her heroic form. Attending a 'poor (*ubogii*) church, lost in the wilderness' in order to pray for her husband's salvation, she mingles with the 'pious crowd' (*tolpa bogomol'naiia*), thereby fulfilling not only her own religious ideals but the populist dream of union with the Russian people:

Казалось, народ мою грусть разделял,
 Молясь молчаливо и строго.
 И голос священника скорбью звучал,
 Прося об изгнанниках бога.

[The people, it seemed, shared my sorrow, praying silently and strictly; the priest's voice, beseeching God on the exiles' behalf, was filled with grief.]¹³³

A projection of contemporary revolutionary ideals, Volkonskaia's journey to Siberia effectively anticipates the 'movement to the people' that began months after the poem's publication. In the final chapter of 'Russkie zhenshchiny', the poem's two sections

¹³⁰ Ibid., pp. 60-61.

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 73.

¹³² Ibid., pp. 73-75.

¹³³ Ibid., p. 76.

interweave as Volkonskaia and Trubetskaia meet by chance on the road to Nerchinsk; proceeding to the mines together, they vow to ‘support the dying, the weak and the sick in the hateful prison’.¹³⁴ That this refers to the ordinary criminals, overwhelmingly drawn from the peasantry, as much as the exiled Decembrists is confirmed not only by their salutation as ‘angels’ by the former upon arrival at Nerchinsk,¹³⁵ but by Volkonskaia’s ensuing soliloquy:

Спасибо вам, русские люди!
 В дороге, в изгнании, где я ни была,
 Все трудное каторги время,
 Народ! Я бодрее с тобою несла
 Мое непосильное бремя [...]
 Ты любишь несчастного, русский народ,
 Страдания нас породнили.

[Thank you, Russian people! On the road, in exile, in all the hardships of *katorga*, wherever I was – oh, people, with you I bore my unbearable burden more boldly [...]. You love the poor unfortunate, Russian people, our sufferings bought us together.]¹³⁶

With the poem’s final stanzas, the interaction of religious and political themes reaches a crescendo. As Volkonskaia descends into the mines, the proximity of Siberia’s heavenly and hellish aspects becomes apparent: ‘God guided me safely past the terrible chasms,

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 78.

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 81. Nekrasov’s intertext here was almost certainly Dostoevskii’s 1866 novel *Prestuplenie i nakazanie* (*Crime and Punishment*), in the Siberian epilogue of which Sonia Marmeladova is presented in similarly angelic terms. See Dostoevskii, *PSS* VI, p. 419.

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 80.

rockfalls and potholes’, she recalls, ‘and all became brighter and brighter’. Upon spotting her, the Decembrists refer to her as ‘the angel of god’ in ‘this accursed mine, more like hell’.¹³⁷ With Volkonskaia’s eventual reunion with her husband, the convicts and their guards fall silent, and *katorga* itself momentarily appears as heaven on earth (‘sacred, sacred was the silence’). Ordered to leave the mine and return to the surface, Volkonskaia feels herself ‘released from heaven to hell’ (*i slovno iz raia spustilas' ia v ad*).¹³⁸ By following their husbands into exile, the women are ultimately seen to sacralise not simply the Decembrists’ sufferings, but Siberia itself.

For Pavel Annenkov, an émigré journalist and friend of Nekrasov’s, the inseparability of religion and revolution was the poem’s defining feature. ‘Trubetskaia and Volkonskaia were no enamoured peasant women (*muzhichka-liubovnitsa*) running off to Siberia after their beloved masters’, he wrote. ‘For people like that *katorga* is actually *katorga*, and offers no consoling thoughts of dignity upheld or a duty fulfilled. But for our great women of 1825, *katorga* was an apotheosis.’¹³⁹ Annenkov was, of course, somewhat overstating the extent to which Nekrasov’s Decembrist wives corresponded to their historical counterparts. Much criticism of ‘Russkie zhenshchiny’ at the time of its publication and afterwards focused upon its largely ahistorical presentation of the women, with Volkonskaia’s relatives complaining that Nekrasov had portrayed her as a ‘rioter (*buntarka*)’.¹⁴⁰ Yet as the Soviet critic Kornei Chukovskii, amongst others, later pointed out, historical authenticity was essentially ancillary to the poet’s priorities.¹⁴¹ By rewriting Trubetskaia and Volkonskaia in the image of the 1870s *raznochintsy*, Nekrasov firmly established a distinct revolutionary genealogy from the Decembrists to the radicals

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 82.

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 85.

¹³⁹ P. V. Annenkov to Nekrasov, 8 March 1873, *Perepiska N. A. Nekrasova v dvukh tomakh*, ed. V. A. Viktorovich, G. V. Krasnov and N. M. Fortunatov (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1987) I, p. 255.

¹⁴⁰ Frizman, *Dekabristy i russkaia literatura*, p. 204.

¹⁴¹ K. I. Chukovskii, ‘Zdes' i teper'’ in idem., *Nesobrannye stat'i o N. A. Nekrasove*, ed. A. M. Garkavi (Kaliningrad: Kaliningradskii gosudarstvennyi universitet, 1974), pp. 23-55.

of his own time and, moreover, provided the latter with their own heroic Siberian text to follow in the years and decades to come.

In this respect, his timing was undeniably auspicious. Mere months after the second part of 'Russkie zhenshchiny' was published in 1873, the 'movement to the people' began, with thousands of young radicals leaving Moscow and Petersburg for the countryside in the hope of living amongst the peasants and converting them to socialism. Numerous arrests, and hundreds of prison and exile terms, followed over the coming years. For many caught up in the repression, Nekrasov's Decembrist poetry both contextualised and valourised their situation. After being sentenced to hard labour in Nerchinsk in 1884, Lev Deich begged a copy of the poet's collected works from a fellow prisoner to take to Siberia with him. Nekrasov, he later wrote, 'bestowed his blessing upon and prostrated himself before those who sacrificed themselves for the freedom of the people [...] before the heroism of the young avant-garde and their torments in Siberia, prison and exile'.¹⁴²

¹⁴² Deich, 'Nekrasov i semidesiatniki', p. 12, 22.

2.5. Conclusion

By the late nineteenth century, the oral and literary traditions of the Russian revolutionary movement had elevated both Siberian exile and Siberia itself to mythic status and, in so doing, produced a complex and multifaceted series of images of the region that corresponded closely to its broader relationship to Russian culture. From the Decembrists onwards, most revolutionaries saw Siberia in dualistic terms. On one level, it was a dismal land of incarceration and punishment that nonetheless undermined autocratic rule as much as exemplifying it, providing heroic political exiles with opportunities for resistance and defiance in both word and deed. On another, it was a second United States, a dynamic and egalitarian land of renewal and a vast stage upon which to rehearse Russia's post-autocratic future. For the writers and propagandists that constructed the Siberia of revolutionary myth and legend, all these notions were interwoven and inseparable. Not one contributor to the revolution's Siberian text ever attempted to map precisely where the snows and exile settlements ended and where the invigorating, transformative frontier began, nor could they have done so, for such would have missed the point: Siberia's strength lay in its liminality, its capacity to encapsulate simultaneously the idealised heroism and self-sacrifice of the revolutionary struggle and the utopian dreams of those engaged in it. The ramifications of this for the revolutionaries of the turn of the century are explored in later chapters. For the moment, however, it remains to note that the Siberian imagery that proved so fruitful for Gertsen, Bakunin, Nekrasov and others was by no means confined to Russian culture. During the nineteenth century, Siberia was an object of international fascination, and many of its most striking features – whether carceral or otherwise – were as relevant to constructing the image of Tsarist Russia abroad as they were for revolutionaries at home. As we shall now see, the

development of a parallel and closely related Siberian theme in Britain during approximately the same period exhibited many of the same tropes, deployed to completely different ends.

3. Siberia and the British critique of Russia, 1806-1885

The circumstances connected with my escape from Siberia are as follows. My sympathy with the cause of Poland was ardent, but I had always a strong conviction that one of the minor duties of an Englishman was to attend to his own business. Mine was grocery [...] To free the Poles is, of course, our immediate duty. Nevertheless, I did not go to Poland. In point of fact, I never left St Mary Axe. And it is entirely to this circumstance that I attribute my escaping from Siberia.

– Letter to *Fun* magazine, August 1863¹

On the evening of 27 February 1882, the American journalist and traveller George Kennan gave a lecture to the American Geographical Society in New York in which he set out to make the case that exile to Siberia was not so horrible a punishment as was then supposed by many in the West, and thereby to defend the Russian government from the charges of its overseas detractors. For nearly a century, Kennan lamented, ‘the whole civilized world’ had taken ‘a deep and painful interest in the fortunes and fate of Siberian exiles’:

Again and again, in books, in magazines, and in newspaper leaders throughout the world, the subject has been taken up and discussed; sometimes with sympathy and pity, sometimes with prejudice, but always with ignorance. Novelists and dramatists have used the supposed facts of Siberian exile as themes for stories and

¹ ‘My Escape from Siberia’, *Fun* 4 (15 August 1863), p. 212.

plays [...] It has been almost impossible, since the Crimean War, to take up a newspaper or a magazine in England or America which, if it mentioned Russia at all, did not make some reference to Siberian exile. Probably no social question was ever so much discussed and so little understood.²

If Kennan's attempt to humanise the exile system was, as he himself subsequently conceded, somewhat questionable, his comments on the Western public's fascination with Siberia were unerringly accurate. Around the turn of the nineteenth century, the treatment of political exiles in Siberia was above all else the cause that underpinned Russian revolutionary émigrés' propaganda campaigns amongst their Victorian hosts and which rallied progressive British opinion against the Tsarist government. As noted earlier, historians have generally acknowledged this fact in passing but, as yet, ascribed no real significance to it. Yet the Siberian theme in nineteenth-century Anglo-Russian contacts has a prehistory eminently worthy of exploration, for it was not by chance that Kravchinskii, Kropotkin and their fellow refugees of the 1880s and 1890s chose to consistently and vociferously publicise the Siberian sufferings of revolutionary exiles. Throughout the preceding decades, the incessant repetition of clichés about Siberia and the Russian penal system (the two being interchangeable for most Britons) in popular fiction, publicistic works and journalism had firmly entrenched a sensationalised image of the region that, by the 1880s, was ripe for exploitation by Russia's revolutionary émigrés. As *The Spectator* put it in 1900:

There was something about the penalty of banishment, and banishment to Siberia, which took an extraordinary hold on the imagination. The enormous distance

² George Kennan, 'Siberia: The Exiles' Abode', *Journal of the American Geographical Society of New York* 14 (1882), pp. 34-35.

which the exiles had to travel, the Arctic climate and surroundings in which they were supposed to be doomed to drag out what remained of life, the impossibility of escape except at the cost of untold risk and suffering - all helped make a picture of appalling cruelty. The horror was heightened by the circumstance that the whole body of exiles were popularly invested with an interest which really belonged to a single, and that a small, class. No one remembered the crimes of which the majority had been guilty; they were all assumed to be sufferers for conscience's sake. Siberia, in the imagination at all events of Western Europeans, was peopled by political prisoners.³

This chapter traces the origins and development of Siberia's image, and its relation to the representation of Russia more generally, in British politics, culture and society from the beginning of the nineteenth century to the origins of the Siberian agitation in the 1880s. It contends, first and foremost, that although Siberia and its exile system were central to British views of Russia from an early stage, the subject became increasingly politicised throughout the nineteenth century. During the decades prior to the Crimean War and the Polish insurrection of 1863, Siberia was primarily significant as a source of exotica for fiction writers and was synonymous with an undifferentiated, hackneyed image of Russia, tailored to the expectations of a public that knew little about the country. Conversely, as information on various aspects of Russian life began to proliferate more widely in the latter half of the century, Siberia increasingly served as both a locus for British critiques of Russian politics and society and a rhetorical device for placing Russia either within or beyond the ambit of European civilisation. By the 1880s, whether one believed that the exile system was really as awful as its reputation suggested was generally indicative of

³ 'Siberia No More', *The Spectator* 85.3759 (14 July 1900), p. 39-40.

one's views on a variety of questions related to the merits of autocratic rule, the growth of the revolutionary movement, and where Russia stood in relation to the West.

As will be seen, this gradual politicisation of the Siberian theme was intimately connected with the growth of British sympathy for Poland throughout the early-to-mid nineteenth century, the propaganda activities of Polish émigrés in Britain, and the explicit association of the struggle for Polish nationhood with Siberian exile by a number of early literary contacts. As Britons enthusiastically rallied to the Polish cause after the insurrections of 1830 and 1863, so the fate of those rebels banished to Siberian *katorga* and exile became symbolic of political repression, with the region itself depicted by some as the oriental antithesis of occidental Poland. Such depictions of Siberia as the key battleground in the contest between Western liberty and Russian autocracy subsequently shaped British perceptions of Russia's radical intelligentsia, who – like the Poles – were generally considered to be closer civilisationally to Europe than to Russia. In this way, Siberia's literary terrain was gradually politicised over the course of the nineteenth century. This process, however, did not result in a linear progression from one image the region rooted in fiction to another based upon facts. Throughout the nineteenth century, the region's reputation amongst the British public was in large part constructed through the appropriation of fictional writing, its redeployment as documentary material and use as a pretext for the discussion of political questions. In this sense, Siberia was inseparable from its imaginative, half-Ruritanian shadow, a duality that simultaneously whetted the British public's appetite for horror and melodrama whilst posing a problem for attempts to uncover the 'truth about Siberia' as the century wore on.

3.1. ‘The land of eternal snow’: Mme Cottin’s *Elisabeth; ou, Les*

Exilés de Sibérie

Throughout the early decades of the nineteenth century, most British people knew very little of Russia, and disliked that which they did know. From the Congress of Vienna in 1815 to the outbreak of the Crimean War in 1853, the escalation of political animosity between the two countries, along with the gradual development of a more liberal political culture in Britain that saw Russia as its autocratic antithesis, provided the genesis of a ‘British Russophobia’ active at all levels of politics, culture and society.⁴ Worsening political relations were compounded by a paucity of socio-cultural contacts between the two countries. Few Britons visited Russia, still fewer spoke or read the language, and no British newspaper had a dedicated Russian correspondent. Likewise, no Russian literature whatsoever was available in English translation until 1821, and no translations of real consequence appeared until the 1850s.⁵ The result of all this was that British knowledge of Russia depended almost entirely upon the repeated propagation of crude Russian stereotypes and the appropriation of Russian exotica, both of which simultaneously served the Russophobic political priorities of a nascent Victorian liberalism and the construction of Russia as a distant, semi-Ruritanian other. For several decades, episodic instances of genuine curiosity struggled against ‘a sense of cultural superiority and a

⁴ John Howes Gleason, *The Genesis of Russophobia in Great Britain: A Study of the Interaction of Policy and Opinion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1950).

⁵ See, respectively, Iwona Sakowicz, ‘Russia and the Russians: Opinions of the British Press during the Reign of Alexander II (Dailies and Weeklies)’, *Journal of European Studies* 35.3 (2005), pp. 272-273 and Gilbert Phelps, ‘The Early Phases of British Interest in Russian Literature’, *Slavonic and East European Review* 36.87 (1958), pp. 426-430. In general, see *A People Passing Rude: British Responses to Russian Culture*, ed. Anthony Cross (Cambridge: Open Book, 2012).

whole set of stock emotional reactions and generalised notions arrayed against a background of political and commercial hostility or self-interest'.⁶

As the remarkable nineteenth-century career of the French writer Sophie Cottin's 1806 novel *Elisabeth; ou, Les Exilés de Sibérie* (*Elizabeth; or, The Exiles of Siberia*) makes clear, representations of Siberian exile played a central role in this process from an early stage. A classic of the sentimentalist genre, the novel was based on the story, widely reported in Paris during 1805, of Praskov'ia Lupolova, a Russian peasant girl who reputedly walked from Tiumen' to Moscow to petition Alexander I for her father's release from exile. Cottin took considerable artistic license in adapting Lupolova's story for the European literary market, with the novel's eponymous heroine engineering her own escape from Siberia by winning the heart of the local governor's son and belatedly arriving in Moscow before the benevolent Tsar after several chapters' worth of snowbound tundra, wolves and troikas.⁷ Perhaps unsurprisingly, *Elisabeth; ou, Les Exilés de Sibérie* was an instant hit across Europe and America. Sales far outstripped those of Cottin's other novels; even in Russia, *Elisabeth* appeared in five different editions between 1808 and 1830.⁸ In Britain, where it first appeared in translation in 1808, it proved remarkably enduring and, for many decades, was widely seen as synonymous with popular perceptions of Russia in general and Siberia in particular. In this respect the novel's afterlife is rather curious since Cottin claimed no documentary or political significance for it whatsoever, and indeed emphasised that it was not meant to be a remotely faithful description of Siberia. 'The scene of the principal anecdote of this story

⁶ Phelps, 'The Early Phases of British Interest in Russian Literature', p. 420. For a bibliography of English-language accounts of Russia during this period see Anthony Cross, *In the Lands of the Romanovs: An Annotated Bibliography of First-Hand English-Language Accounts of the Russian Empire, 1613-1917* (Cambridge: Open Book, 2014).

⁷ Sophie Cottin, *Elizabeth; or, The Exiles of Siberia: A Tale Founded Upon Facts*, trans. W. R. Bowles (London: J. Limbird, 1824).

⁸ Hilde Hoogenboom, 'Sentimental Novels and Pushkin: European Literary Markets and Russian Readers', *Slavic Review* 74.3 (2015), p. 563.

is removed as far as Siberia', she noted in the preface, 'yet I must add that it was unnecessary for me to extend my researches to so distant a region, since every country affords traits of filial piety and of mothers animated with the glow of parental tenderness'.⁹ Moreover, the novel's initial reception in Britain ascribed to it no such value. The weightier of the periodicals responded to *Elisabeth* on a purely aesthetic level – *The Edinburgh Review* praised it enthusiastically, while *The Monthly Review* found the plotline 'for the most part artless'¹⁰ – and much of its initial success was due to its widespread recognition as a morality tale suitable for schoolchildren.¹¹

This said, there is little doubt that *Elisabeth*'s later success in Britain owed less to its literary merits than to the insatiable demand of the public for material showcasing the most lurid clichés about Russia. During the decades prior to the Crimean War, in Royal Gettman's words, English readers primarily wanted 'a picture of actual Russian life more lively than true and more clever than accurate', one preferably comprised of 'measureless steppes, crackling snow, foam-flecked horses pursued by packs of howling wolves [...] overtopped by the stealthy intrigues of the secret police and the terrifying prospect of Siberian exile'.¹² *Elisabeth* met these criteria perfectly, and less than a decade after it first appeared in English translation, it was 'to be found in every library in the kingdom'.¹³ The extent to which the novel became both a fixture and a standard reference in discussions of Russia can be judged from *Punch*'s confident assertion, as late as 1874, that the Duke of Edinburgh's marriage to the Grand Duchess Maria Alexandrovna would

⁹ Cottin, *Elizabeth; or, The Exiles of Siberia*, p. 4.

¹⁰ 'Elizabeth, ou les Exilés de Sibérie', *Edinburgh Review* 11.22 (January 1808), pp. 448-462; 'Elizabeth; or, The Exiles of Siberia', *Monthly Review* 58 (March 1809), p. 329.

¹¹ Michael Call, *Infertility and the Novels of Sophie Cottin* (Newark, NJ: University of Delaware Press, 2002), p. 138.

¹² Royal A. Gettman, *Turgenev in England and America* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1941), p. 12.

¹³ 'Madam Cottin', *Ladies' Monthly Museum*, 1 July 1817, p. 17.

see everyone ‘smitten with a taste for malachite [and] reading *Elizabeth; or, The Exiles of Siberia*’.¹⁴

By this time, *Elizabeth*’s uselessness as a source of information on Russian politics, society and culture was increasingly obvious. After the Crimean War, the average Briton knew at least slightly more about Russia than before, and the stereotypes with which *Elizabeth* was primarily associated were a frequent target for mockery. One impresario’s decision to revive the novel on the London stage to coincide with the royal wedding of 1874 was greeted with derision by the press, and references to Cottin’s writing in adventure stories that drew upon Siberian themes and imagery were often distinctly tongue-in-cheek: one frequent contributor to *The Boy’s Own Paper*, James Hodgetts, depicted his ‘nihilistic’ protagonists fleeing Siberia with the help of illegally-imported copies of the book.¹⁵ Yet others continued to invest *Elizabeth* with political significance, and by the late nineteenth century those who wished to pass judgement on the Siberian exile system in particular and the Russian government in general regularly referred to the novel. As William Howells, the editor of the Anglo-American monthly *Harper’s*, put it in 1888:

The pathetic tale of *Elizabeth, or The Exiles of Siberia*, one of the books which touched deeply the imagination of children fifty years ago, left an impression of Russian tyranny which no lapse of time wore away. The general American and English feeling about the gigantic and gloomy empire was largely determined by that little book. The national mind of both countries was prepared to receive and believe all the tales of the horrors of despotism, and the later mysterious

¹⁴ ‘All About the Wedding’, *Punch*, 24 January 1874, p. 37.

¹⁵ J. F. Hodgetts, ‘Ivan Dobroff: A Russian Story’, *The Boy’s Own Paper* 332 (23 May 1885), p. 539.

organization of the Nihilists and the terrible revelations of the Russian novelists are all made credible and probable by the sorrowful story of Elizabeth.¹⁶

How and why did Cottin's novel achieve such significance? One minor detail offers a clue to its curious nineteenth-century afterlife: the fact that the author rewrote Praskov'ia Lupolova and her family as exiled Polish nobles. Why she included this detail (which is only introduced halfway through, sparingly referred to thereafter and completely extraneous to the plot) is not quite certain, but probable sources for it are not hard to identify. Still a relatively recent memory, the Third Partition of Poland in 1795 had provided plentiful material for European writers in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The Scottish poet Thomas Campbell, later an influential Polonophile publicist, immortalised the heroic figure of Tadeusz Kosciuszko in his 1799 historical epic 'The Pleasures of Hope' ('Hope, for a season, bade the world farewell / And freedom shriek'd – as Kosciuszko fell!') to great acclaim.¹⁷ Two years earlier, a brief visit to Britain by Kosciuszko himself had aroused significant public excitement and indirectly inspired Jane Porter's *Thaddeus of Warsaw*, the first historical novel in the English language, which went through nine editions between 1803 and 1810.¹⁸

A further incentive for Cottin to Polonicise her novel, however superficially, was the immense impact made by Maurycy Beniowski's *Memoirs and Travels*. A Polish-Hungarian nobleman exiled to Siberia in the 1770s for association with the Confederation of Bar, Beniowski belonged to the first generation of Polish insurrectionists exiled to

¹⁶ W. D. Howells, 'Editor's Easy Chair', *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* LXXVII (August 1888), p. 474.

¹⁷ Thomas Campbell, *The Poetical Works of Thomas Campbell* (Philadelphia, PA: Lea & Blanchard, 1845), p. 40.

¹⁸ Amongst those who met Kosciuszko in London was Porter's brother, Robert, later an artist-in-residence at the court of Alexander I. On Polonophilism in late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century English literature see L. R. Lewitter, 'The Polish Cause as Seen in Great Britain, 1830-1863', *Oxford Slavonic Papers* 28 (1995), pp. 35-36 and Gleason, *Genesis of Russophobia*, p. 14.

Siberia during the imperial period.¹⁹ Shortly after his arrival on the Kamchatka peninsula, he raised a rebellion and escaped by way of Macau and Madagascar, subsequently colonising the latter on behalf of France. Beniowski wrote his memoirs in the early 1780s and entrusted them to the Portuguese philosopher Jean Magellan, who published them in English in 1790 following the author's death.²⁰ Translated into most European languages within a few years, *Memoirs and Travels* was hugely popular, inspiring August von Kotzebue's 1795 opera *Graf Benjowsky, oder die Verschwörung auf Kamtschatka* (*Count Beniowski, or The Uprising on Kamchatka*) as well as the French ballet *Beniowski; ou, Les Exilés au Kamschatka* (*Beniowski, or The Exiles of Kamchatka*), which may have inspired Cottin's title. Both *Elisabeth* and Beniowski's *Memoirs and Travels* were readapted for the stage on several occasions throughout the early nineteenth century, and *The Boston Statesman's* charming misapprehension of news in 1828 that a shipment of copies of *Elisabeth* had reached America ('Exiles of Siberia - one hundred and fifty of these miserable felons are said to have arrived at New York, among them Count Benyowsky') would appear to suggest that the two stories were closely associated in the eyes of the public.²¹

Whatever Cottin's reason, her decision to situate a family of heroic Polish exiles in the Siberian wilds fortuitously prefigured many Britons' association of Siberian exile with the Polish national cause throughout the decades to come, during which the fortunes of her final novel were closely connected to the growth of British sympathy with Poland and hostility towards Russia. *Elisabeth* was again reworked for the stage in the years following the uprising of November 1830 and appeared in several new editions during the insurrection of 1863, during which time journalists and critics often referred to it in

¹⁹ Gentes, *Exile to Siberia*, pp. 118-120.

²⁰ Maurice Auguste Benyowsky, *Memoirs and Travels of Mauritius Augustus, Count de Benyowsky*, trans. William Nicholson (London: G. G. J. Robinson, 1790).

²¹ 'Curious Blunder', *The Age* 141 (27 January 1828), p. 27.

relation to the memoirs of various real-life Polish exiles, thereby politicising it. Throughout the mid-nineteenth century, the novel's popularity provided a supportive mesh for the activities of Polish émigré propagandists, who frequently imputed a binary opposition between Poland and Siberia by equating the one with freedom, enlightenment and European values and the other with barbarism and despotism. This, however, was not Cottin's only contribution to Siberia's image in Victorian Britain. As it gradually accrued political significance in spite of itself, *Elisabeth; ou, Les Exilés de Sibérie* permanently intertwined Siberian fact and fiction. In both respects, as we shall see, the novel's success set a precedent for the propaganda campaigns waged by Russian émigrés in later decades.

3.2. Siberia and the Polish national cause, 1830-1863

From the early 1830s to the 1860s, Polish refugees were the largest national constituency of political émigrés resident in Britain. They were also, by some distance, the most vocal. Their presence *en masse* and their persistent advocacy for Poland's claim to statehood played the single most important part in the development of liberal and working-class internationalism in Britain prior to 1848 and during the subsequent decades of reform. Polonophilism was fundamental to both liberal and radical conceptions of Britain's place in the world, and representatives of the 'great emigration' duly enjoyed cordial relations with a diverse array of British parliamentarians, journalists and radical activists from the early 1830s onwards. Founded in February 1832 by Thomas Campbell with help from Prince Adam Jerzy Czartoryski, Wladyslaw Zamoyski and other conservative émigrés, the Literary Association of the Friends of Poland (LAFP) devoted itself to recruiting support for the Polish cause at Westminster and developing a formidable network of sympathetic contacts in the press and aristocratic society; prior to its decline in the mid-

1850s, it represented the single most important forum for establishment British Polonophilism.²² Elsewhere, Polish refugees of more avowedly nationalist and socialist persuasions were closely associated with the Chartists in the 1830s and 1840s.²³ By the middle of the nineteenth century, a wide variety of Polish émigré organisations had thus been active in Britain at different times, each enjoying varying degrees of public exposure and popular support.²⁴

British sympathy for the Poles peaked in the years following the insurrections of 1830 and 1863. The 1830s and early 1840s witnessed the zenith not only of parliamentary interest in the issue, but of working-class enthusiasm for the Polish cause and the LAFP's influence across the country as a whole. This inchoate Polonophilism had begun to dissipate markedly by the revolutions of 1848, and by the end of the Crimean War (1853-1856), the internationalist ardour of previous decades seemed of scant importance in comparison to the all-encompassing struggles over electoral reform at home. Yet the Warsaw uprising of 1863 quickly returned Poland to the centre of public attention and elevated the restoration of Polish statehood into an all-encompassing *cause célèbre* throughout Britain, the emigration's years of indefatigable agitation belatedly paying dividends as British sympathy with and activism in support of the insurgents reached fever pitch. Public debate was characterised by open calls for war with Russia in defence of Poland, while a landmark protest meeting at London's Guildhall in March 1863 was

²² The history of the LAFP cannot easily be separated from the career of Lord Dudley Stuart (1803-1854), one of its earliest members and the most enthusiastic supporter of Polish statehood in mid-Victorian Britain. See Krzysztof Marchlewicz, *Polonofil doskonaly: propolska dzialalnosc charytatywna i polityczna lorda Dudley Couttsa Stuarta, 1803-1854* (Poznan: Wydawnictwo Poznanskie, 2001).

²³ On working-class support for the Poles see Peter Brock, 'Polish Democrats and English Radicals 1832-1862: A Chapter in the History of Anglo-Polish Relations', *Journal of Modern History* 25.2 (1953), pp. 139-156 and Henry G. Weisser, 'Polonophilism and the British Working Class, 1830 to 1845', *Polish Review* 12.2 (1967), pp. 78-96. Although the discussion that follows covers both liberal and radical Polonophilism, it should be noted that these conceptions of internationalism were in practice quite distinct from one another. See Margot Finn, 'A Vent Which Has Conveyed Our Principles': English Radical Patriotism in the Aftermath of 1848', *Journal of Modern History* 64.4 (1992), pp. 637-659.

²⁴ Peter Brock, 'The Polish Revolutionary Commune in London', *Slavonic and East European Review* 35.84 (1956), pp. 116-128. The better known groups included the Polish Democratic Association, the Polish Emigration Committee, the National League for the Independence of Poland, the National Polish League, and the Deputies of the Polish Emigration.

overshadowed only by the famous Tyneside radical Joseph Cowen fitting out privateers on behalf of the revolutionary government and the townspeople of Woolwich cheering Bakunin's ill-fated 'Polish legion'.²⁵ During this period, events in Poland generated only slightly less coverage in British newspapers than the denouement of the American Civil War in the two years that followed.²⁶

Throughout this period, the association of radical Polish patriotism with Siberian exile featured heavily in the propaganda effort that underlay this eventual groundswell of public support. Aware that Russophobia was Polonophilism's natural corollary, both the Polish émigrés in London and their supporters in Parliament sought to buttress their representation of Poland as an enlightened European nation with a correspondingly negative image of Russia. As a result, MPs who spoke in support of the Poles during the early 1830s rarely neglected to reference the sufferings of Polish exiles in Siberia. In a debate in the Commons on 18 April 1832, the Scottish MP and LAFP stalwart Robert Cutlar Fergusson reminded the House that 'while the mildness and mercy of the Emperor Nicholas were the theme of some persons' praise, he had transported his Polish subjects by thousands from their own country to the barren wilds of Siberia', while Lord Viscount Sandon rose in like manner to 'condemn the deportation of the Poles to Siberia as an act of unparalleled atrocity'.²⁷ In another debate on Polish affairs just over two months later, Viscount Morpeth lamented that the nobility of the 'land that first resisted the torrent of Mahomedan invasion and secured the liberties and religion of Europe' had been 'consigned to the dungeons, the mines, the graves of Siberia', and its children 'carried off

²⁵ The general picture is given in Lewitter, 'The Polish Cause as Seen in Great Britain', pp. 35-61. On the resurgence of support for the Poles in the early 1860s see Peter Brock, 'Joseph Cowen and the Polish Exiles', *Slavonic and East European Review* 32.78 (1953), pp. 52-69. On the Guildhall protest, the Polish legionaries and the *Ward Jackson* affair respectively, see 'The Rising in Poland', *The Times* 24497 (4 March 1863), p. 7, 'Insurrection in Russian Poland: Conveyance of Armed Poles from England to the Baltic by the *Ward Jackson*', TNA HO 45/7514 and Carr, *The Romantic Exiles*, pp. 235-243.

²⁶ John F. Kutolowski, 'Polish Exiles and British Public Opinion: A Case Study of 1861-2', *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 21.1 (1979), pp. 45-65.

²⁷ *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates* (hereafter *Hansard*), 3rd series, vol. 12, cols. 651-658, HC Deb 18 April 1832.

to lose the memory of their noble country on the frozen banks of the Ob'.²⁸ The following year, both Cutlar Fergusson and the Irish MP Daniel O'Connell raised the case of Prince Roman Adam Stanislaw Sanguszko, a young Polish nobleman who had reportedly been forced to complete his journey to Siberia on foot and whose experiences in exile subsequently inspired a popular music hall ditty.²⁹

The Polish emigration thus clearly perceived the propaganda value of Siberian horror stories from an early stage. References to the exile system in Parliament were neither spontaneous nor coincidental, since MPs affiliated to the LAFP or otherwise sympathetic to the Poles rarely spoke on the subject without prior consultation with, and assistance from, their émigré associates.³⁰ Indeed, references to Siberian exile very similar to those recorded in the Commons can be found in the LAFP's founding manifesto, written by Campbell in 1832 on the basis of documentary materials provided by Czartoryski, Zamoyski and others. 'The Muscovite is sending, by thousands and by tens of thousands, the wounded men, the weeping mothers, and the very youth from the schools of Poland, in chains to Siberia – would to God we could believe that report has exaggerated these atrocities!', Campbell declared, concluding that 'the most merciful fate that a Pole can now expect is to be spared being sent into Siberia'.³¹

The parliamentary agitation instigated by London's Polish émigrés in the early 1830s was largely ineffective insofar as it failed to recruit more than a handful of MPs to their cause and did not alter British policy towards Russia: its main accomplishment was securing an annual grant of £10,000, disbursed initially by the LAFP and later by the

²⁸ *Hansard*, vol. 13, col. 1134, HC Deb 28 June 1832.

²⁹ *Hansard*, vol. 19, cols. 408-442, HC Deb 9 July 1833; Lewitter, 'The Polish Cause as Seen in Great Britain', p. 47.

³⁰ Marchlewicz, *Polonofil doskonaly*, pp. 69-70; Lewitter, 'The Polish Cause as Seen in Great Britain', pp. 44-45.

³¹ *Address of the Polish Literary Association to the People of Great Britain* (London: Literary Association of the Friends of Poland, 1832), pp. 9-10, 16.

Treasury, for the maintenance of destitute Polish refugees in Britain.³² The impact made by the campaign outside Westminster, however, was far greater. In the years that followed, the LAFP organised rallies, founded regional branches across Britain and published information, émigré proclamations and pro-Polish articles in the British press. It was through these channels that the talking points favoured by the émigrés reached a wider audience; by 1836, the Manchester free trade enthusiast Richard Cobden felt obliged to object to the ‘clamour of fine sentiments palmed by philanthropic authors and speakers upon the much abused public mind about Russian aggression in [Poland]’.³³

In conveying their appeal to the British public at large, the émigrés found the imagery of Siberian exile useful not only as an indictment of the Russian autocracy, but as a means of underscoring the enlightened nobility of their cause. The widespread notion that only in exile had an embryonic Polish nationality survived the disasters of the previous decades – in the words of the Polish Emigration Committee’s London branch in 1862, there had long been ‘no Poles but in exile’³⁴ – served to collapse both the distance and distinction between Poland and Siberia, an imagined proximity that informed one distinct strand of Polish émigré propaganda during the mid-nineteenth century. For the British public – which still derived its minimal knowledge of Siberia primarily from texts such as Cottin’s *Elisabeth* and Beniowski’s *Memoirs and Travels* – the notion that Nicholas I had aimed to ‘make a Siberia of Poland and a Poland of Siberia’, as the émigré Krystyn Lach-Szyrma put it in 1852, would have been highly suggestive.³⁵ (It is striking that almost all reference to Siberian exile in the British press and in publicistic works

³² Lewitter, ‘The Polish Cause as Seen in Great Britain’, p. 46.

³³ Richard Cobden, ‘Russia’ in *The Political Writings of Richard Cobden*, ed. F. W. Chesson, 2 vols (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1903), I.ii, p. 32. Cobden’s invective was directed primarily at Dudley Stuart, whose criticisms of Russian policy he considered ill-informed and hysterical.

³⁴ *The Cause of Poland: An Address by the Polish Exiles to the British Public, Unanimously Adopted at the Anniversary Meeting* (London: Polish Emigration Committee, 1862), p. 5.

³⁵ Ewa Felinska, *Revelations of Siberia: By A Banished Lady*, ed. Krystyn Lach-Szyrma (London: Colburn & Co., 1852), ix-x.

during the middle of the nineteenth century either originated tangentially from broader discussions of the Polish national cause or, at the very least, emphasised the sufferings of exiled Polish patriots to the complete exclusion of their Russian counterparts. At a time when the revolutionary movement in Russia was little known in Britain and regarded with extreme distaste whenever it was mentioned, the *katorga* terms handed down to both the Decembrists and *Petrashevtsy* during the Nicholaevan period went entirely without mention, as did the banishment of such figures as Chernyshevskii in the 1860s.)

It was in the realm of publicistic literature that Polish émigré efforts to capitalise upon Siberia's propaganda potential were most consistent and most successful. The years directly before and during the Crimean War saw the emergence of a tendency in Britain towards the 'informational translation' of Russian literature, with a number of famous texts – including Gogol's *Mertvye dushi* (*Dead Souls*), Lermontov's *Geroi nashego vremeni* (*The Hero of Our Time*) and Turgenev's *Zapiski okhotnika* (*A Sportsman's Sketches*) – selected for translation on political grounds and repurposed or rewritten to confirm readers' chauvinistic biases about Russia.³⁶ Several such piracies and adaptations were published by Polish émigrés.³⁷ Lach-Szyrma's 1854 reworking of *Mertvye dushi* into a tendentious pseudo-documentary pamphlet entitled *Home Life in Russia*, which was unattributed to Gogol' and rapidly denounced as fraudulent by the more perceptive elements of the periodical press,³⁸ was bookended by references to Siberian exile. An editorial preface sought to justify the author's anonymity on the grounds that publicity

³⁶ Rachel May, *The Translator in the Text: On Reading Russian Literature in English* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1994), p. 15. See, respectively, *Home Life in Russia, by a Russian Noble. Revised by the Editor of Revelations of Siberia*, ed. Krystyn Lach-Szyrma, 2 vols (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1854); *Sketches of Russian Life in the Caucasus: By a Russe, Many Years Resident Amongst the Various Mountain Tribes* (London: Ingram & Cooke, 1853) and Ivan Tourghenieff, *Russian Life in the Interior; or, The Experiences of a Sportsman*, trans. James Meiklejohn (Edinburgh: A & C Black, 1855).

³⁷ Gilbert Phelps, 'The Early Phases of British Interest in Russian Literature', *Slavonic and East European Review* 38.91 (1960), p. 419.

³⁸ 'Home Life in Russia', *The Athenaeum* 1414 (2 December 1854), pp. 1454-1455.

would ensure him little more than ‘a passport to the Siberian wilds’, and the book ended abruptly with Chichikov being arrested and condemned to an uncertain fate:

The imperial messenger pointed silently to a sinister looking carriage called a Siberian *kibitka*, into which our hero was assisted without being able to utter a syllable - and the next moment he was a dead man!’³⁹

Two years earlier, another of Lach-Szyrma’s translations had dealt with the subject at greater length. *Revelations of Siberia* was the memoir of Ewa Felinska, a minor Polish noblewoman exiled to Berezov in the 1840s for organising an anti-Russian propaganda circle, and is primarily significant for having been the first genuinely autobiographical account of Siberian exile offered to the British public during the nineteenth century. In his introduction, Lach-Szyrma claimed that Felinska’s evidence justified Siberia’s terrifying fictional reputation, locating the region within a broader civilisational binary and – in a manner not dissimilar to that of the Russian writers we have already examined – utilising the imagery of Siberian exile to juxtapose concepts of freedom and autocracy:

The subject of the present work is Siberia, a region dreary by nature, and not only in name synonymous, but actually identical with a vast prison - a locality associated in our minds with the most poignant of human sufferings. As such, it could only be properly described under the influence of these painful impressions, and while the writer is writing under the most acute mental agony [...] The author could not but suffer the more bitterly when torn of a sudden from her domestic hearth and the bosom of civilised society, and carried off to the wilds of Siberia.

³⁹ *Home Life in Russia*, vol. I, iii, vol. III, p. 314.

Here, among a barbarous population, her very habits of refinement, as may be conceived, rendered her position more difficult and unendurable [...] Desolate and dismal, unexplored and unexplorable, as Siberia may be, it is not, as will be seen from this work, without its peculiar lineaments of sublimity, amidst all its dreariness and solitudes; and a day will come when its ice-bound territories will be opened to civilisation and its forests vanish before the advance of freedom.⁴⁰

Despite this framing, the reaction of the press to Felinska's memoirs was somewhat more muted than the émigrés behind the publication had evidently hoped. While this was partially due to the tenuous yet prevailing state of peace between Britain and Russia – hostilities did not break out until February the following year – an equally important reason was that Felinska's rather tame description of Siberian exile simply did not live up to Lach-Szyrma's billing. Although *The Standard* found that 'the narrative must make the blood boil in the veins of every free man and free woman', others were less convinced. *The Morning Chronicle* felt that Felinska was 'not as graphic in her descriptions as we could desire', while the conservative weekly *John Bull*, which regarded 'the offer of a peep into Siberia' as 'scarcely less tempting than the promise of an introduction to the secret chambers of the inquisition at Rome', complained that 'the reality as here described is considerably less shocking than the imaginary horrors which are generally associated in men's minds with the notion of transportation to Siberia'.⁴¹

Such thinly-veiled disappointment that Siberian exile did not, in practice, appear to meet British readers' titillating standards also partially characterised the reception afforded in 1855 to the first part of Aleksandr Gertsen's *Byloe i dumy* ever published in English translation. An overlooked curio from the annals of Gertsen's London

⁴⁰ Felinska, *Revelations of Siberia*, v-vii, xvi.

⁴¹ 'Literature', *Standard* 8832 (29 November 1852), p. 1; 'Revelations of Siberia', *Morning Chronicle* 27055 (9 September 1853), p. 1 and 'Literature', *John Bull* 1664 (30 October 1852), p. 699.

emigration, this episode is worth relating both as an illustration of the extent to which Siberia had become central to British perceptions of Russia within the space of a few decades and as a harbinger of things to come. In September 1854, parts of the aforementioned *Tiur'ma i ssylka*, which had first been published by the Free Russian Press three months earlier, were unexpectedly translated into French and printed in the Parisian periodical *Revue des Deux Mondes*. This, in turn, led to a glowing review in *The Athenaeum* of January 1855.⁴² Thereby apprised of the European public's interest in the Russian prison and exile system, Gertsen readily agreed to proposals for both German and English editions of the book and commissioned the writer Malwida von Meysenbug (then a member of his entourage) to translate it into both languages.⁴³ However, when the English edition appeared in October 1855, Gertsen and von Meysenbug, neither of whom had been allowed to see proofs of the translation, were startled to find the title changed from the original *Prison and Exile to My Exile in Siberia*.⁴⁴

In light of the many Siberian allusions dotted throughout the early parts of *Byloe i dumy* and discussed earlier, it would perhaps be unfair to blame Gertsen's London publishers entirely for this embellishment. Nonetheless, since the author did not literally claim to have been exiled to Siberia at any point in *Tiur'ma i ssylka*, the inaccuracy was quickly noticed, and despite Gertsen complaining to the publishers (who rapidly changed the title to simply *My Exile*), the damage was done. Throughout October and November, a fiery debate on whether the author was guilty of trying to mislead the British public raged in the London periodical press. *The Examiner* was the first to spot the embellishment, but nonetheless absolved the author of any wrongdoing. 'Perm and Wiatka are not in Siberia,

⁴² 'Prison and Banishment: From the Memoirs of Iskander', *The Athenaeum* 1419 (6 January 1855), pp. 7-9; B. F. Egorov and G. G. Elizavetina, *Letopis' zhizni i tvorchestva A. I. Gertsena*, 4 vols (Moscow: Nauka, 1974-1987) II, p. 219.

⁴³ Gertsen to Liugi Pianciani, 15 October 1855, *SS XXV*, pp. 227-228. See also Egorov and Elizavetina, *Letopis' zhizni i tvorchestva A. I. Gertsena* II, p. 255 and L. R. Lanskii, 'Gazetnye i zhurnal'nye vyrezki v arkhive Gertsena', *Literaturnoe nasledstvo* 63 (1956), p. 806.

⁴⁴ Alexander Herzen, *My Exile* (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1855).

nor does M. Herzen profess ever to have been exiled to that portion of the world which figures on his title page', it wrote: 'Siberia stands there only through the great prudence of his translators in Germany and England, who believed that they better know than himself, having not the same necessity of truth to restrain them, with what syllable to conjure readers and purchasers'.⁴⁵ Others, possibly aware of Gertsen's formerly close working relationship with London's Polish émigrés, suspected a repeat of the previous year's *Home Life in Russia* fiasco and were far more critical.⁴⁶ *The Morning Post* felt he had 'formed an erroneous estimate of our national character in supposing that such a production will prove acceptable to the majority of English readers',⁴⁷ while a mysterious correspondent signing themselves 'Veritas' declared Gertsen a fraud:

Mr. Herzen has never been in Siberia as an exile, and [the] title of the work is a fallacy [...] Thus it is, the reader imagines Mr. Herzen to have suffered all the horrors of exile in a Siberian desert; especially so, as there are throughout the book a great many anecdotes relating to Siberian scenes of cruelty. Unfortunately there is not a syllable of truth in this, as far as regards Mr. Herzen [...] As Mr. Herzen allows the public to be thus deceived, I consider it my duty to warn the public – the more so as this Muscovite proscriber entertains strange notions about the gigantic destiny of Russia and the decrepit state of Europe, notions incompatible with the interests and the triumphs of Western civilisation.⁴⁸

The furious response to his memoirs by elements of the press dismayed Gertsen, who complained in a subsequent foreword to *Byloe i dumy* that his attempts to act in good faith

⁴⁵ 'The Literary Examiner', *Examiner* 2491 (27 October 1855), p. 676.

⁴⁶ The Free Russian Press shared its Bloomsbury offices with the Polish Democratic Society until December 1854, when the latter's rent arrears forced Gertsen to relocate. See Gertsen, *SS XI*, pp. 141-143.

⁴⁷ 'Mr. A. Herzen's 'Exile in Siberia'', *Morning Post* 25546 (19 November 1855), p. 3.

⁴⁸ 'Our Weekly Gossip', *The Athenaeum* 1465 (24 November 1855), p. 1371.

throughout had not prevented a single British newspaper slandering him.⁴⁹ This was, of course, to somewhat underplay his own responsibility for the controversy. Here two points should be made. Firstly, the reception afforded to the English version of *Tiur'ma i ssylka* was the first of many lost-in-translation moments in the history of the Russian revolutionary emigration in London to originate in attempted appeals to the sympathies of the British public. Writing for a Russian audience, Gertsen had adorned his memoirs with references to Siberian exile as a means of illustrating his development as a revolutionary conspirator and status as an heir to the Decembrists. Yet when these references were taken literally by British readers unfamiliar with the Decembrist intertext, Gertsen found himself having to defend his personal reputation from the attacks of the London press. Secondly, the reaction of the press itself reveals much about the fundamental duality of Siberia's image in Britain during the middle of the nineteenth century. On the one hand, there was a suspicion of the mythologised, clichéd Siberia epitomised by texts such as Cottin's *Elisabeth; ou, Les Exilés de Sibérie* and Polish émigré memoirs, which had established a 'horizon of expectation' for British readers and thus left them open to exploitation by cynical political émigrés exciting public opinion against the Russian government.⁵⁰ On the other, there was, as with Felinska's memoirs, a prurient fascination with the horrors of prison and exile, a dogged adherence to the familiar Siberian tropes, and an unmistakable dismay when the reality of the situation seemed somewhat less interesting – hence *The Athenaeum*'s complaint that Gertsen's account of Perm' 'did not fulfil the ideal of Siberian desolation', which was not a comment on his editors' geographical misapprehensions.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Gertsen, 'K pervoi chasti: predislovie', *SS VIII*, pp. 399-400.

⁵⁰ This concept is developed in Hans Robert Jauss, 'Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory', *New Literary History: A Journal of Theory and Interpretation* 2.1 (1970), pp. 7-37.

⁵¹ 'My Exile in Siberia', *The Athenaeum* 1460 (20 October 1855), p. 1210.

With the Polish insurrection of 1863, the realities of the Siberian exile system belatedly began to measure up to these preconceptions. Historians have not always acknowledged the critical role played by the insurrection in shaping the late imperial exile system, in large part because, as Andrew Gentes has argued, the 36,000 rebels exiled in its aftermath (of whom between 18,000 and 24,000 were sent to Siberia) espoused no coherent ideology beyond a desire to be free of Russian authority and thus did not fit the conventional definition of political exiles central to Soviet scholarship on the subject.⁵² Nonetheless, the scale of the repression did much to hasten the exile system's infrastructural and bureaucratic collapse. The arrival in Siberia of 10,000 new exiles, many of whom were Poles, in a single year (1862) represented an unprecedented 25% increase on the previous year's figure, a rate sustained year upon year all the way to 1883.⁵³ Kropotkin, who met a number of the insurrectionists whilst still an officer in Siberia, estimated that as many as 11,000 had ended up in Eastern Siberia alone during the early 1860s.⁵⁴ Overall, Poles accounted for over 30% of those exiled to Siberia throughout the 1860s, a decade during which, for the first and only time, political exiles also made up over 30% of new arrivals.⁵⁵ In addition to the pressure this huge influx exerted on provisioning, sanitary conditions and the physical infrastructure of the prisons and *etapnyi put'*, the unprecedented step of banishing the majority of the insurgents by administrative order, rather than relying upon penal exile or *katorga* sentences, contributed hugely to the administrative chaos that would come to epitomise Siberian

⁵² Andrew A. Gentes, 'Siberian Exile and the 1863 Polish Insurrectionists According to Russian Sources', *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 51.2 (2003), p. 197-217.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 203-204.

⁵⁴ Kropotkin, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist* I. p. 253.

⁵⁵ Beata Gruszczynska and Elżbieta Kaczynska, 'Poles in the Russian Penal System and Siberia as a Penal Colony (1815-1914): A Quantitative Examination', *Historical Social Research* 15.4 (1990), pp. 107-108.

exile in the decades to come.⁵⁶ In short, the use of Siberian exile in suppressing the 1863 insurrection proved a pivotal moment in the former's prolonged systemic collapse.

Throughout the 1860s, these events were followed with considerable interest in Britain and, to some extent, informed the British understanding of the Polish crisis. From 1863 onwards, British politicians, journalists and publicists began for the first time to use Siberian themes as a means of articulating their own critique of the Russian government, as opposed to merely echoing that of the Polish émigrés.⁵⁷ After presenting the petition resulting from the Guildhall protest of May 1863 to the House of Lords, the Earl of Shaftesbury reminded his peers that:

Husbands and sons [had been] seized by surprise, and in the dead of night dragged from their homes, cast naked into prison, taken from prison to remote regions of the Empire and then carried [...] into the wilds of Siberia. Of all the outrages ever perpetrated by sinful man, there was not one more foul and horrible.⁵⁸

It was from approximately this point onwards that the notion of Siberia as the birthplace of revolutionary heroes – again, a notion familiar to us from Russian revolutionaries' approaches to the subject – became entrenched amongst interested Britons. In November 1863, a correspondent for Charles Dickens' weekly *All The Year Round*, having expressed interest in the treatment of Polish prisoners while on assignment in Moscow, was invited to witness an exile party's departure from the city's Butyrka transfer prison.

⁵⁶ Gentes, 'Siberian Exile and the 1863 Polish Insurrectionists', pp. 206-207.

⁵⁷ By 1863, most of those previously most closely involved in disseminating émigré propaganda – Czartoryski, Dudley Stuart and the old guard of the LAFP – were either dead or otherwise inactive. For a sense of the coverage devoted to Siberian exile in the British press during the insurrection, see 'The Polish Exiles to Siberia', *The Observer* (5 June 1864), p. 5; 'The Poles in Siberia', *The Manchester Guardian* (26 May 1865), p. 4; 'The Polish Revolt in Siberia', *The Manchester Guardian* (4 January 1867), p. 3.

⁵⁸ *Hansard*, vol. 170, col. 1375, HL Deb 8 May 1863. See also the Earl of Ellenborough's comments in *ibid.*, vol. 176, col. 2093, HL Deb 26 July 1864.

Accepting the offer, he fell asleep the same night to a ‘Russian nightmare, composed of birch forests, rampant bears, Siberian exiles, blows of the knout, of all the czars, sturgeon, icebergs and armies of Poles, armed with flashing scythes’.⁵⁹ Upon arriving at the prison the following morning, he concealed neither his disappointment that the Poles only comprised a minority of the party nor his disinterest in the Russian ordinary criminals, of whom the men were ‘mutinous and shameless’ and the women ‘of a low type’. Amongst the convicts, the Poles alone cut heroic figures, walking ‘with such a dignity and a calm defiant pride, not studied, nor self-conscious, nor theatrical, [but] proceeding from a quiet, deep, intense, indestructible, changeless hate, arising from a hostile religion, from a difference of race, creed, manners and civilisation. Their leader [...] walked as Hofer might have walked to death, heedless of the crowd, heedless of the punishment, of his destination, of the journey. Head erect, eyes unflinching, he walked as if he was leading on a regiment of heroes to die for Poland.’⁶⁰ The implicit ghastliness of the fate awaiting the Polish exiles underscored not their revolutionary militancy, but their European identity and thus their civilisational distance from their Russian captors.

Similar observations can be made in the case of the Polish émigré Rufin Piotrowski, whose Siberian memoirs, at the behest of the British press, were translated into English and published at the height of the insurrection.⁶¹ Piotrowski had taken part in the November 1830 uprising and had subsequently joined the underground Polish Democratic Society, for which he was arrested in 1843 and sentenced to hard labour near Omsk. He escaped from Siberia in 1846, a feat of derringdo that received a limited amount of coverage in the European press following his arrival in Paris in October that

⁵⁹ ‘Starting for Siberia’, *All The Year Round* 10.240 (28 November 1863), p. 326.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 329-330. The reference here is to Andreas Hofer, a Tyrolean innkeeper who took up arms against Napoleon Bonaparte in 1809 and was posthumously revered for his stoical behaviour prior to his execution.

⁶¹ Rufin Piotrowski, *The Story of a Siberian Exile* (London: Longman, 1862) and *My Escape from Siberia* (London: Routledge, 1863).

year.⁶² Although Piotrowski quickly published an account of his experiences in exile, it initially passed without notice: in Britain, *The Northern Star*, Feargus O'Connor's Chartist weekly, was almost alone in drawing attention to it.⁶³ After this, nothing more was heard of him until 1861, when the escalating political crisis in Poland induced him to publish his Siberian memoirs in French. Serialised once again in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, they quickly came to the attention of the British press, which proceeded to adopt Piotrowski as a minor celebrity, hailing his achievement in becoming the first Polish political exile to succeed in escaping to the West since Beniowski. Dickens' *All The Year Round* ran a lengthy feature on his story, and when the initial English translation of his memoirs appeared in October 1862, *The Times* proclaimed him 'almost a solitary example [...] of a man relegated to that desolate prison-house who has attempted his escape and who has succeeded and lived to tell his extraordinary story'.⁶⁴ The anonymous editor's introduction to Piotrowski's *Story of a Siberian Exile* began by vividly restating the link between Siberia and the Polish national cause:

The conviction is deep that they who are once transported to those regions of pain can quit them no more; that Siberia never relinquishes her prey. For nearly a century she has torn from Poland her most devoted women, her most generous sons. Back to those realms of snow and blood fly the thoughts of every Pole who inquires into the past fortunes of his family, and when the poet dreams for his country a future which is all liberty and bliss, it is again Siberia which rears

⁶² 'The Polish Prisoners in Siberia', *The Times* 19425 (21 December 1846), p. 8.

⁶³ 'Democratic Committee for Poland's Regeneration', *Northern Star* 483 (23 January 1847), p. 6.

⁶⁴ 'An Escape from Siberia', *All The Year Round* 7.169 (19 July 1862), pp. 448-456; 'The Story of a Siberian Exile', *The Times* 24371 (8 October 1862), p. 5.

herself before his eyes, ready after victory itself still to demand her victims. It is a mysterious and dismal land.⁶⁵

It was emphasised that thanks to the efforts of Beniowski, Felinska and Piotrowski, Polish literature possessed ‘a complete collection of the writings of Siberian exile [already] sufficiently large, and which, in spite of the monotony of the subject, certainly is not lacking in interest’.⁶⁶ In essence, the intention was similar to that behind the publication of Felinska’s memoirs a decade earlier: to situate ostensibly factual accounts of Siberia and the exile system in close proximity to the image of the region inherited by generations of British readers from such texts as Cottin’s *Elisabeth*, and thereby infuse the latter with political meaning.

By this time, the boundaries of fiction and memoir were widely acknowledged to be loosely defined at best so far as Poles in Siberia were concerned. Because of this, and because the contents of Piotrowski’s memoirs were several decades old, the reception afforded to both *Story of a Siberian Exile* and its subsequent abridgement, *My Escape from Siberia*, was again somewhat ambiguous. *The Daily News* heartily recommended both to its readers as ‘the authentic records of a life of suffering sustained with a persistent fidelity to a noble cause which has rarely been equalled’, calling Piotrowski himself a ‘true hero and Christian gentleman’.⁶⁷ Others were less sure. *John Bull* begged leave ‘to be a little incredulous as to the cruelties which the writer relates from hearsay’ and quipped that Piotrowski seemed ‘to have had an ample command of money, which would give him a much better start than Madame Cottin’s Elizabeth was fortunate enough to obtain’.⁶⁸ *The London Quarterly Review* defended the veracity of the memoirs, but

⁶⁵ Piotrowski, *Story of a Siberian Exile*, pp. 1-2.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3, 9.

⁶⁷ ‘Literature’, *Daily News* 5384 (11 August 1863), p. 2.

⁶⁸ ‘The Story of a Siberian Exile’, *John Bull* 2200 (7 February 1863), p. 91.

acknowledged readers' likely misgivings on the grounds that 'there are few English philanthropists who have not been done at one time or another by some counterfeit Pole', which had 'tended to lessen our national faith in Polish memoirs'.⁶⁹ Yet the enduring lesson of *Elisabeth; ou, Les Exilés de Sibérie* was that books about Siberia did not need a solid factual basis in order to sell well, and Piotrowski's continued to do so for many years, comfortably besting the aforementioned Decembrist Andrei Rozen's memoirs (translated and published under the title *Russian Conspirators in Siberia* in 1872) despite the latter's superior artistic merits and far stronger claim to objectivity.⁷⁰ Indeed, it is significant that references to Piotrowski during this time generally failed to emphasise the distinction between his memoirs' fictional and documentary antecedents. As one periodical put it in 1870:

Who does not remember the pleasure with which, as a child, he read the history of *Elizabeth, or The Exiles of Siberia*, her courageous devotion and her ultimate success? Such literature has latterly become too common among the unfortunate Poles. Her most devoted and brave sons have been expatriated to the land of eternal snow [...] Once or twice in a century, [a] bold and energetic exile finds means to escape his horrible doom and reappears among his former acquaintances like a ghost from another world. They write the story of those wild and howling wildernesses, and others who died there send the journals they have kept to beloved friends, who publish them in Paris or Brussels, where the press is free.

⁶⁹ 'The Story of a Siberian Exile', *London Quarterly Review* 20.40 (July 1863), pp. 523-525.

⁷⁰ Baron R— [A. E. Rozen], *Russian Conspirators in Siberia: A Personal Narrative*, trans. Evelyn St. John Mildmay (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1872).

Such a work is that of M. Rufin Piotrowski, almost the only example of a man sentenced to hard labour who tried to escape and succeeded.⁷¹

Throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, and both during and immediately after the Polish crisis of the early 1860s, the British image of Siberia remained overwhelmingly associated with the Polish national cause. During this period, virtually all attempts to supplement the Siberian mythology exemplified by Cottin's *Elisabeth* with first hand testimony and documentary evidence originated from Polish émigrés, and were thus politically motivated and propagandistic in nature, tending rather to confirm Britons' preconceptions about Siberia than challenge them. Thus refracted through the lens of Poland's struggle for self-determination, Siberia became synonymous amongst British writers and journalists not only with exile, but with the evils of the Russian autocracy and with Russia's implied civilisational distance from Europe.

In the decades that followed, both the inexorable decline of public enthusiasm for the Polish cause after its zenith in 1863 and the concomitant rise of political, social and economic intercourse between Britain and Russia began to undermine these assumptions.⁷² As knowledge of Russia began to circulate more widely and heroic Polish protagonists were harder to come by, it became increasingly imperative for Britons to discover the 'truth about Siberia'. By the 1880s, as we shall now see, the tendency was less to blithely conflate Siberian fact and fiction, and more to appropriate one as the other.

⁷¹ 'The Last Escape from Siberia', *Chambers's Journal of Popular Literature, Science and Arts* 326 (26 March 1870), p. 198.

⁷² The best general overview of Anglo-Russian relations during the later nineteenth century is undoubtedly Neilson, *Britain and the Last Tsar: British Policy and Russia 1894-1917*, pp. 51-109, although note should also be made of Eric Hobsbawm's discussion in *The Age of Empire 1875-1914* (London: Abacus, 1994), pp. 314-320. On the decline of British support for the Poles after 1863 see Brock, 'Polish Democrats and English Radicals', pp. 154-156.

3.3. Buried alive: Dostoevskii's *Zapiski iz mertvogo doma* in English translation

In February 1881, a short obituary for the recently deceased Fedor Dostoevskii in the periodical *Academy* observed that the writer was ‘doubtless best known in [Britain] for his *Memoirs from the House of the Dead*, which has been translated into English’.⁷³ In the years that followed, British critics and readers’ fascination with *Zapiski iz mertvogo doma* far exceeded their interest in the writer himself, who was little known, or in his other works, which were infrequently read in comparison to those of Lev Tolstoi and Ivan Turgenev.⁷⁴ During the 1880s, Dostoevskii’s prison memoir was translated into English twice, first in 1881 under the title *Buried Alive* and again in 1887 as *Prison Life in Siberia*. Although this level of interest in a translated work of Russian literature was unprecedented, the novel’s arrival in Britain, where it was misapprehended as documentary material and reviewed and discussed more in political terms than literary, had little to do with the Russian original or its author.⁷⁵ During the 1880s, the popularity

⁷³ ‘Obituary’, *Academy* 459 (19 February 1881), p. 136.

⁷⁴ In general, Dostoevskii was not popular in Britain until after 1911, when Constance Garnett began to translate his novels for a newly receptive public eager to read him as a type of prophet and the epitome of Russian spirituality (frequently juxtaposed, in the years prior to the First World War, with a Germany drunk on *kultur*). See Helen Muchnic, *Dostoevsky's English Reputation 1881-1936* (Northampton, MA: Smith College, 1939).

⁷⁵ Debates on *Zapiski iz mertvogo doma* amongst literary scholars have primarily focused on the question of genre and the problems presented by the novel’s liminality between the traditions of autobiography, psychological realism and redemption narrative, with a loose consensus emerging that this polyphony is the work’s defining feature and that it is consequently less important to ‘classify it properly than to understand the unique mixture that Dostoevsky created’: see Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Stir of Liberation*, p. 222. The genre confusion in the text largely stems from the dualistic presentation of the protagonist, Gorianchikov, whose introduction in the preface is at odds with the character’s development and narratorial voice in the remainder of the novel. It is strongly implied within the first two chapters that Gorianchikov is not in fact a wife-murderer but rather a political offender, as Dostoevskii was: see Dostoevskii, *PSS IV*, p. 28. Likewise, the denouement in which he leaves prison full of resurrected optimism does not tally with the frail, broken introvert seen in the introduction. This juxtaposition problematises the identification of Gorianchikov with Dostoevskii himself, and has given rise to a range of interpretations in which the preface has been seen, inter alia, as compartmentalising Dostoevskii’s personal trauma away from the central redemption narrative and counterposing the latter by defining damnation and salvation as cyclical. See Robert Louis Jackson, *The Art of Dostoevsky: Deliriums and Nocturnes* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), pp. 33-170; Lewis Bagby, ‘On Dostoevsky’s Conversion: The Introduction to Notes from a Dead House’, *Symposium*

of *Zapiski iz mertvogo doma* reflected not Dostoevskii's artistic standing, but the British public's fascination with Siberian exile and the consequent demand for reliable documentary sources with which to differentiate politically motivated sensationalism from objective truth.

It has sometimes been suggested that Dostoevskii's early reception in Britain was conditioned by the then-ongoing debate over realism in literature that culminated in the prosecution and conviction of Henry Vizetelly, Émile Zola's London publisher, for obscene libel in 1889.⁷⁶ However, this somewhat overstates the role of aesthetics in the response to these early translations, not least because reviews of Dostoevskii's writing that emphasised his 'realistic' features during this period tended rather to endorse the notion that he was somehow characteristically Russian and should therefore be read on a straightforwardly informational basis, as various references to him as a 'nihilist' suggest.⁷⁷ In this respect, it is surprising neither that *Zapiski iz mertvogo doma* was central to his early reputation in Britain, nor that the titles chosen by its publishers gave the impression that it was first and foremost a documentary work. The novel first appeared in English at the beginning of 1881 as *Buried Alive; or, Ten Years' Penal Servitude in Siberia*.⁷⁸ Based on a pre-existing German rendering of the version included

39.1 (1985), pp. 3-18; Harriet Murav, 'Dostoevskii in Siberia: Remembering the Past', *Slavic Review* 50.4 (1991), pp. 858-866; Karla Oeler, 'The Dead Wives in the Dead House: Narrative Inconsistency and Genre Confusion in Dostoevskii's Autobiographical Prison Novel', *Slavic Review* 61.3 (2002), pp. 519-534; Anne Dwyer, 'Dostoevsky's Prison House of Nation(s): Genre Violence in Notes from the House of the Dead', *Russian Review* 71.2 (2012), pp. 209-225. See also Robin Feuer Miller, *Dostoevsky's Unfinished Journey* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), pp. 22-43 and, in general, Nancy Ruttenburg, *Dostoevsky's Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010) and Anna Schur, *Wages of Evil: Dostoevsky and Punishment* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2013). Although the present chapter makes no claims whatsoever about Dostoevskii's authorial intentions or the text itself, it is important to stress that none of the aforementioned scholarship proposes *Zapiski iz mertvogo doma* as a journalistic exposé or documentary account of the Siberian exile system (as it was assumed to be in Britain during the period in question), nor was it taken as such in Russia after its publication in 1861-1862 (despite its considerable influence on the subsequent development of Russian prison writing during the 1860s and 1870s).

⁷⁶ See in general Muchnic, *Dostoevsky's English Reputation*, pp. 6-30 and Lucia Aiello, *After Reception Theory: Fedor Dostoevskii in Britain, 1869-1935* (London: Legenda, 2013), pp. 36-40.

⁷⁷ Muchnic, *Dostoevsky's English Reputation*, p. 30.

⁷⁸ Fedor Dostoyeffsky, *Buried Alive; or, Ten Years' Penal Servitude in Siberia*, trans. Marie von Thilo (London: Longmans, 1881).

in the 1875 edition of Dostoevskii's collected works, *Buried Alive* omitted the chapter describing the prison's Polish inmates, which had been removed by the censorship in 1862 and was only occasionally reinstated in subsequent editions.⁷⁹

Although such an omission would have reduced the sketches' value considerably for British readers of the previous generation, the absence of Polish content may conversely have contributed to its success in 1881, when comparatively few were interested in the Polish national cause. Indeed, reviews of *Buried Alive* tended to favourably compare Dostoevskii's detailed descriptions of prison and exile with the embellished or outright fictitious accounts of Siberia to which readers were accustomed. *The Athenaeum* reviewed the translation alongside the French novelist Victor Tissot's *La Vie en Sibérie: Aventures de Trois Fugitifs* (*Life in Siberia: The Adventures of Three Fugitives*), which was 'so absurd that it will probably be translated'. Although it cautioned that Dostoevskii's observations were not accurate representations of the exile system as it was in the 1880s, it nonetheless recommended *Buried Alive* as 'a valuable primer towards the formation of correct ideas about penal servitude in Siberia'.⁸⁰ This view was shared by Britain's then-preeminent Russianist, William Ralston, who presumably had both Tissot and Sophie Cottin in mind when proclaiming Dostoevskii's account of *katorga* a 'useful corrective to the sensational accounts of Siberian horrors which certain French writers of fiction delight in producing'.⁸¹

Despite this reception, there is no evidence that *Buried Alive* was published for political reasons; on the contrary, Dostoevskii's artistic reputation was far better

⁷⁹ This chapter, entitled 'Tovarishchi' (Comrades), was originally intended for publication in *Vremia* during May 1862, but was not approved by the censorship until December. It was included in the 1865 edition of Dostoevskii's collected works, but removed again a decade later. See Nina Perlina, 'Dostoevsky and His Polish Fellow Prisoners from the House of the Dead' in *Polish Encounters, Russian Identity*, ed. David Ransel and Bozena Shallcross (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005), pp. 100-109.

⁸⁰ 'Siberia', *The Athenaeum* 2788 (2 April 1881), pp. 455-456.

⁸¹ W. R. S. Ralston, 'Buried Alive; or, Ten Years of Penal Servitude in Siberia', *Academy* 467 (16 April 1881), pp. 273-274.

established in Germany, whence the translation originated.⁸² The opposite, however, was true of *Prison Life in Siberia*, a later rendering produced by the journalist Henry Sutherland Edwards and published in 1887.⁸³ A veteran foreign correspondent and Polonophile, Sutherland Edwards had reported on the events of 1863 for *The Times* and had developed an interest in the theme of captivity through his personal identification with the Polish national cause, on which he wrote several books.⁸⁴ He maintained his interest in the Siberian exile system in the years that followed and, in 1890, convened a symposium of influential British politicians and writers as a protest against the mistreatment of political prisoners in Yakutsk and Kara the previous year.⁸⁵

By 1887, the relatively few readers then interested in Dostoevskii on an artistic level had more material to choose from, and – as we shall see – better sources were available to those primarily concerned with discovering the truth about Siberia. As a result, Sutherland Edwards' rendering of *Zapiski iz mertvogo doma* did not have the same impact as *Buried Alive*. Indeed, although his version naturally took care to restore the previously omitted chapter on Polish prisoners, this fact passed without comment, something that attests to the decline of interest in Poland amongst British readers in the years after 1863.⁸⁶ It should be noted, however, that the terms in which the two translations were received were substantially the same. *The Athenaeum* did not recognise *Prison Life in Siberia* as the same novel it had reviewed several years previously, remarking that it 'reads like truth, and is in consequence all the more terrible'.⁸⁷ Writing

⁸² Muchnic, *Dostoevsky's English Reputation*, p. 10.

⁸³ Feodor Dostoevsky, *Prison Life in Siberia*, trans. H. Sutherland Edwards (London: J & R Maxwell, 1887).

⁸⁴ H. Sutherland Edwards, *The Polish Captivity: An Account of the Present Position of the Poles in the Kingdom of Poland, and in the Polish Provinces of Austria, Prussia, and Russia* (London: W. H. Allen, 1863) and *The Private History of a Polish Insurrection: From Official and Unofficial Sources* (London: Saunders, Otley & Co., 1865).

⁸⁵ H. Sutherland Edwards, 'Siberian Exile: A Symposium and a Protest', *Universal Review* 7.25 (May 1890), pp. 1-28.

⁸⁶ 'Prison Life in Siberia', *Spectator* 60.3097 (5 November 1887), p. 1496.

⁸⁷ 'Our Literary Table', *The Athenaeum* 3110 (4 June 1887), pp. 734-735.

in *The Academy*, Edward Brayley-Hodgetts, a prominent commentator on Russian affairs, reviewed Sutherland Edwards' effort alongside Petr Kropotkin's *In Russian and French Prisons* and recommended both to the 'student of the Siberian convict system', although his comments on Dostoevskii's writing acknowledged the artistic dimension in passing: 'Nothing can be more powerful in style and more intensely realistic', he wrote, 'than these ghastly reminiscences, told in simple language and put into the mouth of a repentant murderer'.⁸⁸ (It is curious that, despite British readers and critics' disproportionate interest in political offenders, the revelation of Dostoevskii's protagonist Gorianchikov as one such early on in the novel does not seem to have registered; here, again, the apparent absence of political content may conversely have been one reason why the source seemed credible.)

If many Britons during the 1880s came to value Dostoevskii's Siberian sketches as documentary material attesting to the realities of the exile system, others that questioned their value as evidence often misappropriated the text in their own way. The reception of *Buried Alive* in 1881 was in large part determined by the controversy surrounding Henry Lansdell, a Bible Society colporteur whose travels in Siberia and contacts with prison officials during the late 1870s had convinced him that the realities of the exile system had long been wilfully distorted in Europe by fiction writers and political agitators alike.⁸⁹ In a series of articles published in *The Contemporary Review* and elsewhere throughout 1880-1881, Lansdell claimed that the number of political offenders exiled to Siberia was commonly exaggerated in the British press, and suggested that most *katorzhniki* were free to work as much or as little as they pleased.⁹⁰ Although Lansdell's

⁸⁸ E. A. Brayley-Hodgetts, 'In Russian and French Prisons', *Academy* 804 (1 October 1887), pp. 214-215.

⁸⁹ On the background to this episode, see James Y. Muckle, 'Henry Lansdell, Leskov and Tolstoy: The Russian Travels of a 'Missionary Prospector' between 1874 and 1888', *Neue Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft* 34.4 (1978), pp. 291-308.

⁹⁰ Henry Lansdell, 'Through Siberia: By Way of the Amur and the Ussuri', *Contemporary Review* 38 (1 July 1880), pp. 564-565; see also idem., 'Siberian Exiles', *Leisure Hour* (March 1881), pp. 143-150.

travelogue *Through Siberia* had yet to go to print at the time of *Buried Alive*'s publication, his argument had been widely publicised and was well known. He was therefore primarily responsible for the considerable interest in *Buried Alive*, which was generally read as confirmation of his claims. Although *The Saturday Review* felt that Dostoevskii's descriptions of Siberian exile were 'likely to be tolerably correct', it advised that 'readers who wish to form a correct idea of what penal servitude in Siberia now is cannot do better than refer to the letters on the subject which Mr Lansdell contributed to *The Times* in the spring of last year', while both Ralston's review and that which appeared in *The Athenaeum* echoed Lansdell's suggestion that Siberian prison conditions were no worse than those in Britain.⁹¹

By the time *Through Siberia* was published at the end of the year, it included a brief discussion of *Buried Alive* in which, ironically, Lansdell attempted to take Dostoevskii to task for factual and methodological failings. The section in question sought to apportion blame for the public's distorted view of the exile system, and predominantly retraced familiar territory.⁹² Naturally, *Elisabeth; ou, Les Exilés de Sibérie* was at fault for drawing 'a picture of Siberian exile life very different from anything I ever heard, saw or read of in the country itself'. Cottin, however, could be forgiven on the grounds that she was a novelist. The same exception could not be made for later politically motivated writers such as Piotrowski and Gertsen – the *My Exile in Siberia* episode did not escape Lansdell's attention – who were accused of regaling the public with stories of horrors 'which they neither profess to have witnessed nor attempt to support by adequate testimony'. Still less excusable were those writers that intentionally

⁹¹ 'Buried Alive', *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art* 51.1330 (23 April 1881), 273-274; 'Siberia', p. 455; Ralston, 'Buried Alive', p. 273. See also 'Reminiscences of Prison Life', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 130.789 (July 1881), pp. 21-35.

⁹² Henry Lansdell, *Through Siberia*, 2 vols (London: Sampson Low, 1882) II, pp. 379-386.

misrepresented the exile system by presenting decades-old events as current, as he argued Dostoevskii did:

I was struck at the outset [of *Buried Alive*] with the significant fact that the reader is not properly informed as to places and dates. The introduction sets forth that a certain Alexander Petrovitch Goryantchikoff died, after whose death there was found among his papers a bundle of manuscripts which the editor, Feodor Dostoyeffsky, thought would interest the public. But scarcely a word is dropped to inform the reader when the events referred to took place, and he is left to form the very natural conclusion that he is reading of things as they now exist [...] The translation might not have sold so well had readers been informed that it treats of a state of things more than a quarter of a century old; yet, no doubt, so candid a statement would have prevented many from forming false opinions respecting the present state of Siberian prisons.⁹³

Despite other such misapprehensions and the overly credulous tone in which it was written, *Through Siberia* was rapidly acclaimed as ‘the best book on a Russian subject which has appeared of late years’, and was initially seen as marking a decisive break with the outmoded Siberian clichés that had defined the region’s image for successive generations of British readers. *The Spectator* found ‘the stamp of truth and moderation’ upon the book, while Brayley-Hodgetts considered it ‘much more entertaining, and certainly more readable, than many novels’.⁹⁴ Further approbation for *Through Siberia*,

⁹³ Ibid, pp. 384-386. Lansdell conceded in a footnote that ‘the whole tone of Dostoyeffsky’s book is far above that of the vindictive class of writers’, but compounded his own mistake by thanking ‘Alexander Goryantchikoff for his life-like pictures’.

⁹⁴ ‘Through Siberia’, *The Athenaeum* 2830 (21 January 1882), pp. 85-86; E. A. Brayley-Hodgetts, ‘Through Siberia’, *Academy* 510 (11 February 1882), pp. 94-95; ‘Through Siberia’, *Spectator* 55.2806 (8 April 1882), p. 469.

however, was soon forthcoming from a far more controversial direction. In January 1882, the conservative émigré publicist and self-styled ‘MP for Russia’ Ol’ga Novikova seized upon Lansdell’s exoneration of the Russian government, recommending it as the closest the casual reader could get to actually being exiled to Siberia. Novikova mentioned *Buried Alive* but did not attach much weight to it, considering Dostoevskii’s sketches to be of ‘historical and psychological interest’ alone. Nonetheless, her attempt to rehabilitate the exile system in the eyes of the British public found an unlikely ally in the great novelist himself:

Our greatest novelist, Dostoevsky, one of our best specimens of an earnest ‘Slavophil’, once met a young man whose views and feelings obviously found a response in his own heart [...] Dostoevsky, fixing his kind, earnest look upon him, as if he would penetrate the very soul of the speaker, said: ‘What a capital man you might be! How I wish you had to spend some years, as I have done, in Siberian prisons! Capital school for forming a character and regaining faith, my dear friend’, added Dostoevsky, with a tinge of melancholy and that peculiar concentrated enthusiasm which you often see in Russians [...] Alas, poor Dostoevsky! How well I remember the very last letter I had from him, and how pleased he was with the review I sent him of his *Buried Alive*, which appeared in the *Pall Mall Gazette* very shortly before his premature death. He was indeed a noble soul. To him self-sacrifice was part of his being, and his Siberian sufferings, which ruined his health, had built up a character and consolidated a faith which Russia ill could lose. Siberia was to him what the prison was to John Bunyan.⁹⁵

⁹⁵ O. K. [O. A. Novikova], ‘The Tercentenary of Siberia’, *Fraser’s Magazine* 625 (January 1882), p. 54. Although Dostoevskii and Novikova knew one another, whether or not Novikova really apprised him of *Buried Alive*’s publication is unclear, since the writer’s published letters do not record any correspondence with her in the months immediately prior to his death. In light of Dostoevskii’s remarks to his brother on

Novikova was not alone in appropriating Dostoevskii's Siberian experiences for political ends. Attempting to debunk Lansdell's claims the following year, Kropotkin cited *Buried Alive* as a 'remarkable psychological study' which demonstrated the debilitating effects of *katorga* sentences on Siberian convicts, and it is unlikely to be a coincidence that he later declared *Zapiski iz mertvogo doma* to be Dostoevskii's only 'truly artistic' work.⁹⁶ The contributions of Novikova and Kropotkin to the novel's reception in Britain during the early 1880s are noteworthy in the first instance because both almost certainly realised that they were misrepresenting Dostoevskii, but also as a harbinger of the renewed political significance Siberia was to accrue over the coming decades. As the journalist W. T. Stead noted some years later, Novikova – the preeminent spokesperson for official Russian conservatism in late Victorian Britain – was fully aware that the negative perception of Siberian exile was detrimental to Russia's image abroad.⁹⁷ Lansdell's investigation therefore represented a propaganda opportunity not to be missed, and it is likely that Novikova seized upon it safe in the knowledge that the Englishman was wholly on side: over a decade later, the latter was obliged to concede that he had sent the proofs for *Through Siberia* to officials in Petersburg for correction, and had thus been somewhat less impartial than he had claimed.⁹⁸

These attempts to improve Siberia's image, however, did not go unanswered for long. The gradual escalation of the revolutionary situation in Russia throughout the 1870s and early 1880s captured the attention of the British public and thereby gave the Siberian question an immediacy it had not possessed since the Polish crisis of the early 1860s. One

his time in *katorga* cited earlier, the views Novikova here attributes to him seem improbable at best. Nonetheless, she appears to have made similar claims to friends in private as well: see W. T. Stead, *The MP for Russia: Reminiscences and Correspondence of Madame Olga Novikoff*, 2 vols (London: Melrose, 1909) II, p. 125.

⁹⁶ See Kropotkin, 'Outcast Russia', p. 967 and idem., *Russian Literature: Ideals and Realities* (London: Duckworth & Co., 1905), pp. 179-180.

⁹⁷ Stead, *The MP for Russia* II, pp. 331-340.

⁹⁸ Senese, *S. M. Stepniak-Kravchinskii*, p. 92.

reason for this was simply that the unfolding drama was eminently newsworthy in an age of expanding readerships and literacy.⁹⁹ Equally important, however, was the reestablishment of the previous decades' revolutionary diaspora on an unprecedented scale. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, immigrants from Russia and Eastern Europe made up an increasingly prominent part of Britain's social fabric. Within the space of four decades, the Russian population of England and Wales increased nearly tenfold from 9,569 in 1871 to 94,204 in 1911, the majority of whom were Jews displaced from the Pale of Settlement by pogroms and state-sponsored immiseration.¹⁰⁰ Alongside these migrants came political refugees.¹⁰¹ As the autocracy began to expand Siberian exile and *katorga* as a means of combatting the revolutionary threat, many individual revolutionaries – evading arrest yet finding themselves confronted with the difficulties of carrying on underground activity in the face of overwhelming police surveillance and oppressive new laws – took the decision to leave Russia and continue their political activities from the relative safety of Western Europe. From the early 1880s onwards, a steady stream of Russian political refugees, the third wave of the pre-revolutionary emigration, arrived in London. All were attracted by the British authorities' relaxed disposition towards foreign conspirators; a select few, intent on testing that disposition to destruction, sought to enlist the support of their hosts. As sympathy for the revolutionary movement steadily grew amongst sections of the public by virtue of their propaganda campaigns, Siberia was increasingly depicted as the battlefield upon which

⁹⁹ Michael J. Hughes, 'British Opinion and Russian Terrorism in the 1880s', *European History Quarterly* 41.2 (2011), pp. 255-277.

¹⁰⁰ Colin Holmes, 'Immigrants, Refugees and Revolutionaries' in *From The Other Shore*, pp. 8-11. On Jewish immigration from the Pale of Settlement to London in particular see William J. Fishman, *East End Jewish Radicals 1875-1914* (London: Duckworth, 1975), pp. 31-60.

¹⁰¹ As Fishman, *East End Jewish Radicals*, p. 70 points out, the two categories were often conflated, with parts of the London press not infrequently referring to Jewish sweated labourers as 'nihilists' and so forth. Nonetheless, it is impossible to give more precise figures for those one might tenuously classify as 'legitimate' political émigrés – i.e. those explicitly associated with the revolutionary movement – since political asylum did not exist in Britain prior to the Aliens Act of 1905, and so their legal status was the same as other migrants.

the contest between the radical opposition and the autocracy – and, by extension, between Russia's barbarous present and civilised future – was to be settled.

3.4. The Russian revolutionary emigration and the debate on the exile system

From the critical reaction to *Through Siberia* and the way in which its claims about the exile system influenced the reception of *Zapiski iz mertvogo doma*, it is clear that Lansdell and Novikova had the upper hand in the battle over Siberia's image during the years 1881-1882. This posed a serious problem for the fledgling Russian emigration in London, which at the time largely consisted of the veteran *narodniki* Nikolai Chaikovskii and Lazar Gol'denberg and, from time to time, Kropotkin. Although the attempted whitewash of the Russian penal system obliged the émigrés to respond, their negative public image and lack of sympathetic contacts in the press allowed them few opportunities to do so. Nonetheless, the necessity of such a response became inescapable in 1882 when a parallel controversy involving the aforementioned George Kennan erupted in the United States. A former telegraph engineer who had spent the years 1864-1866 in Siberia and subsequently acquired a reputation as an expert on Russian affairs, Kennan had spent much of the 1870s and early 1880s on the midwestern lecture circuit in a prolonged attempt to defend the Russian government from the charges brought against it by (in his view) foreign provocateurs.¹⁰² These debates increasingly gravitated towards the subject of the Siberian exile system. With his 1882 address to the American Geographical Society, Kennan largely adopted Lansdell's position, staking his reputation on the claim that the realities of the situation were nowhere near as bad as widely supposed.

¹⁰² Frederick F. Travis, *George Kennan and the American-Russian Relationship, 1865-1924* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1990), p. 73.

The majority of Kennan's argument rested upon disabusing his audience of the prevailing misconceptions on the subject – specifically, that Siberia's climate was uniformly harsh, all exiles worked in mines and that political offenders represented the majority of them. Yet he also pointed out, not unreasonably, that the Russian penal system was by no means *sui generis* in terms of brutality or injustice. There was, he declared, 'hardly an instance of cruelty' in the history of Siberian exile 'for which a parallel may not be found in the history of American state prisons, to say nothing of the history of the transportation of convicts to Australia and Van Diemen's Land. If these abuses of authority in English colonies and in America do not prove that the government under which they occur is a brutal and half-barbarous one, neither do similar abuses in Russia prove that the government of that country is brutal and semi-barbarous.'¹⁰³ Since Kennan famously abandoned this position several years later and began instead to argue that the mistreatment of political prisoners in Siberia showed the Russian autocracy to be irredeemably cruel and barbarous, it is worth noting here that his initial motivation in discussing the exile system was actually to portray Russia as a relatively civilised European nation.

On both sides of the Atlantic, such attempts to defend the Russian government from the charges of its detractors and absolve it of wrongdoing in its treatment of political exiles met with a series of disparaging responses, both from writers who had themselves travelled in Siberia and those who simply claimed expertise in Russian affairs.¹⁰⁴ None of these made much impact or did significant damage to Lansdell and Kennan's reputations. In some cases, such as that of James Buel's 1883 *Russian Nihilism and Exile Life in Siberia*, an insincere and sensationalist tone was to blame, but more frequently they

¹⁰³ Kennan, 'Siberia: The Exiles' Abode', p. 58.

¹⁰⁴ See chiefly J. W. Buel, *Russian Nihilism and Exile Life in Siberia* (Philadelphia, PA: West Philadelphia Publishing Co., 1883) and Edmund Noble, *The Russian Revolt: Its Causes, Conditions and Prospects* (Boston, MA: Houghton, 1885).

simply failed to prove beyond reasonable doubt their claims the state of the exile system. A more formidable counterattack, however, came from Kropotkin, who had been in London at the time Lansdell published his findings and was familiar with the terms of the debate.¹⁰⁵ Between January 1883 and March 1884, while imprisoned in France, the aristocratic émigré produced a series of weighty indictments of Russian prisons and Siberian exile for the influential London periodical *Nineteenth Century*.¹⁰⁶

As noted earlier, Kropotkin had served as a junior officer in Siberia decades earlier, but had never been exiled there. His articles during this period were therefore not written from first-hand observation, and depended primarily on published sources and materials from the Russian press. Nonetheless, they represented the first truly detailed and evidence-based accounts of prison and exile made available to the British reading public during the nineteenth century. Kropotkin first dismissed Kennan as unworthy of a reply, then attacked Lansdell as a willing dupe who had neither inspected Siberia's prisons properly nor attempted to familiarise himself with the various Russian sources on the subject. *Through Siberia* was insubstantial, overly dependent on hearsay, and could 'only convey false ideas'.¹⁰⁷ To this onslaught Lansdell could muster only the most equivocal and unconvincing of replies in the following month's *Contemporary Review*: protesting Kropotkin's claim that he had not seen a single major prison, he insisted that he had visited either the Petropavlovskaya or Shlissel'burg fortress, but could not recall which.¹⁰⁸ Mocking Lansdell's naïveté, Kropotkin pressed home his advantage:

¹⁰⁵ Kropotkin, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist* II, p. 271.

¹⁰⁶ P. Kropotkin, 'Russian Prisons', *Nineteenth Century* 13.71 (January 1883), pp. 27-44; 'The Fortress Prison of St Petersburg', *Nineteenth Century* 13.76 (June 1883), pp. 928-949; 'Outcast Russia', *Nineteenth Century* 14-82 (December 1883), pp. 964-976; 'The Exile in Siberia', *Nineteenth Century* 15.85 (March 1884), pp. 475-493.

¹⁰⁷ Kropotkin, 'Russian Prisons', p. 28.

¹⁰⁸ Henry Lansdell, 'A Russian Prison', *Contemporary Review* 43 (February 1883), pp. 275-288.

Siberia, the land of exile, has always appeared in the conceptions of the Europeans as a land of horrors, as a land of the chains and *knoot*, where convicts are flogged to death by cruel officials or killed by overwork in the mines; as a land of unutterable sufferings of the masses and horrible prosecutions of the foes of the Russian government [...] As the traveller descends, however, towards the rich prairies of Western Siberia; as he notices there the relative welfare and the spirit of independence of the Siberian peasant and compares them with the wretchedness and subjection of the Russian peasant; as he makes acquaintance with the hospitality of the supposed ex-convicts [and] with the intelligent society of the Siberian towns, and perceives nothing of the exiles, and hears nothing of them [...] he feels inclined to admit that his former conceptions about the great penal colony of the North were rather exaggerated, and that on the whole the exiles may not be so unfortunate in Siberia as they were represented to be by sentimental writers. Very many visitors to Siberia, and not foreigners alone, have made this mistake.¹⁰⁹

The reality, he claimed, was worse than anything dreamed up by the most prurient of fiction writers. The past two decades, Kropotkin wrote, had seen over 300,000 new exiles arrive in Siberia, of whom less than half had received a judicial sentence. Although he did not specify what proportion of this total were political offenders, he did note that the latter were obliged to complete the journey on foot alongside the ordinary criminals.¹¹⁰ *Katorga* was ‘a life of moral and physical sufferings, of infamous insults and pitiless persecutions, of pains beyond man’s strength’, a world of disease-ridden, overflowing prisons that brutalised the convicts and Siberia’s natural environment in equal measure. The human

¹⁰⁹ Kropotkin, ‘Outcast Russia’, p. 964.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 966-968, 975.

tragedy of exile was matched only by that of vagrancy: one third of Siberia's whole exile population had simply vanished over the past half century, joining 'the human current, 20,000 men strong, that silently flows through the forest lands of Siberia, from east to west towards the Ural. Others [...] already have dotted with their bones the 'runaway paths' of the forests and marshes'.¹¹¹

Kropotkin's polemic with Lansdell in the periodical press marked the beginning of the first serious debate in Britain, and to some extent the United States, on the realities of prison and exile in Russia. In principle, there was widespread agreement that the time had come to move beyond the sensationalist clichés that had previously defined Siberia's image and establish the facts of the matter, and dissent only on what those facts were and whether they spoke well or ill of the Russian government. In reality, the situation was more complex. Although it was generally acknowledged amongst those paying attention that Kropotkin had exposed Lansdell as foolish and incurious,¹¹² his victory had not been a decisive one: much to the London émigrés' chagrin, *Through Siberia* was a commercial success, and it was not until 1894 that the political machinations behind the book's production were revealed.

In essence, the émigrés were confronted with two problems. Firstly – as was evident from Kropotkin's *Nineteenth Century* articles, which depended for first hand testimony solely on the revolutionary populist German Lopatin, recently escaped not from Siberia but from Tashkent – they were desperately short of contacts with and information from Siberia. Secondly, the only foreigners granted access to Siberia's prisons and exile settlements were those known to be sympathetic to the Russian government, and their first hand observations would always carry more weight than the claims of the despised 'nihilists'. The émigrés therefore sought a pragmatic solution. Rather than attempting to

¹¹¹ Kropotkin, 'The Exile in Siberia', pp. 483-484.

¹¹² E. A. Brayley-Hodgetts, 'Stepniak's Russia Under The Tzars', *Academy* 695 (29 August 1885), p. 129.

dislodge the dated Siberian tropes by means of dispassionate reportage, they resolved instead to exploit them, satisfying British readers' insatiable appetite for Siberian gore and melodrama until such time as the case could be conclusively proven *ipso facto* in their favour.

One illuminating example of the émigrés' struggle to reconcile Siberian fact and fiction can be found in Kropotkin's attempt in 1883 to publish the memoirs of Emile Andreoli, a Frenchman exiled to Irkutsk for fighting on the Polish side during the 1863 insurrection. Upon his release in 1867, Andreoli had serialised his experiences in a Parisian journal, the *Revue Moderne*, and subsequently published them in book form.¹¹³ Given the rapid decline in public enthusiasm for the Polish national cause after 1863, few in Britain took any note, and Andreoli does not appear to have been referenced in the British press whatsoever until Lansdell mentioned him in passing in 1881. Far from censuring Andreoli, as he did with other Siberian memoirists, Lansdell observed that 'his style does not raise the suspicion that he exaggerates or wilfully leads his readers astray', before emphasising that Andreoli's recollections of Siberia, as serialised in the *Revue Moderne*, featured no references to silver mines.¹¹⁴ By way of reply, Kropotkin accused Lansdell of misrepresenting Andreoli's version of events, noting that he hoped soon to publish new information on an unspecified episode involving Polish exiles in Siberia to which he personally had been a witness, and which would bear out some of Andreoli's claims.¹¹⁵ This he did not do; instead, he rapidly acquired Andreoli's memoirs, translated them into English and began to prepare them for publication.

¹¹³ Emile Andreoli, *De Pologne en Sibérie: Journal de Captivité, 1864-1867* (Paris: Bibliotheque nouvelle, 1869).

¹¹⁴ Lansdell, 'Siberian Exiles', p. 144. The omission was hardly surprising, since the *Revue Moderne* only serialised Andreoli's memoirs up to his arrival in Tomsk.

¹¹⁵ Kropotkin, 'The Fortress Prison of St Petersburg', p. 930. This was probably a reference to the Irkutsk uprising of 1866, which Kropotkin described many years later in *Memoirs of a Revolutionist* (see note 46 above). See also P. A. Kropotkin, 'Vosstanie na krugobaikal'skoi doroge 1866-go goda', *Byloe* 17 (1921), pp. 105-154.

The surviving manuscript scarcely justifies Lansdell's praise.¹¹⁶ Andreoli's writing is extremely light on detail and highly emotional, portraying Siberia as 'the land of torture, where anyone who commands may be an executioner in whatever way he likes, for his mission is to torment both soul and body'.¹¹⁷ He is extremely critical of almost all previous accounts of Siberian exile, yet himself epitomises the very tendency towards prurient exaggeration and sentimentalism of which he complains. This problem irrevocably obscures whatever documentary value the memoirs possess when Andreoli declares that, having been 'under the influence which all Europeans experience at the mere name of Siberia', he had been 'eager to learn heart-rending stories and bloody details, [and] find mysteries to make the hair of one's head stand on end and render the most hardened reader faint with horror'.¹¹⁸ To this end he introduces a mysterious interlocutor known only as 'Dr Brodiaga' to relate the tragic story of Vera Pavlovna, a banished Russian noblewoman who bears some superficial similarities to her namesake in Chernyshevskii's *Chto delat'?*, but otherwise serves solely as the lynchpin of a love triangle involving the local governor and another political exile.¹¹⁹ That Kropotkin ultimately never published Andreoli's memoir is hardly surprising: what is surprising is that, as a fluent French speaker, he undertook the project in the first place and (to judge by his numerous marginal notes and statistical digressions) tried hard to produce something with the appearance of documentary merit.¹²⁰

With Kropotkin's enforced absence from London still ongoing, it fell to Sergei Stepniak-Kravchinskii to continue the revolution's struggle for public support in Britain.

¹¹⁶ This manuscript, entitled 'Siberian Convicts' Life', is currently in a private collection in London, and I am very grateful to Richard Ford for his generosity in allowing me access to it. Although it is undated and the translation unattributed to Kropotkin, the marginal handwriting is recognisably his, and given the material's provenance there is no reason for supposing it dates to any other period than that in question.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 27-45.

¹²⁰ Indeed, the manuscript features a second set of annotations, apparently from Andreoli himself, which further suggest that the project was not abandoned in haste. Kropotkin's own notes replicate many of the statistical claims used in his *Nineteenth Century* articles.

An associate of Chaikovskii's from the early 1870s, Kravchinskii had joined *Zemlia i volia* before murdering a senior gendarme, General Nikolai Mezentsov, in 1878. Forced to flee to Europe, he made his name three years later with a hugely successful series of biographical sketches of revolutionary activists published in a Milanese newspaper under the title *La Russia Sotterranea (Underground Russia)*, whence he acquired the *nom de plume* Stepniak.¹²¹ Constant police harassment and the risk of deportation to Russia forced Kravchinskii to move around the continent several times before he finally settled in London in June 1884. When Kropotkin arrived in Britain two years later following his release from prison in Clairvaux, he found Kravchinskii firmly established as 'a central influence on English intellectual life', widely respected amongst liberals and the nascent socialist movement alike.¹²² Although Kravchinskii was not an entirely unknown quantity in Britain prior to his move to London – an English translation of *Underground Russia* had appeared in March 1883 – it is fair to surmise that much of the influence Kropotkin attributed to him was due to *Russia Under The Tzars*, which was published in 1885 and represented the first and most significant of his publicistic works written specifically for a British audience.¹²³ In one sense, *Russia Under The Tzars* was a companion volume to *Underground Russia*, since it was intended to 'confirm the initial impression' made by the latter.¹²⁴ Otherwise, it was a much broader and more ambitious piece of work that took several years to complete. Aware that the sketch format he had previously used would not hold readers' attention for a second time, and having been criticised by Vera Zasulich for rendering the personalities somewhat more perceptively than the issues,

¹²¹ S. Stepniak, *Underground Russia: Revolutionary Profiles and Sketches from Life* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1883).

¹²² P. A. Kropotkin, 'Vospominaniia' in S. M. Stepniak-Kravchinskii, *Grozovaia tucha Rossii* (Moscow: Novyi kliuch, 2001), p. 383.

¹²³ S. Stepniak, *Russia Under The Tzars*, trans. William Westall (London: Ward & Downey, 1885). Having yet to achieve his later English fluency, Kravchinskii wrote the book in Russian.

¹²⁴ E. A. Taratuta, *Istoriia dvukh knig: 'Podpol'naia Rossiia' S. M. Stepniaka-Kravchinskogo i 'Ovod' Etel' Lilian Voinich* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1987), p. 70.

Kravchinskii produced a lengthy treatise on Russian politics and society, approximately half of which was devoted to the government's misuse of emergency powers, prison, *katorga* and exile.¹²⁵

These subjects reflected Kravchinskii's broader political priorities. During his early years in the emigration, he had substantially abandoned his former Bakuninist convictions – the emphasis on peasant revolt and disinterest in political strategy common to many populist revolutionaries of the 1870s – and had begun instead to stress the importance of cooperation between different revolutionary factions. This change of heart was partially a pragmatic response to the destruction of *Narodnaia volia* after 1881, but more directly it resulted from his acquaintance with the Ukrainian nationalist and liberal activist Mikhail Dragomanov, one of the emigration's most consistent advocates for bipartisan unity (*vnepartiinost'*) throughout the 1880s.¹²⁶ Those that shared Dragomanov's analysis generally envisaged a reconciliation between Russian liberals and socialists in the interests of short-term political advantage. Kravchinskii, however, went further than this, seeking to enlist the support of sympathetic foreigners alongside that of other opposition forces. As early as 1882, he impressed upon the *Narodnaia volia* leadership the importance of framing the revolutionary movement in moral and humanitarian terms for the benefit of European audiences: Russian émigrés, he argued, should 'acquaint Europe not with our political programme, but rather with the current state of the revolutionary struggle'.¹²⁷ After his death, a former associate, Ol'ga Liubatovich, recalled his almost unique commitment to uniting people 'not merely of

¹²⁵ Taratuta, *S. M. Stepniak-Kravchinskii*, pp. 328-330.

¹²⁶ Donald Senese, 'S. M. Kravchinskii and the National Front Against Autocracy', *Slavic Review* 34.3 (September 1975), pp. 511-513.

¹²⁷ 'Otvet S. M. Kravchinskogo na pis'mo ispolnitel'nogo komiteta Narodnoi voli' in *Revoliutsionnoe narodnichestvo 70-kh godov XIX veka*, ed. S. N. Valk, 2 vols (Moscow: Nauka, 1964-1965) II, p. 345.

different political points of view, but of different cultures'.¹²⁸ *Russia Under The Tzars* represented Kravchinskii's first practical step in this direction. Devoid of theory and ideological particularism, it set the tone for much else he subsequently wrote by adopting an essentially journalistic style and lavishing attention upon comparatively apolitical issues that could command widespread sympathy across different audiences. Acting in later years through the SFRF and its monthly newspaper *Free Russia*, Kravchinskii would insistently bring several of these, including the repression of Jews and religious minorities and relief for the victims of the 1891 famine, to the attention of the British public. The most important such issue, however, was the Russian prison and exile system.

How and why Kravchinskii came so quickly to recognise the peculiar attraction of clichéd Siberian imagery for British readers is not difficult to surmise. Whether through the émigré grapevine or his own contacts with the British press, he was likely aware of Kropotkin's polemic with Lansdell prior to his arrival, and since a number of his London acquaintances quickly solicited literary contributions from him – Eleanor Marx, most notably, commissioned an article on the Russian penal system for her socialist newspaper *To-day* – it is reasonable to suppose the subject would have arisen there too.¹²⁹ More importantly, Kravchinskii's main strength as an émigré agitator was arguably his capacity for immersing himself in the culture of his surroundings and thereby tailoring his writing and image to his audiences' expectations. Partly because of his own literary pretensions, he was a voracious reader of fiction – an unusual habit for revolutionaries of his generation, most of whom had taken to heart Chernyshevskii's attack on aesthetics at an

¹²⁸ O. S. Liubavovich, 'Dalekoe i nedavnee: vospominaniia iz zhizni revoliutsionerov 1878-81 gg. Posviashchaetsia pamiati S. M. Kravchinskogo', *Byloe* 5 (1906), p. 239.

¹²⁹ After the English translation of *Underground Russia* and the fallout from the Degaev affair in 1883 (see Chapter I, note 46), a number of British newspapers had invited Kravchinskii to write on various topics connected to the revolutionary movement: see Taratuta, *S. M. Stepniak-Kravchinskii*, pp. 315-317.

early stage.¹³⁰ Consequently, having been exposed to the pervasive Russian exotica beloved of British novelists and journalists, he exhibited a tendency towards self-caricature, willingly embracing the term ‘nihilist’ and cultivating an image as an enigmatic and daring revolutionary that, for his associates, proved irresistibly romantic.¹³¹ This penchant for seizing upon the various cartoonish aspects of Russian life that appealed to fevered Western imaginations and exaggerating them for political advantage was equally evident in the way he set out to exploit the familiar rhetoric of Siberian horrors, starting from *Russia Under The Tsars*:

Siberia! The word sends a thrill of cold through our very bones, and when we think of the unfortunate exiles lost in icy wastes and condemned to lifelong servitude in chains, our hearts are moved to pity and compassion. Yet [...] this word of horror is to some people suggestive of consolation and hope. To them it is a promised land, a place of security and rest. We know, too, that thither are sent men and women who, though reduced to the last extremity, their gaolers do not as yet want quite ‘to finish’. What then is this paradise of the lost, this enigmatical

¹³⁰ In 1892, Lev Deich, who read Kravchinskii’s novel *The Career of a Nihilist* while in Siberian exile, described it as ‘really weak and rather like something from the pages of some ‘petit journal’ [...] Reading it, it’s hard to believe it describes our own familiar world.’ See *Gruppa ‘Osvobozhdenie truda’: iz arkhivov G. V. Plekhanova, V. I. Zasluch i L. G. Deicha*, ed. L. G. Deich, 5 vols (Moscow: Gos. izd-vo, 1924-1926) V, p. 117.

¹³¹ Kravchinskii used the term ‘nihilist’ both self-referentially and to describe the revolutionary movement generally in many of his publicistic works: see, for instance, S. Stepniak, *The Career of a Nihilist* (London: W. Scott, 1889) and idem., *Nihilism As It Is*, trans. E. L. Voynich (London: T. F. Unwin, 1894). The fact that several successful contemporary novels feature Russian protagonists apparently based on him would suggest that his efforts to match his own image to British expectations were not wasted. See, for instance, E. L. Voynich, *The Gadfly* (London: Heinemann, 1897); Isabel Meredith, *A Girl Among the Anarchists* (London: Duckworth & Co., 1903) and Thomas C. Moser, ‘An English Context for Conrad’s Russian Characters: Sergey Stepniak and the Diary of Olive Garnett’, *Journal of Modern Literature* 11.1 (1984), pp. 3-44. On the uses of Russian exotica in British fiction see John Slatter, ‘Bears in the Lion’s Den: The Figure of the Russian Revolutionary Emigrant in English Fiction, 1880-1914’, *Slavonic and East European Review* 77.1 (1999), pp. 30-55 and Neilson’s more sparing remarks in *Britain and the Last Tsar*, pp. 90-95.

Siberian place of punishment, converted by a strange evolution into a Nihilist kurort, a revolutionary sanatorium?¹³²

The reader will notice that this was an exemplary précis of the standard revolutionary image of Siberia as both prison and *tabula rasa*, but couched in the sentimentalist language of Mme Cottin's *Elisabeth* and thus readily comprehensible to British readers. Where Gertsen's attempt to translate the one to the other several decades earlier had backfired, Kravchinskii – the revolutionary terrorist taken by many in Britain to be an eminently respectable liberal – succeeded.

Such reference to British literary sensibilities notwithstanding, Kravchinskii's attempt to write about Siberia posed him a problem similar to Kropotkin's. Having made a habit of evading arrest and imprisonment, he wrote from no personal experience, and his source material was therefore mostly limited to the second-hand recollections of his friends and whatever Russian publications he could obtain in the Reading Room of the British Museum. Consequently, little of what followed had much to do with Siberia itself. Kravchinskii's description of the region's transfer prisons and *katorga* infrastructure differed only slightly from Kropotkin's, while other details were regurgitated from his biographical sketch of Liubatovich.¹³³ Administrative exile received a lengthy but intentionally genericised discussion primarily based on a fictional town called Gorodishko, quietly revealed later not to be in Siberia at all but in the vicinity of Arkhangelsk.¹³⁴ Although Kravchinskii claimed that this 'description of administrative exile in its mildest form' reflected his own desire throughout to understate rather than overstate the case, it was manifestly due in equal measure to the paucity of sources available to him. He subsequently referred the increase in political exiles sent to Eastern

¹³² Stepniak, *Russia Under The Tzars*, p. 234.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 252-253.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 257-292. The use of *gorodishko* as a placeholder was not explained to readers.

Siberia from the late the 1870s, yet resolved not to ‘weary the reader with descriptions of this almost unknown land’. The only part of *Russia Under The Tzars* which dealt with Siberian exile outright was acknowledged as an article translated from the liberal newspaper *Zemstvo*.¹³⁵

Nonetheless, it was precisely this part of *Russia Under The Tzars* that produced the greatest impression upon British readers and critics. Responses to the book were mixed, but this did not reflect doubts over the veracity of Kravchinskii’s claims so much as a residual antipathy to revolutionary émigrés. *The Athenaeum* cautioned that some distrust was due in the case of a writer who was ‘apparently in sympathy with the Russian dynamitards’, but feared that there was ‘only too much truth in the more sensational part of the work, that devoted to the horrors of Russian captivity and exile’.¹³⁶ Meanwhile, those who had formerly welcomed Lansdell’s exoneration of the exile system were obliged to recant.¹³⁷ The influence of *Russia Under The Tzars* can best be gauged from the fact that the year of its publication saw the first abortive incarnation of the SFRF. This group first came to prominence during the early 1890s, when – as we shall see – it organised the London émigrés’ campaigns against autocratic rule in Russia and boasted a membership comprised of representatives from across the spectrum of progressive Victorian politics. In all, the SFRF provided the principal forum for contacts between Russia’s revolutionary émigrés and their British sympathisers for over two decades prior to the outbreak of the First World War. Its origins, however, were directly traceable to *Russia Under The Tzars*. The socialist writer Annie Besant, who together with

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 311, 312-327. Taratuta takes the view that Kravchinskii was primarily concerned with appearing to avoid sensationalism in his descriptions of prison and exile: see *S. M. Stepniak-Kravchinskii*, p. 329.

¹³⁶ ‘Russia Under The Tzars’, *The Athenaeum* 3001 (2 May 1885), pp. 561-562.

¹³⁷ Brayley-Hodgetts, ‘Stepniak’s Russia Under The Tzars’, pp. 128-129.

Kravchinskii convened the first ever meeting of the Society in August 1885,¹³⁸ hailed the book as a new departure in British perceptions of Russia:

From time to time of late years [...] some cry out of the Russian darkness has sent a thrill through Europe, and men and women have shuddered and turned pale as pleasure seekers might do if they suddenly came in their rambles upon some mutilated victim [...] But never has Western Europe been able to gaze on Russia's thousand Golgothas as it can do today, now that Sergius Stepniak has torn down the curtain which veiled the crucifixion of a nation and has bidden all men behold the tragedy of the Russian Passion.¹³⁹

At the time, the emergence of the SFRF was of primarily symbolic importance. Despite its early meetings generating some sympathetic coverage in the press, the project was shelved after a call for subscriptions failed to generate any, and in practical terms it amounted to nothing for the next five years. Nonetheless, the Society's formation was the harbinger of a new era in the internationalist politics of the British left. By bringing Kravchinskii and his associates into direct contact with such progressive Victorian luminaries as the radical MP Charles Bradlaugh and the playwright George Bernard Shaw, the appearance of the SFRF clearly signalled that the Russian revolutionary movement had a distinct constituency within British society for the first time.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ Hollingsworth, 'The Society of Friends of Russian Freedom', pp. 49-50.

¹³⁹ Annie Besant, 'Russia Under The Tzars', *Our Corner* (October 1885), p. 218.

¹⁴⁰ Taratuta, *S. M. Stepniak-Kravchinskii*, p. 332.

3.5. Conclusion

By the middle of the 1880s, the Siberian exile system was a far more bitterly contested and highly politicised topic than it had been at the outset of the century. After the Crimean War, Russia loomed ever larger in British politics, culture and society, and the result of this was an attitude towards and image of Russia far more nuanced and complex than the monolithic Russophobia of previous decades. The evolution of Siberia's image over the latter half of the nineteenth century, and the increasingly pronounced differentiation of the 'truth about Siberia' from the dated literary tropes that had formerly defined the region, both reflected and played an important role in the broader development of Russia's image. By the 1880s, one's view of Siberia and the exile system was closely related to – if not entirely coterminous with – one's perspective on Russian politics and society. Debates over Siberian exile, in short, served as proxies for a broader ongoing debate about Russia's place in the world and its status as a European, or non-European, nation.

Despite this incremental politicisation of Siberia's image in Britain, however, the literary tropes inherited by generations of readers from texts such as Mme Cottin's *Elisabeth; ou, Les Exilés de Sibérie* – snowbound tundras populated by sympathetic, and usually non-Russian, heroes – proved remarkably enduring. Siberia's image therefore remained fundamentally dualistic. Virtually all attempts to set out the 'truth about Siberia' and debunk sentimentalist clichés ensured the latter's continued relevance by referencing them; conversely, successive waves of Polish and Russian revolutionary émigrés sought to use Siberian exile as the raw material of propaganda, conforming the facts of the matter to the British reader's horizon of expectation. The polemics of the 1880s between the Russian government's defenders and prosecutors in the revolutionary

emigration and the British press confirmed this tendency, yet also contributed to its demise during the following decade. In early 1885, George Kennan, dismissed by Kropotkin as not worthy of a response and maligned by fellow Russianists, signed a contract with a prestigious American periodical for a series of articles on Siberian exile to be written from first-hand observation. The results of his investigations would shake public opinion on both sides of the Atlantic to the core, forging a fleeting yet potent alliance between Russia's revolutionaries and their Western sympathisers.

4. Siberian exile as transnational *cause célèbre*, 1885-1895

Resolved that we, the sons and daughters of Free America, whose blood is the blood of our revolutionary fathers, owe a duty to the memory of these great and good men for the blessing they have given us to enjoy; and therefore it is resolved that we discharge this duty to humanity by joining our hands and hearts and efforts in this organisation [...] to be known as the United States Siberian Exile Humane Society.

– Manifesto of the United States Siberian Exile Humane Society, 1891¹

You can scarcely imagine the joyous excitement that overtook us when we learned of Kennan's agitation and the explosion of anger that shook the whole of educated Europe and America after the executions in Yakutsk and the horrors of Kara.

– Ivan Meisner²

On the afternoon of 9 March 1890, several thousand Londoners, undeterred by the unseasonal snow, descended upon Hyde Park to hear a succession of orators condemn the Russian autocracy.³ Conceived in response to a widely-publicised series of atrocities

¹ 'Materialy obshchestva družei russkoi svobody', RGALI f. 1158.1.544, p. 1.

² Cited in D. Makhlin, 'Yakutskaiia tragediia 1889-go goda i podpol'naia pechat', *Katorga i ssylka* 52 (1929), p. 38. I. I. Meisner was a member of *Narodnaia volia* arrested in 1887 and sentenced to nineteen years' *katorga*, the majority of which he served on Sakhalin.

³ One newspaper reported a turnout of 25,000, although this was likely an overestimate: see 'Treatment of Russian Political Prisoners', *Dundee Courier & Argus* 11442 (10 March 1890), p. 1. In general, see Robert Henderson, 'The Hyde Park Rally of 9 March 1890: A British Response to Russian Atrocities', *European Review of History* 21.4 (2014), pp. 451-466. This article appeared during the early stages of my research for the present chapter, and contributed greatly to it. I would therefore like to express my sincere gratitude to the author.

committed against political exiles in Siberia late the previous year and attended by a diverse assortment of political émigrés, Irish nationalists, trade unionists, radical Nonconformists and Jewish socialists, the protest was an unprecedented event in two respects. It was not only the first open outpouring of popular anger over internal Russian affairs in British history, but the first time that representatives of the fledgling Russian revolutionary emigration in London had shared a public platform with a diverse cross-section of late Victorian liberal and radical opinion. Addressing the crowd, the trade union leader John Burns expressed his solidarity with the revolutionary movement by evoking the familiar imagery of the exile system's horrors:

Beautiful women, beautiful girls, young men, old men, all sent to Siberia, guarded by brutal soldiers, chained together with massive iron chains, and with boots the soles of which fall off in two days, these unfortunate prisoners tramped fifteen miles a day in the freezing snow, subjected to the foulest indignities that it was possible to imagine. On the road, men were shot down for the smallest fault, and even if they survived these perils they were starved to death by the order of the Czar.⁴

During the late 1880s and early 1890s, the controversy over Siberian exile transnationalised the Russian revolutionary struggle. From late 1887 onwards, the serialisation of George Kennan's exposé of the exile system in New York's *Century Magazine*, a liberal monthly with a wide circulation on both sides of the Atlantic, caused an international sensation. Two years later, with Kennan's series drawing to a close, news from Siberia – first of convoy troops opening fire on an exile party in Yakutsk, then of a

⁴ 'Russian Political Prisoners', *Standard* 20489 (10 March 1890), p. 3.

mass suicide amongst political inmates at the Kara *katorga* prison – appeared to confirm his allegations. Following an international propaganda campaign orchestrated by exiles in Siberia and émigrés in Europe, a wave of popular outrage in the West saw the revival of the SFRF in London in early 1890, and the establishment of an American branch a year later. Comprised of a diverse coalition of Russian émigrés and Victorian progressives, the SFRF began a vigorous campaign against the mistreatment of political offenders in Siberia and, by extension, the Russian government in general. Over the following months and years, this campaign was sustained by the arrival in Britain of a steady stream of Siberian escapees whose presence generated considerable publicity and support for the SFRF by providing a highly visible symbol of the contrast between British liberty and Russian despotism. The impact made upon both public opinion and Anglo-Russian relations by this unprecedented wave of protest was considerable. Petr Rachkovskii, the erstwhile head of the Russian police’s foreign intelligence section (*Zagranichnaia agentura*), considered the London émigrés and their local allies the foremost overseas threat to autocratic rule in Russia during the period in question.⁵ ‘The accursed Stepniak is stirring up everything and everyone in England against all that is dear to Russia’, wrote Ol’ga Novikova; ‘the situation is simply awful’.⁶

These events witnessed the confluence of the two Siberian narratives we have hitherto examined. On the one hand, after nearly a century of overexposure to Mme Cottin’s *Elisabeth* and the memoirs of Polish exiles, the pejorative notion of Siberia as a vast prison camp metonymous with the evils of Russian autocracy had become firmly entrenched in Britain and America, and so provided a natural rallying point for those attracted to the ‘nihilist’ cause – something Kravchinskii and his comrades in the emigration understood all too well. On the other, Siberia had long been a central feature

⁵ Senese, *S. M. Stepniak-Kravchinskii*, p. 98.

⁶ L. A. Tikhomirov, *Vospominaniia*, ed. V. I. Alekseev (Moscow-Leningrad: Tsentrarkhiv, 1927), p. 384.

of the revolutionary movement's internal mythology, framed as a site of resistance to autocratic rule by successive generations of revolutionary writers and publicists. As the autocracy's mistreatment of political exiles became headline news in Britain and America, the superficially similar rhetoric of punishment and protest central to both these narratives allowed Russian émigrés to engage with their overseas allies in mutually comprehensible terms. Yet the common front resulting thereby was illusory. The mutual fixation with Siberia effectively obfuscated each side's distinct motivations, allowing Russian émigrés and Anglo-American progressives to talk to, but not necessarily understand, one another.

Focusing on the decade following Kennan's visit to Siberia in 1885-1886, this chapter first traces the origins and development of the émigré-led campaign against the exile system, and then explores the ways in which both Russian and Anglo-American participants in these émigré-led campaigns repurposed the debate over Siberian exile as a proxy for their own political and ideological priorities. For many in Britain and America, I argue, adopting the cause of Siberia's political exiles – identifiably European by virtue of the otherness of their surroundings – was essentially self-referential, a means of locating Russia within their hierarchies of civilisation and progress, problematising analogous colonial dilemmas closer to home and reaffirming the universality of freedom and liberal democracy. Yet while Western progressives projected themselves upon the figure of the Siberian prisoner, Russia's revolutionaries appropriated and repurposed Western writing on the exile system to serve their own purposes. The majority of the discussion throughout the latter part of this chapter focuses on Kennan, whose *Century* articles and subsequent monograph, *Siberia and the Exile System*, proved highly influential not only among Western audiences but in the Russian revolutionary underground. In English, Kennan's Siberian writings sought to portray all Russian

revolutionaries as eminently respectable Western liberals; translated into Russian, his work was repurposed as justification for the resumption of political violence on the grounds that even citizens of free and democratic nations conceded the legitimacy of the revolutionary struggle. The transnational agitation on behalf of Siberia's political exiles thus revealed significant tensions in how both the revolutionary movement, and Russia in general, were understood at home and abroad.

4.1. 'Write overseas, to every Kennan'

In the summer of 1885, George Kennan returned to Siberia in order to investigate the exile system at close quarters. Three years earlier, as we have seen, he had effectively staked his reputation as an expert on Russian affairs on the argument that the exile system was nowhere near as bad as was commonly supposed. For this reason, his decision to go to Siberia was widely seen at the time as an attempt to defend his own reputation above all else.⁷ Nonetheless, he appears to have begun his investigations with an open mind. On the one hand, after arriving in St Petersburg in May, he wrote to the owner of *Century Magazine* that the autocracy had been 'so much misrepresented that they naturally feel a little afraid of foreign writers', especially those professing an interest in Siberia. On the other, he sought out the Siberian regionalist Nikolai Iadrintsev – a fierce critic of the exile system – as a matter of priority, in the belief that 'if I could make [Iadrintsev's] acquaintance and gain his confidence, I could not only get at the anti-government side of

⁷ On the charges of bad faith directed against Kennan at the time, see W. J. Armstrong, *Siberia and the Nihilists: Why Kennan Went to Siberia* (Oakland, CA: Pacific, 1890) and Travis, *George Kennan and the American-Russian Relationship*, pp. 88-95.

the exile question but obtain a great deal of valuable advice and information with regard to Siberia'.⁸

Kennan did not remain on the fence for long. Armed not only with documentation from the authorities (who were aware of his earlier public defence of the exile system) but with Iadrintsev's letters of introduction to political exiles and local officials alike, he crossed the Urals in June and, from then until March 1886, traversed a route across Siberia from Tiumen' in the west to Nerchinsk in the east. In the process, he visited thirty prisons and exile settlements and met well over one hundred political exiles, both administrative exiles and *politkatorzhane*. His experiences during this time in general, and his encounters with political exiles in particular, produced a remarkable effect on him, turning him into an enthusiastic supporter of the revolutionary movement. The precise reasons for Kennan's change of heart will be discussed in detail later; for the moment, it will suffice to quote his own explanation for it, as expressed to an acquaintance shortly after his return to the United States:

I am not sure that I shall not have to call my forthcoming book *How I Became a Nihilist* [...] What I saw, heard and learned in Siberia stirred me to the very depths of my soul and raised, in some respects, all my moral standards. I made the intimate acquaintance of characters as truly heroic in mould – characters of as high a type – as any outlined in history, and saw them showing courage, fortitude, self sacrifice and devotion to an ideal beyond anything of which I could believe myself capable.⁹

⁸ Kennan to Roswell Smith, 30 May 1885, LC MSS George Kennan Papers (hereafter LC MSS GK), Box 6.

⁹ Kennan to Amanda Dawes, 15 December 1886, LC MSS GK Box 6.

After leaving Russia in the early summer of 1886, Kennan stopped in London to meet Kravchinskii and Kropotkin at a hotel near Charing Cross. The émigrés were initially sceptical: Kropotkin later recalled having felt ‘no excess of confidence in enterprising Englishmen who had previously taken to learn all about the Siberian prisons without even learning a word of Russian’.¹⁰ Nonetheless, the American’s impressive command of the language and intimate knowledge of the exile system proved persuasive, and they gladly accepted his services as a propagandist. Kravchinskii, who immediately realised the importance of Kennan’s findings for his own aim of enlisting overseas support for the revolutionary movement, was delighted. As he wrote to one London friend, the Fabian socialist Edward Pease, several days after the meeting:

What Kennan saw [in Siberia] entirely overturned every single one of his previous convictions. His views have changed root and branch, and he now completely and utterly confirms everything we previously said – only his facts are still newer and more numerous than those we were able to deploy [...] His book will represent an epoch in the conquest of European and American public opinion in support of our cause.¹¹

Kravchinskii’s prediction was quickly vindicated. Kennan’s findings first appeared as a series of twenty-three articles in *Century* that ran from November 1887 to November 1889. Their impact on public opinion in Britain and America alike was enormous, effectively putting paid to the debates on Siberian exile that had run throughout the early

¹⁰ Kropotkin, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist* I, p. 212.

¹¹ Kravchinskii to Edward Pease, c. 10 August 1886 in S. M. Stepniak-Kravchinskii, *V londonskoi emigratsii: publitsistika i perepiska*, ed. M. E. Ermasheva and V. F. Zakharina (Moscow: Nauka, 1968), p. 201. Although neither Kropotkin’s memoirs nor this letter record the precise date of the émigrés’ meeting with Kennan, it seems likely to have occurred at the very end of July: see also Taratuta, *S. M. Stepniak-Kravchinskii*, pp. 340-341.

1880s. Subsequently embarking upon a famous series of lectures during which he regaled his audience with stories of Russian political prisoners singing the American national anthem on 4 July and appeared on stage dressed as a Siberian *katorzhnik*, Kennan sold out lecture halls and theatres across the United States.¹² The writer Mark Twain, who attended one of Kennan's lectures in Boston, allegedly cried that if conditions in Russia could not be changed 'otherwise than by dynamite, then thank God for dynamite'.¹³ By October 1888, Kennan was able to assure Kravchinskii that, were he to visit the United States by the end of the following year, he would find nobody with a word to say for Alexander III or his ministers, and millions 'passionately and actively sympathetic to the Russian revolutionaries'.¹⁴ In Britain, where the *Century* also had a substantial readership, his findings likewise prompted outrage. The directors of the Howard Association – the precursor of today's Howard League for Penal Reform – wrote to *The Times* to protest the Russian government's 'grossest violations of decency and morals' in its treatment of political exiles, declaring that 'all hope of mitigating this cruelty rests on influencing the public opinion of Christendom'.¹⁵ Even W. T. Stead's *Pall Mall Gazette*, an enthusiastically pro-Russian newspaper that regularly published contributions from Ol'ga Novikova herself, was forced to concede that Kennan's revelations had 'conferred a great benefit upon Russia'.¹⁶

Within a month of the final instalment of Kennan's *Century* series in November 1889, news from Siberia supplied a tragic epilogue. Earlier that year, at the end of March, a party of approximately thirty administrative exiles, most of them former members of *Narodnaia volia*, had reached Iakutsk, the last major town in the Siberian northwest. Upon arrival, despite having formerly understood Iakutsk to be their final destination,

¹² Foglesong, *The American Mission and the Evil Empire*, pp. 16-17.

¹³ Kravchinskii, *V londonskoi emigratsii*, p. 426.

¹⁴ Kennan to Kravchinskii, 15 October 1888, *ibid.*, p. 227.

¹⁵ 'Russian and Siberian Exiles', *The Times* 32590 (8 January 1889), p. 10.

¹⁶ 'Occasional Notes', *Pall Mall Gazette* (12 January 1889), p. 2.

they were promptly ordered onwards to various remote settlements beyond the Arctic Circle and denied the opportunity to rest or gather provisions for their journeys. As an act of protest, on the night of 21 March, a number of the exiles armed themselves, barricaded themselves in the house they had been billeted in and refused to move. The following morning, the local governor ordered the building stormed. In the firefight that ensued, six of the exiles were killed, and the remainder arraigned before a military court. The three ringleaders – Al'bert Gausman, Lev Kogan-Bernshtein and Nikolai Zotov – were sentenced to death and belatedly executed on 7 August; the others received lengthy *katorga* terms.¹⁷ In a letter to another revolutionary written shortly before his execution, Zotov urged that the story be brought to international attention. 'Write of all this to every corner of the motherland and overseas, to every Kennan', he pleaded; 'it is the one thing we can do to end all this barbarity'.¹⁸ This appeal did not go unanswered. In the months that followed, both Zotov's fellow political exiles in Siberia and political émigrés in Europe, aware of the impact made by Kennan's exposé, orchestrated a highly successful propaganda campaign designed to publicise the victims' stories and inflame Western opinion against the Russian autocracy.

Rumours of the initial standoff and firefight in Yakutsk began to spread almost immediately. As early as April, the salient details had reached Geneva, where they were published by the revolutionary émigré Vladimir Burtsev in his newly-founded émigré newspaper *Svobodnaia Rossiia* (*Free Russia*).¹⁹ Burtsev's emergence as an interlocutor was fortuitous. Having escaped from Siberia himself the previous year, he knew several

¹⁷ Detailed accounts of the events in Yakutsk can be found in V. L. Burtsev, *Ubiistvo politicheskikh ssyl'nykh v Iakutske 22-go marta* (Zheneva: M. Elpedine, 1890); *Iakutskaia tragediia 22 marta (3 april'ia) 1889 goda*, ed. M. A. Braginskii and K. M. Tereshkovich (Moscow: Izd-vo politkatorzhan, 1925) and O. S. Minor, 'Iakutskaia drama 22-go marta 1889-go goda', *Byloe* 9 (1906), pp. 129-148.

¹⁸ N. L. Zotov to M. P. Orlov, 5-6 August 1889, cited in O. S. Minor, 'Pis'ma osuzhdennykh iakutian', *Byloe* 9 (1906), p. 154.

¹⁹ 'Krovoprolitie v Iakutske', *Svobodnaia Rossiia* 3 (May 1889), pp. 15-17.

of the victims personally.²⁰ He was also familiar – for reasons we shall examine later – with Kennan’s exposé of the exile system, having translated and published two of the latter’s *Century* articles in another émigré journal, *Samoupravlenie (Self-Government)*, earlier in the year.²¹ Most importantly, however, Burtsev wholeheartedly subscribed to Kravchinskii’s view that foreign public opinion had an important role to play in the revolutionary struggle, and that it was consequently important to emphasise more politically neutral issues around which a variety of Russian oppositionists and the international public could coalesce. Since the mistreatment of political prisoners in Siberia evidently met this requirement, he quickly forwarded his information on the Yakutsk affair to London, urging Kravchinskii to make use of it.²²

Burtsev was not the only one to perceive the propaganda opportunity at hand. Several months later, as word of the ringleaders’ executions spread across Siberia, a number of exiled revolutionaries gathered in a small town near Irkutsk and decided to facilitate the escapes of several of those mentioned by name in Kennan’s *Century* articles, with the intention that they would cross the Pacific, accompany Kennan on his lecture tours and thus bolster his propaganda campaign.²³ Shortly after this, in a letter to the Marxist émigrés Georgii Plekhanov and Vera Zasulich in Geneva, Lev Deich – who was then serving out his own *katorga* term in Nerchinsk – confirmed the version of events that had previously appeared in *Svobodnaia Rossiia* and reported, for the first time, the subsequent executions. Like Zotov and Burtsev, Deich stressed the importance of

²⁰ Burtsev, *Bor’ba za svobodnuiu Rossiiu*, pp. 66-67.

²¹ Dzh. Kennan, ‘Tiuremnaia zhizn’ russkikh revoliutsionerov’, *Samoupravlenie* 3 (February 1889), pp. 3-13 and ‘Poslednee zaiavlenie russkikh liberalov’, *Samoupravlenie* 4 (April 1889), pp. 13-18.

²² Burtsev, *Bor’ba za svobodnuiu Rossiiu*, p. 49.

²³ E. E. Lazarev, ‘Dzhordzh Kennan’, *Volia Rossii* 13 (July 1923), pp. 9-10. This was the final installment of an essay published in three parts: the earlier installments can be found in *Volia Rossii* nos. 8-9 (May 1923), pp. 36-50 and 11 (June 1923), pp. 16-34. Subsequent references to this essay denote these parts as I, II and III.

international publicity, suggesting that his fellow political exiles considered it their only means of redress:

The facts communicated herein are undoubtedly all correct. I would ask you to pass them to as many of the great foreign newspapers and journals as you can. Have Stepniak use them in England, Ania [Kulisheva] in Italy and Pavel [Aksel'rod] in Germany. We consider it extremely important that the facts of the matter, particularly those concerning events in Iakutsk and Kara, should be circulated as widely as possible. Please forward my letter to Kennan as well.²⁴

With the facts thus confirmed by multiple sources, Kravchinskii, exploiting his formidable contacts with the British press, persuaded *The Times* to run the story in late December.²⁵ When the news broke, it provoked a storm. In an editorial, *The Times* invoked the 'outraged conscience of humanity' in calling for justice, and *The Manchester Guardian* opined that publicity would 'kill the Siberian exile system, as it killed slavery and many another evil thing'.²⁶ One London periodical, *The Saturday Review*, described the events in Iakutsk as 'purely Russian in character', remarking that they 'could have happened nowhere save in a country where men are condemned to a punishment worse than death by administrative order'.²⁷ Across the Atlantic, Kennan hastened to write his own condemnation of the Russian prison authorities in his *Century* column, having been independently forwarded copies of the executed ringleaders' final letters and various other relevant materials by Feliks Volkhovskii, a political exile whom he had befriended

²⁴ Cited in G. V. Plekhanov, 'Novaia drama v Sibiri' in *Gruppa 'Osvobozhdenie truda'* III, p. 306. Kulisheva and Aksel'rod were Marxist émigrés and members of Plekhanov's circle.

²⁵ 'Reported Slaughter of Siberian Prisoners', *The Times* 32883 (16 December 1889), p. 5.

²⁶ See leaders in *The Times* 32892 (26 December 1889), p. 7 and *The Manchester Guardian* (27 December 1889), p. 5.

²⁷ 'The Affray at Yakoutsk', *Saturday Review* 68.1783 (28 December 1889), p. 734.

in Tomsk four years earlier.²⁸ ‘If I live’, Kennan wrote, ‘the whole English-speaking world, at least, shall know all the details of this most atrocious crime.’²⁹

Still worse, however, was to come. In February 1890, news broke of a second outrage that had taken place three months earlier in the Kara *katorga* prison near Nerchinsk. In early 1889, a directive from the central prison authorities in Petersburg had for the first time permitted the use of corporal punishment – formerly reserved for ordinary criminals – against political offenders. In response to both this and other attempts to treat political offenders in a similar manner to common criminals, a number of female revolutionaries incarcerated in Kara staged a series of hunger strikes. By August, with the standoff continuing and the health of several women seriously deteriorating, an inmate named Nadezhda Sigida physically assaulted the prison commandant, assuming that the insult to his dignity would force his resignation and thus an end to the hunger strike. Although her actions had the desired effect, Sigida nonetheless spent the following two months in solitary confinement and, on 6 November, was subjected to flogging by the order of the local governor, Andrei Korf. Later that night, she and five other political offenders - three women and and two men - committed suicide by overdosing on morphine in their cells.³⁰

Once again, the news leaked almost immediately and reached Europe through the concerted efforts of exiles and émigrés alike. As before, Plekhanov received details of the tragedy directly from Siberia and hastened to forward the information to Kravchinskii, while both Volkhovskii and the highly respected populist theoretician Petr Lavrov – then

²⁸ F. V. Volkhovskii to Kennan, 2 February 1890, LC MSS GK Box 1. The documents Volkhovskii supplied apparently included telegrams, excerpts from the investigative commission’s report and a diagram illustrating the firefight, although I have been unable to locate any of these amongst Kennan’s papers.

²⁹ Kennan, ‘The Latest Siberian Tragedy’, *Century Magazine* 39.6 (April 1890), p. 892.

³⁰ Further details of the ‘Kara tragedy’ are given in V. V. Sukhomlin, ‘Vospominaniia: zapiski o kariiskoi katorge’, *Voprosy istorii* 4 (1966), pp. 97-110 and V. L. Burtsev, *Za sto let: sbornik po istorii politicheskikh i obshchestvennykh dvizhenii v Rossii* (London: Fond vol’noi russkoi pressy, 1897), pp. 231-243.

living in semi-retirement in Paris – supplied Kennan with evidence they had received from their own local contacts.³¹ When the story broke overseas in mid-February, the effect was immediate. Although the events in Iakutsk had been shocking in their own right, the floggings and suicides in Kara were still more so, since they represented an explicitly gendered act of violence that both intersected the familiar plotlines of Mme Cottin's *Elisabeth* and appealed to the darker recesses of the Victorian melodramatic imagination. Sigida's story dominated newspapers' front pages on both sides of the Atlantic, with much of the American press indulging readers' appetites for Siberian horrors with bloodcurdling headlines and titillating details bordering on the pornographic.³² In Britain, *The Times* once again led the charge, proclaiming that 'such infamies were not perpetrated on ladies of rank and position even in the time of the Emperor Nicholas'.³³

In Britain, during the days and weeks that followed, a public agitation against the Siberian exile system began in earnest. Kravchinskii visited Newcastle to negotiate the revival of the SFRF with Robert Spence Watson, the influential chairman of the National Liberal Federation. In London, two separate groups – the Oppressed Nationalities Aid Committee and the Russian Atrocities Workmen's Protest Committee – were formed, plans were made for the Hyde Park rally of 9 March, and a proposal circulated that all Russian refugees planning to attend the protest should, for the benefit of the crowd, come

³¹ P. L. Lavrov to Kravchinskii, 15 February 1890, *V londonskoi emigratsii*, pp. 273-274; Volkhovskii to Kennan, 15 February 1890 and Lavrov to Kennan, 8 March 1890, LC MSS GK Box 1. It should be noted that Lavrov's letter is somewhat unclear, since it refers only to Kravchinskii having received information on the events in Kara from 'B'. Although this appears to be a reference to Plekhanov, who sometimes used the pseudonym Bel'tov in émigré correspondence, it may also refer to Burtsev, who had since arrived in Paris and was in contact with Lavrov. Unambiguous references to Burtsev as 'B' appear in other émigré letters of the time: see notes 43-44 below.

³² See, for example, 'Horrors of Siberia', *Chicago Daily Tribune* (16 February 1890), p. 1; 'Russia's Brutal Cruelty', *New York Times* (16 February 1890), p. 1 and 'Flogged Her To Death', *Washington Post* (16 February 1890), p. 1.

³³ 'Flogging and Suicide of Female Political Prisoners in Siberia', *The Times* 32932 (11 February 1890), p. 4.

dressed in traditional peasant costumes.³⁴ (The sources do not reveal whether any of the émigrés actually did this, although the idea, given the overwhelmingly populist sympathies of the London colony, presumably provided some amusement.)

As an unprecedented show of public feeling on Russia's internal affairs, the galvanising effect of the Hyde Park rally was in retrospect all the more remarkable for the fact that it was, in most practical respects, a failure. Many of those who had been scheduled to speak, including Kropotkin, Annie Besant and George Bernard Shaw, did not appear. Lord Salisbury, the Prime Minister, not only declined to acknowledge the meeting's petition but wrote to Britain's ambassador in St Petersburg, expressly forbidding him from raising the issue with the Russian government.³⁵ To make matters worse, reports the following day that one orator had called for the Tsar's assassination caused fury in Petersburg, redoubling both the attentions of the *Zagranichnaia agentura* on the various parties involved and the efforts of both Novikova and the Russian ambassador to persuade the Home Office that the London émigrés were bloodthirsty anarchists.³⁶ Nonetheless, the size and diversity of the turnout confirmed to the organisers – principally Kravchinskii, Spence Watson and James Beal of the London County Council – that the plight of Siberia's exiles had the potential to muster the support of a substantial cross-section of progressive opinion. Three weeks later, the SFRF was formally revived at a meeting near Charing Cross, with Spence Watson presiding.³⁷ Amongst the Society's first actions was publishing a series of pamphlets with titles such as *The Slaughter of Political Prisoners in Siberia* and *The Flogging of Political Exiles in*

³⁴ 'The Agitation Against Russian Atrocities', *The Times* 32944 (25 February 1890), p. 3.

³⁵ See Salisbury's memorandum to the Home Secretary, Lord Llandaff, in TNA HO 45/9715/A51339.

³⁶ Sir Robert Morier to Salisbury, 19 March 1890, TNA FO 65/1381, pp. 258-260.

³⁷ Hollingsworth, 'The Society of Friends of Russian Freedom', pp. 50-51.

Russia. These proved very popular: by the following year, *The Slaughter of Political Prisoners in Siberia* had sold ten thousand copies.³⁸

On 1 June 1890, the first issue of the SFRF's monthly newspaper, *Free Russia*, appeared in newsagents and libraries across Britain.³⁹ Initially written almost exclusively by Kravchinskii, the paper launched with extensive coverage of the Iakutsk and Kara affairs. Despite an editorial which noted that 'the necessity to devote much space to preliminary explanations and the accumulation of cases of exceptional barbarity in the treatment of political offenders in Siberia gives a special character to our present issue',⁴⁰ Siberian horror stories would in fact appear frequently in both the paper's columns and the SFRF's lectures and publications throughout the 1890s. As Kravchinskii readily admitted, this was not because the abolishing the exile system was a crucial programmatic issue for any revolutionaries, but simply because it guaranteed publicity and support:

The great stream of sympathy with our cause, spreading now over the whole English-speaking world, has its source in the work of a man whose name will be forever associated with our emancipation, George Kennan, who has written only about our political exiles. As Russians, we cannot regard the ill-treatment of political offenders by the Russian government as our greatest grievance [...] But men's hearts are so made that the sight of one voluntary victim for a noble idea stirs them more deeply than the sight of a crowd submitting to a dire fate they cannot escape.⁴¹

³⁸ SFRF annual report for 1891-1892, LSE COLL MISC 1028.

³⁹ The title was not a coincidence, since Kravchinskii admired Burtsev's *Svobodnaia Rossiia* and had previously suggested it to Kennan as a suitable blueprint for an émigré-run Anglophone newspaper. See Kravchinskii to Kennan, 25 April 1889, LC MSS GK Box 1.

⁴⁰ S. Stepniak, 'Our Plan of Action', *FR* 1 (June 1890), p. 3.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

Following these events, the SFRF's nascent campaign against Siberian exile urgently needed a symbolic figurehead. With the aforementioned Feliks Volkhovskii, who arrived in London in August 1890, it acquired one. A battle-hardened veteran of the 'movement to the people' and participant in the *bol'shoi protsess* of 1878, Volkhovskii – as noted earlier – had acted as one of Kennan's secret correspondents during his time in exile. When he escaped from Siberia across the Pacific in November 1889, Kennan returned the favour by providing him with financial help during his sojourn in Canada and arranging for his young daughter's safe passage to Europe.⁴² By the following year, however, Volkhovskii had begun to doubt the depth of his patron's professed commitment to their common cause, complaining of Kennan's reluctance to promote Russia's revolutionaries except through his own lucrative public appearances.⁴³ As he wrote to Kravchinskii in March 1890:

Undoubtedly half the takings from [Kennan's] lectures – that is, about \$10,000 – have gone straight to his pocket. Undoubtedly his lectures are also the strongest propaganda we have at our disposal. But the point is that with organised help from the public we could raise twice that much, and Kennan will literally never agree to this.⁴⁴

Thus apprised of Volkhovskii's growing disaffection and assured that he shared their vision for the SFRF, Kravchinskii and Burtsev together asked him to come to Britain in June 1890.⁴⁵ The invitation was quickly accepted. At the beginning of September, *Free*

⁴² 'How I Came From Siberia', *FR* 11.2 (February 1900), p. 21.

⁴³ Volkhovskii to Kennan, 25 February 1890, LC MSS GK Box 1.

⁴⁴ Volkhovskii to Kravchinskii, 30 March 1890, RGALI f. 1158.1.232, p. 42-43.

⁴⁵ Volkhovskii to Kennan, 8 June 1890, LC MSS GK Box 1.

Russia duly announced Volkhovskii's arrival in London, hailing him as a 'living indictment of Russian despotism, straight from the land of exile and suffering'.⁴⁶

Neither a compelling writer or theorist nor a natural leader such as Kravchinskii, Volkhovskii was not a significant figure within the revolutionary movement. Nonetheless, he was both an escaped Siberian exile and – since Kennan had written about him in one of the *Century* articles – one with international name recognition, and this was enough to justify the fanfare.⁴⁷ His first contributions to *Free Russia* appeared almost immediately after his arrival, and he quickly received significant editorial duties on the paper. Within months, he had written a pamphlet on his experiences in Siberia, which sold well and went through a number of reprints.⁴⁸ For the best part of five years, Volkhovskii spearheaded the SFRF's lecture campaigns, overcoming his avowed lack of charisma and struggles with the English vernacular as he beat a persistent path between the workingmen's clubs, literary-philosophical societies and Nonconformist church halls of late Victorian Britain.⁴⁹ His numerous public appearances focused overwhelmingly on his experiences in Siberia, the abuses of administrative exile and the plight of political offenders.⁵⁰

During this period, Volkhovskii not only established himself as the public face of the SFRF but approximated, in the eyes of his audience, the *beau ideal* of the Russian revolutionary hero. In addition to his tragic personal history replete with the requisite Siberian sufferings, he cultivated a veneer of political moderation and social affect for the

⁴⁶ 'English Notes', *FR* 1.2 (September 1890), pp. 15-16.

⁴⁷ George Kennan, 'Political Exiles and Common Convicts at Tomsk', *Century Magazine* 37.1 (November 1888), pp. 32-33.

⁴⁸ Felix Volkhovsky, *At The Mercy of Every Official: A Sketch of Exile Life* (London: SFRF, 1890). This pamphlet was still being reprinted by local branches four years later. See 'Notes of the Month', *FR* 5.1 (January 1894), p. 6.

⁴⁹ Volkhovskii does not appear to have found public speaking in English a comfortable experience. See his letters to Kravchinskii of 30 March 1890 and 8 May 1891, RGALI f. 1158.1.232, p. 12, 49.

⁵⁰ Promotional materials for these appearances can be found in 'Lectures on Russia by Felix Volkhovsky', LSE COLL MISC 1028, although the collection unfortunately includes no transcripts of the lectures themselves.

benefit of his British admirers; many years later, Chaikovskii would write of him that ‘the impeccable correctness of his personal relationships bought him close to the ideal of the English gentleman’.⁵¹ Outside his lecturing commitments, Volkhovskii wrote regularly for the London periodicals, organised protest meetings, and was namechecked by British newspapers.⁵² His appearances generated the majority of the SFRF’s revenue through the sale of literature, and it was no coincidence that the Society’s first serious financial problems coincided with the greater administrative responsibilities he was forced to assume following Kravchinskii’s sudden death in 1895.⁵³

With Volkhovskii installed in London, Kravchinskii took steps to extend the agitation from Britain to the United States. In the wake of Kennan’s lectures, a number of organisations with the explicit aim of funding political exiles’ escapes from Siberia had been formed in major American cities, including the Russian Exile Relief Fund in Philadelphia and the United States Siberian Exile Humane Society in Denver – the latter with the help of Egor Lazarev, one of several exiles to have escaped in the hope of reaching the United States and linking up with Kennan in the aftermath of the Yakutsk massacre.⁵⁴ Kravchinskii hoped to capitalise on these developments and, after booking a series of public appearances through Kennan’s promoter in Boston, sailed for New York in December 1890. In all, he spent about five months lecturing and fundraising across the eastern seaboard.⁵⁵ Because of his association with Kennan, he attracted considerable attention, and by March was seriously considering the possibility of transferring *Free*

⁵¹ N. V. Chaikovskii, ‘F. V. Volkhovskii’, *Golos minuvshogo* (October 1914), p. 235. It is probably not coincidental that Volkhovskii is best remembered today for having first encouraged Constance Garnett’s fledgling interest in Russian literature. See her sister-in-law’s recollections of him in *Tea and Anarchy! The Bloomsbury Diary of Olive Garnett, 1890-1893*, ed. Barry C. Johnson (London: Bartletts, 1989), pp. 52-58.

⁵² F. Volkhovsky, ‘My Life in Russian Prisons’, *Fortnightly Review* 48.287 (November 1890), pp. 782-794; ‘The Sufferings of Russian Exiles’, *New Review* 3.18 (November 1890), pp. 414-426; ‘The Real Siberia’, *Contemporary Review* 61 (April 1892), pp. 533-545.

⁵³ ‘A Special Appeal to Our Friends’, *FR* 7.12 (December 1896), p. 95.

⁵⁴ See note 22 above and Kravchinskii, *V londonskoi emigratsii*, p. 426.

⁵⁵ Kravchinskii, *V Londonskoi emigratsii*, pp. 425-427.

Russia to New York on a permanent basis, with Volkhovskii as the paper's editor.⁵⁶ Although this plan was quickly abandoned, an American branch of the SFRF (SAFRF) was established in Boston the following month and, for several years, published its own version of *Free Russia* with the assistance of the aforementioned *narodnik* Lazar Gol'denberg. Yet despite Kennan's fame and Kravchinskii's popularity, the American branch ultimately amounted to little, and never attracted more than a few hundred members nationwide. One reason for this was Kennan's refusal to devote himself to organising it at the expense of his lecturing commitments – in this sense, Volkhovskii's reservations about him were justified – although the reluctance of other American progressive luminaries such as Mark Twain to work actively on its behalf was likewise problematic.⁵⁷ By 1894, the American edition of *Free Russia* had ceased publication and the SAFRF was dormant, although the latter was briefly revived a decade later to promote Ekaterina Breshko-Breshkovskaia's 1904-1905 American lecture tour.⁵⁸

The failure of the SAFRF notwithstanding, it is evident that the émigré-led campaign against Siberian exile not only generated considerable public interest but changed the terms in which the subject was discussed in Britain and United States. This was clearly illustrated by Ol'ga Novikova's botched 1892 attempt to counter popular indignation over the autocracy's treatment of political exiles by recycling her methods from previous years. During the early 1890s, Novikova – often acting in concert with the aforementioned Rachkovskii and the Russian embassy in London – attempted to undermine the SFRF in a variety of ways, including lobbying William Gladstone for the dismissal of cabinet ministers thought to be sympathetic to the organisation and, in 1894,

⁵⁶ Travis, *George Kennan and the American-Russian Relationship*, pp. 201-203.

⁵⁷ Foglesong, *The American Mission and the Evil Empire*, pp. 26-27.

⁵⁸ For a discussion of Breshkovskaia's American reception, see pp. 251-253 below.

exposing Kravchinskii as Mezentsev's murderer in the London press.⁵⁹ Undoubtedly the least successful of these strategies was that involving Harry de Windt, a military officer turned globetrotting journalist whose 1889 travelogue, *From Peking to Calais by Land*, had included the observation that exiles in Siberia did not 'have such a bad time of it as we in England are generally led to believe'.⁶⁰ Upon reading this, Novikova promptly commissioned de Windt to undertake a short tour of Siberia's prisons and compose a response to Kennan's exposé that found in the Russian government's favour.

By 1892, de Windt had duly produced a tendentious whitewash entitled *Siberia As It Is* which dismissed the 'Siberian atrocity scare' as 'groundless catch-penny fabrication' and included a foreword written by Novikova herself.⁶¹ Although de Windt apparently did visit Siberia in the course of writing this book, the extent to which he actually did any original research for it is unclear, since much of the material was effectively identical to Henry Lansdell's earlier *Through Siberia*. The biggest difference between the two books was in fact the degree of Novikova's involvement, which had been concealed in Lansdell's case but was openly acknowledged in de Windt's. The association of her name with the book made the political intent behind it immediately apparent, and *Free Russia* had a field day attacking the author, drawing attention to his credulity and ignorance of both the Russian language and the subject at hand.⁶² Others rapidly joined the fray, with the liberal periodicals *Speaker* and *Academy* dismissing the book as 'scarcely serious' and

⁵⁹ See Stead, *The MP for Russia* II, pp. 315-318 and 'Anarchists: Their Methods and Organisation', *The New Review* 10.56 (January 1894), pp. 5-16. The latter was essentially a rewritten version of the notorious 'Russian memorandum', a document that Novikova and other Russian agents had been circulating privately amongst British civil servants and journalists since 1892 and which argued that several high-profile Russian émigrés (Kravchinskii, Kropotkin, Volkhovskii, Chaikovskii and Burtsev were mentioned by name) posed a direct threat to Britain's security. A copy of the memorandum can be found in TNA FO 65/1429, pp. 87-92. For a useful overview of Novikova's activities around this time see Ivanova, 'Russkaia revoliutsionnaia emigratsiia', pp. 94-97.

⁶⁰ Harry de Windt, *From Peking to Calais by Land* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1892), p. 241.

⁶¹ Harry de Windt, *Siberia As It Is* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1892), p. 460.

⁶² 'Mr H. de Windt's Discoveries', *FR* 3.4 (April 1892), pp. 7-8.

a ‘work of no value’ over which Kennan and Kravchinskii were unlikely to lose sleep.⁶³ With de Windt’s credibility fatally undermined, a promotional lecture tour for his book was hurriedly called off for want of bookings.⁶⁴

The campaign against the mistreatment of political exiles in Siberia remained the lynchpin of the SFRF’s public activities throughout the early-to-mid 1890s. During this period, the London émigré colony was largely comprised of escapees, as Kravchinskii memorably put it, from ‘the Egyptian bondage of Siberia’.⁶⁵ This was inevitably reflected in the organisation’s propaganda. By the end of 1892, the SFRF commanded sufficient public support to sell out Westminster Town Hall, on which occasion one speaker engaged in ‘some very graphic descriptions of the atrocities prevailing in Russian prisons’ freely acknowledged that no other subject at the time guaranteed such large audiences.⁶⁶ As late as January 1894, with no fresh Siberian horrors having been reported for several years, Kennan was able to visit Britain for an acclaimed lecture tour on the subject.⁶⁷ Several months earlier, a Russian police report on Kennan’s activities across the Atlantic had reached the following conclusion:

In the course of the last four years, Kennan has managed to give around five hundred lectures in the United States, some of which have been attended by as many as six or seven thousand people. In order to make the maximum impact on his audience, he appears in these lectures wearing a prison uniform and handcuffs and, having thus shocked those in attendance, asks the free citizens of America to

⁶³ ‘Siberia As It Is Not’, *Speaker* 5 (April 1892), p. 445; ‘Siberia and the Exile System’, *Academy* 269 (March 1892), p. 221.

⁶⁴ Senese, *S. M. Stepniak-Kravchinskii*, p. 94.

⁶⁵ ‘The Russian Chronicle’, *FR* 1.3 (October 1890), p. 9. Both Burtsev and the Polish nationalist Wilfred (later Mikhail) Voynich settled in London over the winter of 1890-1891, as did the veteran populists L. E. Shishko and E. E. Lazarev in 1891 and 1894 respectively. For a useful overview of the London colony’s composition during this period see Hamburg, ‘The London Emigration and the Russian Liberation Movement’, pp. 324-329.

⁶⁶ ‘Our London Correspondence’, *The Manchester Guardian* (7 December 1892), p. 5.

⁶⁷ ‘Political Exiles at Siberian Mines’, *The Times* 34156 (9 January 1894), p. 9.

help the revolutionary movement. The threat posed by Kennan to the interests of the Russian government is enormous.⁶⁸

This assessment, neither for the first nor last time in the history of intelligence reports, overstated the scale of the problem. Although the campaign against the Siberian exile system during the early 1890s undoubtedly generated significant public support both in Britain and the United States, it never transcended the level of lectures and outrage meetings and ultimately made no impact on the Russian policy of either government. There were several reasons for this. Firstly, the campaign not only failed to secure the patronage of senior progressive politicians on both sides of the Atlantic, but alienated a number of influential Russian socialists who considered the SFRF excessively bourgeois and its plan of securing liberal reforms in Russia through the weight of international opinion ‘so hopelessly misconceived as not to warrant detailed criticism’.⁶⁹ Gradually-shifting public perceptions of Siberia itself – a subject we shall return to – presented a second problem. In a letter to Kravchinskii written in May 1891, Volkhovskii attributed the reluctance of the British press to publicise his lectures to the looming construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway, which had been announced two months earlier. ‘In practical terms’, he remarked, ‘the Siberian exile system is finished.’⁷⁰

In the following discussion, I focus on a third issue that apparently escaped the London émigrés’ notice at the time: the fact that public outrage over Siberian exile did not automatically translate into, or even necessarily relate to, active support for the Russian revolutionary movement. We have already seen that Siberian exile, in the eyes of many Britons and Americans, had long been a proxy for the notional confrontation

⁶⁸ Cited in V. Kovalev and L. Ermolaeva, ‘V Sibir’ za pravdoi’, *Enisei* 3 (1986), p. 74. The original can be found in ‘O pisatele i grazhdanine SShA Dzhordzhe Kennane’, GARF f. 102.120.217.

⁶⁹ Lavrov to E. A. Lineva, 2 April 1891, *V londonskoi emigratsii*, p. 294.

⁷⁰ Volkhovskii to Kravchinskii, 8 May 1891, RGALI f. 1158.1.232, p. 12.

between the civilised world and barbarism that underlay Victorian attitudes towards Russia. By the late nineteenth century, both the decline of enthusiasm for the Polish national cause and the London émigrés' publicistic activities meant that Russia's revolutionaries themselves were increasingly seen as playing the decisive role in this imagined Manichaean struggle. As the tendency of British progressives to relate the sufferings of Siberian exiles to the contemporary situation of Irish nationalists reveals, many Western progressives became involved in the SFRF's campaigns not because of any particular attraction to or knowledge of the revolutionary movement's ideals, but rather because Siberia provided a potent analogy for political dilemmas closer to home and consolidated their own liberal identity.

4.2. Peripheral analogies: Siberia and Ireland

In May 1890, at the height of British indignation over the events in Yakutsk and Kara, William Gladstone gave a speech in Lowestoft in which he explained his reluctance to add his voice to the growing chorus of protest:

Appeals have lately been made to me that I should say what I think of recent transactions which you have heard of, more or less, in Siberia [...] This is a case bad enough, and I am appealed to by those who say, 'Why don't you denounce it?' [...] If the present government were to come before the Czar and his authorities with a representation of this kind, I am a little afraid [...] that it would be in the power of the Russian government to say, and would say when approached, that only three years have passed since at a place called Mitchelstown, in Ireland, three innocent Irish citizens engaged in the perfectly

lawful occupation of discussing Irish affairs in a legal and peaceable public meeting were ruthlessly shot down by the Irish constabulary. Some of us may be apt to forget these things.⁷¹

Such comparisons between the situation of Siberia's political exiles and that confronting Irish nationalists were commonplace during the early years of the Russian freedom movement. The campaign for Home Rule in Ireland dominated Britain's domestic politics at the end of the nineteenth century and tended to draw support from the same progressive circles as the SFRF: Spence Watson gave over one hundred and fifty speeches in support of Irish independence between 1885 and 1890, while the aforementioned symposium convened by Henry Sutherland Edwards in protest at the Yakutsk and Kara affairs involved a significant number of Irish MPs.⁷² Contacts originated from the Russian émigré side too. Both Kravchinskii and Volkhovskii expressed occasional interest in Irish nationalism on a strategic level and from the perspective of Russian populism: in 1890, the latter opined that 'the pro-Russian movement [...] must find sympathy among the Irish inasmuch as their national problem is based on the solution of the land question, which is also at the base of all social progress in Russia'.⁷³ Yet these general affinities between the agitation against autocratic rule in Russia and that in favour of Irish independence do not come close to explaining the frequency with which the Irish question was related to Siberia in particular, both by means of direct analogy and the

⁷¹ 'Mr Gladstone in East Anglia: The Siberian Atrocities', *The Observer* (18 May 1890), p. 5.

⁷² Percy Corder, *Robert Spence Watson* (London: West, Newman & Co., 1911), p. 7; Sutherland Edwards, 'A Symposium and a Protest', *passim*.

⁷³ F. Volkhovsky, 'My Interview with Michael Davitt', *FR* 1.5 (December 1890), pp. 10-11. Volkhovskii later discussed the Irish question in *Chemu uchit konstitutsiia gr. Loris-Melikova* (London: Fond vol'noi russkoi pressy, 1894). See also 'Irlandskie dela', *Delo* 8 (1881), pp. 149-177, written anonymously by Kravchinskii.

general tendency to mention one in close proximity to the other.⁷⁴ Why, then, were the two seen as so closely related?

The first and most obvious answer is that for many of those involved, the Siberian agitation allowed for a type of anti-imperial protest by proxy, an attempt to highlight evils far away in order to draw attention to those much closer to home. Revived mere months after the formation of the Second International in Paris in July 1889 and weeks prior to London's first ever May Day celebrations, the SFRF derived from and reflected an internationalist and anti-imperialist politics characteristic of the time.⁷⁵ Spence Watson, who derived his internationalist sympathies from the devout Quakerism (the Society of Friends) to which the SFRF's name referred, was a passionate supporter of the Indian National Congress and an outspoken opponent of the Second Boer War who denounced the British use of concentration camps in 1901, while the aforementioned Edward Pease declared his support for Russia's revolutionary émigrés to be a product of his broader internationalist politics.⁷⁶ In return, the SFRF attracted support from across the British Empire during its early years. By the end of 1891, it had supporters in Malaysia and the Middle East and a 'large and sympathetic' branch in the Transvaal, established by Boer settlers with the help of Russo-Jewish émigrés.⁷⁷ The following year, the Society's central committee in London arranged for the distribution of Kennan's *Siberia and the Exile System* across Australia after reports that copies of the book had been 'simply devoured'

⁷⁴ For example, the poet Algernon Swinburne, who wrote a poem attacking Alexander III in response to the Yakutsk and Kara affairs, was roundly condemned by unionist MPs who apparently considered his missive a type of nationalist agitation by proxy. See 'House of Commons', *The Times* 33083 (6 August 1890), p. 6 and 'English Notes', *FR* 1.2 (September 1890), p. 15.

⁷⁵ For an interesting discussion of *Free Russia* from this perspective see J. Michael Lyons, 'An Army Like That of Gideon: Communities of Transnational Reform on the Pages of *Free Russia*', *American Journalism* 32.1 (2015), pp. 2-22.

⁷⁶ Percy Corder, *The Life of Robert Spence Watson* (London: Headley, 1914), pp. 193-197, 239-247; Robert Spence Watson, 'The Concentration Camps', *Speaker* (August 1901), p. 584; Edward Pease, 'Our Russian Critics', *FR* 2.2 (February 1891), p. 3.

⁷⁷ S. Stepniak, 'The Society's Work Up Till Now', *FR* 2.12 (December 1891), p. 4; 'A Message from South Africa', *FR* 2.9 (September 1891), p. 8.

in Sydney and Brisbane.⁷⁸ In short, the SFRF's campaigns were just one manifestation of a transnational progressivism that was much in vogue at the time.

In this context, either adopting or pointedly refusing to adopt the cause of Siberia's political exiles was a potent strategy for those who were not primarily interested in Russia, but rather wanted to make a point about British imperialism. The preponderance of the analogy between Siberia and Ireland was linked to this tendency, with both supporters and opponents of Home Rule appropriating the Siberian question and framing it in terms of their own political priorities. As Irish nationalists and Gladstonian liberals attacked the hypocrisy of Britons who condemned political repression in Siberia while endorsing it in Ireland, so loyalists duly deployed Siberian horror stories to highlight what they saw as the relatively benign nature of British rule. If such reasoning was clearly the decisive factor in Gladstone's refusal to partake in the agitation, it was even more obvious in the case of Michael Davitt, an Irish MP and former political prisoner whom Volkhovskii interviewed for *Free Russia* in November 1890. Although Volkhovskii found Davitt 'evidently much interested' in Russian affairs, the latter, who had been released from prison only a few years previously, quickly sought to move the conversation onto a comparison of their respective prison experiences upon discovering that their sentences had been of similar lengths.⁷⁹

Despite promising to rally Irish support for the Russian freedom movement, Davitt's sole contribution during the decade that followed was his involvement in 1896 with a committee mainly comprised of delegates from the SFRF and the London Trades Council convened to gather and channel funds for striking factory workers in Petersburg.⁸⁰ Otherwise, his failure to appear at Hyde Park in March 1890, where he had been scheduled to address the crowd, caused a small riot and gave the impression that

⁷⁸ 'Notes', *FR* 3.11 (November 1892), p. 8.

⁷⁹ Volkhovsky, 'My Interview with Michael Davitt', p. 10.

⁸⁰ 'Help for the Strikers', *FR* 7.8 (August 1896), p. 65.

those present were less united in support of Siberia's exiles than divided on the Irish question; on other occasions, his oft-expressed view that Russian prisons sounded preferable to British ones had a similar effect.⁸¹ As late as 1903, when he travelled to Russia to report on the Kishinev pogroms for an Irish newspaper, Davitt availed himself of the opportunity to visit the novelist Lev Tolstoi at Iasnaia Poliana. Having recently read Tolstoi's last major work, *Voskresenie (Resurrection)* – part of which depicted the sufferings of ordinary criminal exiles in Siberia – Davitt regaled him at some length with stories of his own time in British prisons, asking him in parting to write something on Ireland's behalf when he could.⁸²

Davitt was not the only one to take this approach. Shortly after the first of Kennan's *Century* articles appeared, one Dublin newspaper referred to the Tullamore prison as the 'Siberia of Ireland',⁸³ while Harry de Windt – or, more likely, Novikova – delivered precisely the riposte that Gladstone had feared, noting that 'when we hear of a wholesale arrest of Nihilists, every newspaper in England teems with letters indignantly condemning the action of the Russian government, the writers sublimely ignoring the fact that the same thing happens almost every day in Ireland'.⁸⁴ Even Spence Watson, although he understandably hedged his bets, was clearly not oblivious to the problem: although he considered it 'absurd to suggest any actual similarity' between the Irish and Siberian questions, there was no doubt that the 'pernicious belief that it is possible and

⁸¹ Henderson, 'The Hyde Park Rally of 9 March 1890', p. 459; 'Imperial Parliament', *Standard* 23016 (5 April 1898), p. 6.

⁸² Laurence Marley, *Michael Davitt: Freelance Radical and Frondeur* (Dublin: Four Courts, 2007), p. 262. As Marley points out, Russia was perhaps the one country to which Davitt's internationalism and solidarity with other revolutionaries (a feature of the anti-Parnellite tendency that emphasised the need for global anti-colonial networks and contacts) did not extend, to the point of his claim in 1905 that the ongoing revolution had been fermented by European and Japanese *agents provocateurs* and its scale deliberately overstated abroad. This impression is confirmed by the fact that Davitt's Soviet biographer, V.E. Kunina, *Maikl Devitt – syn irlandkogo naroda, 1846-1906. Stranitsy zhizni i bor'by* (Moscow: Izd-vo 'Mysl', 1973), does not mention his fleeting links to the London emigration at all.

⁸³ 'The Imprisonment of the Lord Mayor', *Freeman's Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser* (12 December 1887), p. 6.

⁸⁴ De Windt, *Siberia As It Is*, p. 36. Novikova had made approximately the same point several years previously: see 'The Tercentenary of Siberia', p. 64.

legitimate to endeavour to influence thought by physical force' was common to both.⁸⁵ Conversely, a number of loyalists saw recent events in Siberia as a counterargument to the Home Rulers' claims. *The Yorkshire Herald* attacked Gladstone's comments on the subject as both fatuous and redundant, writing that although it was hardly possible 'to conceive anything more absurd than the comparison of the lot of an Irish peasant to that of a Russian convict in a Siberian dungeon', even a legitimate analogy would not make the case for Home Rule so much as debunk it, since 'real and beneficial reform can only proceed from a strong and stable government such as now exists'.⁸⁶ In 1894, one Belfast newspaper opined that – had Irish nationalists the misfortune to live under Russian authority in Siberia – they would be 'better able to appreciate the advantages of British rule'.⁸⁷

On one level, therefore, the SFRF's agitation proved extremely useful to both sides of the Home Rule debate by appearing in various ways to confirm by proxy what each had previously said about Ireland. Yet the pervasive rhetoric of similarity between Siberia and Ireland neither originated from, nor was confined to, the late nineteenth-century polemics over Irish independence.⁸⁸ As early as the 1840s, Irish intellectuals such as James Clarence Mangan had appropriated the Siberian imagery beloved of British publicists and Polish émigrés in describing their own colonial situation ('In Siberia's wastes / The ice-wind's breath / Woundeth like the toothéd steel / Lost Siberia doth reveal / Only blight and death').⁸⁹ Similarly, a number of those who deployed the analogy during the early 1890s – most notably George Kennan – attached rather less importance to the question of whether Siberia made the case for or against Home Rule than to the point that

⁸⁵ Robert Spence Watson, 'Siberia. II', *Speaker* 5 (March 1892), p. 584.

⁸⁶ 'Mr Gladstone on Mitchelstown and Siberia', *The Yorkshire Herald* 12168 (3 June 1890), p. 5.

⁸⁷ 'Nationalist Enemies of Great Britain', *The Belfast News-Letter* 24647 (12 July 1894), p. 1.

⁸⁸ Fedor Korandei, 'Kak irlandtsy, pytaiutsia odnim kartofelem': Sibir' 1890-go goda v istoricheskoi geografii obrazov', *Kul'turnaia i humanitarnaia geografiia* 1.1 (2012), pp. 88-97.

⁸⁹ James Clarence Mangan, *Poems* (New York, NY: P. M. Haverty, 1859), p. 432.

the position of Russian revolutionaries exiled to Siberia closely resembled that of Ireland's own radical intelligentsia, something even de Windt was forced to acknowledge.⁹⁰

The literary critic Terry Eagleton once commented on the way in which Ireland's colonial ontology tended to frustrate the British, who were unable to decisively assign the Irish to either centre or periphery; with neither nation wholly metropolitan or conventionally colonial, both remained 'unnervingly close and out of each other's cognitive range'.⁹¹ This dilemma encapsulates the deeper significance of the analogy between Siberia and Ireland, for Russia – neither indubitably European nor fully Asiatic – presented Western observers with a very similar problem, upon which the Liberal MP James Allanson-Picton remarked at the SFRF's 1892 annual meeting in London. There were, Allanson-Picton said, many despotic countries and bad governments in the world. China, for instance, was more barbarous than Russia, and just as badly governed. 'But the Chinese do not object to it', he opined, 'and that is the end of the matter':

With Russia the position is quite different. There is no country which shows so wide a discrepancy between the governors and the governed as Russia. Of the dumb masses, one cannot say anything, [but] with the educated classes the dissatisfaction is obviously general.⁹²

From this perspective, Siberia's significance (and the basis for its comparison with Ireland) was that it epitomised and localised this dilemma by juxtaposing a community of self-consciously westernised intellectuals with extremes of poverty and backwardness.

⁹⁰ Kennan, *Siberia and the Exile System* II, p. 272, 436; de Windt, *Siberia As It Is*, p. 35.

⁹¹ Terry Eagleton, 'Postcolonialism: The Case of Ireland' in *Multicultural States: Rethinking Difference and Identity*, ed. David Bennett (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 127.

⁹² 'Meeting of December 2nd', *FR* 3.1 (January 1892), p. 5.

Although this aspect of the analogy was not openly discussed as frequently as its more tendentious deployment in the debates over Home Rule, there is nonetheless ample evidence, as we shall now see, that it was exactly this conception of Siberia's role in relation to Russian identity in general which underlay the powerful attraction many Anglo-American progressives felt to the banished revolutionaries whose cause they championed. Presented by George Kennan and other Westerners as exemplary westernised liberals and heroic agents of progress abandoned in an Asiatic wilderness, Siberia's political exiles appeared to epitomise not only the revolutionary struggle, but the problem of Russia's liminality. At the end of the nineteenth century, talking about Siberian exile represented an endeavour to assign Russia its correct place in the West's hierarchy of civilisation and progress.

4.3. 'The *Uncle Tom's Cabin* of the Siberian exiles'

Why did George Kennan's Siberian exposé make such a profound impression upon progressive Anglo-American opinion? Three factors are immediately apparent. Firstly, given the level of public interest generated on both sides of the Atlantic by the Siberian polemics of the 1880s, the spectacle of a key participant in those polemics – a respected if self-styled authority on Russia, and a hitherto well-known defender of the Russian government – suddenly renouncing their former convictions and declaring for the revolutionaries was bound to make a major impression. Secondly, it seems indisputable that Kennan's investigations were of a different order, both methodologically and in terms of their literary merits, to almost everything hitherto written on the subject in English. Both his *Century* articles and the 1891 *magnum opus* of which they subsequently formed the basis, *Siberia and the Exile System*, were devoid of both the naïveté and

hearsay of Lansdell's *Through Siberia* and the prurient sensationalism that many readers had come to associate with Mme Cottin's *Elisabeth*, and confirmed the claims made by the Russian émigrés, towards whom, as noted earlier, neutral opinion had been shifting for several years.

The third and most important factor, however, was Kennan's depiction of his principal subjects – Siberia's banished revolutionaries. The heroic figures that emerged from his articles and lectures approximated the ideal of the Anglo-Saxonist *weltanschauung* shared by many Americans and Britons of the late nineteenth century – that 'confusion of race, language, culture and nationality' which alloyed the gradually ebbing Victorian self-confidence of previous decades with Americans' newly inescapable sense of manifest destiny and which everywhere preordained the inexorable advance of free trade and classical liberal democracy.⁹³ Through repeated admiring references to their high level of education and refinement, their self-sacrificial patriotism and their devotion to liberal cosmopolitan values, Kennan portrayed Russia's banished revolutionaries as a small band of westernised *kulturträger* banished to the edge of the known world. In so doing, he effectively bound them to his audience by the ties of an imputed civilisational kinship.

In *Siberia and the Exile System* – to which we will confine the present discussion for the sake of convenience – this effect is primarily achieved through a rhetoric of similarity that recurs throughout the narrative, with initial comparisons between Siberia's physical environment and that of the United States quickly subsiding as Kennan comes into contact with political exiles and begins instead to describe them as honorary Americans. Upon first crossing the Urals and entering Siberia, Kennan repeatedly likens the scenery to familiar American landscapes, informing the reader that the area

⁹³ Travis, *George Kennan and the American-Russian Relationship*, p. 291.

surrounding the railway line ‘resembles in general outline that of West Virginia where the Baltimore and Ohio railroad crosses the Alleghenies’ and later revealing that the southern Siberian winter is not in general ‘much severer than that of Minnesota’.⁹⁴ As he travels further east, the landscape becomes less familiar and more foreboding: the Transbaikal, Kennan informs the reader, was ‘wilder and lonelier than any part of Siberia we had seen’.⁹⁵

From this point it is no longer the region itself but rather the political exiles, whom Kennan first encounters in Semipalatinsk, that recall the United States. One of them, Leont’ev, has an appearance suggestive of ‘studious and scientific tastes’, leading Kennan to observe that ‘if I had met him in Washington and had been asked to guess his profession from his appearance, I should have said that he was probably a young scientist connected with the United States Geological Survey, the Smithsonian Institution, or the National Museum’.⁹⁶ Others that Kennan meets in Semipalatinsk demonstrate ‘more than a superficial acquaintance with the best English and American literature, as well as a fairly accurate knowledge of American institutions and history’, and impress him with an intimate knowledge of American affairs such as ‘one does not expect to find anywhere on the other side of the Atlantic, and least of all in Siberia’.⁹⁷ Such comments continue throughout the various sections of the book devoted to political exiles: of two he subsequently meets in Ulbinsk, Kennan remarks that ‘either of them might have been taken for a young professor, or a post-graduate student, in the Johns Hopkins University’.⁹⁸ Later, he observes of a group of exiles he had befriended in Siberia that ‘no

⁹⁴ Kennan, *Siberia and the Exile System* I, p. 32, 63. See also Sarah J. Young, ‘Knowing Russia’s Convicts: The Other in Narratives of Imprisonment and Exile of the Late Imperial Era’, *Europe-Asia Studies* 65.9 (2013), p. 1704.

⁹⁵ Kennan, *Siberia and the Exile System* II, p. 60.

⁹⁶ Kennan, *Siberia and the Exile System* I, p. 177.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 185-186.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 234.

Americans of my acquaintance are animated by a more sincere or more disinterested patriotism'.⁹⁹

As Kennan comes to identify with the political exiles on a personal level, his portrayal of the Siberian landscape changes accordingly. By the time the reader is introduced to Ekaterina Breshkovskaia, whom Kennan encounters in a village near Irkutsk, the image of the political exiles as the zenith and crowning glory of nineteenth-century culture stands in direct opposition to their foreboding physical surroundings:

Neither hardship, nor exile, nor penal servitude had been able to break [Breshkovskaia's] brave, finely tempered spirit or to shake her convictions of honor and duty. She was, as I soon discovered, a woman of much cultivation, having been educated first in the women's schools of her own country and then at Zurich in Switzerland. She spoke French, German and English, was a fine musician, and impressed me as being in every way an attractive and interesting woman. She had twice been sent to the mines of Kara [...] and after serving out her second penal term had again been sent as a forced colonist to this wretched, godforsaken Buriat settlement [...] There was not another educated woman, so far as I know, within a hundred miles in any direction [and] she had, it seemed to me, absolutely nothing to look forward to except a few years, more or less, of hardship and privation and at last burial in a lonely graveyard beside the Selenga River, where no sympathetic eye might ever rest upon the unpainted wooden cross that would briefly chronicle her life and death.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Kennan, *Siberia and the Exile System* II, p. 441.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 121-122.

Kennan's description of his meeting with Breshkovskaia anticipates his subsequent encounter with another revolutionary, Natal'ia Armfel'd, in which Siberia's role as the political exiles' constitutive other is made even more explicit.¹⁰¹ Kennan and Armfel'd met in late 1885 at the free command (*vol'naia komanda*) of the Ust-Kara *katorga* prison near Nerchinsk, where the latter lived under gendarme supervision. Armfel'd is introduced to the reader as both polyglot and 'educated and accomplished',¹⁰² her kinship with Kennan's Anglo-American readership further affirmed – as in Breshkovskaia's case – by the juxtaposition of her refinement and sympathetic character with her miserable, inhospitable surroundings. In his dramatic account of their clandestine meeting, Kennan not only illustrates this juxtaposition with a judicious deployment of the analogy between Siberia and Ireland discussed earlier, but shows Armfel'd as actively participating in his rhetorical strategy by reciprocating his pointed use of colonial metaphor. In Nerchinsk, the two are depicted as fellow Europeans meeting in a non-European wilderness:

I followed [Armfel'd] through a small, dark entry into a wretched little room about ten feet long by eight feet wide, with bare floor and ceiling of rough-hewn planks [...] Everything was scrupulously neat and clean, but in other respects the house looked like the home of some wretchedly poor Irish laborer [...] I then told her that I had come to Siberia to investigate the life of the political convicts, and gave her a brief account of my previous Siberian experiences. She looked at me like one half dazed by the shock of some great and sudden surprise. Finally she said, speaking for the first time in English: 'Excuse me for staring at you so, and pardon

¹⁰¹ A member of the Chaikovskii circle of the early 1870s, Armfel'd had been sentenced to a lengthy *katorga* term in 1879 for belonging to an illegal populist circle in Kiev: see *Revoliutsionnoe narodnichestvo 70-kh godov XIX veka* I, p. 476. The short biography of Armfel'd included in Kennan's footnotes was provided by Kravchinskii, who knew her personally: see *Siberia and the Exile System* II, p. 184 and Kravchinskii to Kennan, 26 December 1888, LC MSS GK Box 6.

¹⁰² Kennan, *Siberia and the Exile System* II, p. 184.

me if I have not seemed to welcome you cordially, but I can hardly believe that I am awake. I am so excited and astonished that I don't know what I am doing or saying. You are the first foreigner that I have seen since my exile, and your sudden appearance here, and in my house, is such an extraordinary event in my life that it has completely overwhelmed me. I feel as Livingstone must have felt when Stanley found him in Central Africa.'¹⁰³

By initially associating Armfel'd with the plight of the Irish labourer and then likening her to Dr Livingstone, Kennan transforms her from colonial subject to colonist. Nonetheless, the modern reader will notice that their metaphors of choice – assuming, of course, that Kennan's retelling of Armfel'd's remarks is accurate – reveal the differing perspectives partially obfuscated by the rhetoric of civilisational kinship. While Kennan, the American journalist attempting not merely to investigate the exile system but to locate Russia on his map of the civilised world, imagines his interlocutor in comparably liminal Ireland, Armfel'd is solely concerned with asserting her own identity as a occidentalised intellectual antithetical to an oriental Tsarist autocracy. Consequently, she places herself in Africa, the more paradigmatic colonial situation of the two.

The role played by Siberia's physical environment as the political exiles' constitutive other in Kennan's narrative can easily be related to that performed by the ordinary criminals, who are primarily significant for their near-complete absence from the text. The *ugolovnye* primarily appear in the early chapters of *Siberia and the Exile System*, where they are anonymised through Kennan's heavy dependence upon official statistics – a stylistic approach reminiscent of his 1882 lecture on the exile system, and one he quickly abandons in favour of anecdotal digressions and humanising character

¹⁰³ Ibid., pp. 186-187.

sketches as the narrative moves eastwards and he comes into contact with political exiles for the first time.¹⁰⁴ The question this raises, however, is not why Kennan effaces the ordinary criminals in the way that he does so much as why they feature in the text at all. None of Kennan's letters to his employers at *Century Magazine* written during his 1885-1886 travels in Siberia suggest that he had any real object of study other than the political exiles.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, as may be inferred from the introduction to *Siberia and the Exile System*, he clearly understood that his readership was almost exclusively interested in Siberia as a source of revolutionary intrigue:

In 1881 the assassination of Alexander II, and the exile of a large number of Russian revolutionists to the mines of the Transbaikal, increased my interest in Siberia and intensified my desire not only to study the exile system on the ground, but to investigate the Russian revolutionary movement in the only part of the empire where I thought such an investigation could successfully be made – namely, in the region to which the revolutionists themselves had been banished [...] Most of the leading actors in the revolutionary drama of 1878-1879 were already in Siberia. There communication with exiled nihilists might perhaps be

¹⁰⁴ In particular, see Kennan's account of his visit to the Tiumen' transfer prison in *Siberia and the Exile System* I, pp. 74-102. For a discussion of the role played by the ordinary criminals in *Siberia and the Exile System* see Young, 'Knowing Russia's Convicts', pp. 1703-1705. The general resemblance of Kennan's stylistic approach in describing the political exiles to the sketch format of Kravchinskii's *Underground Russia* is unlikely to be coincidental, since the American appears to have read the latter in 1885 during research for his trip and undoubtedly sought to romanticise the revolutionaries he met in a similar way: see Kennan to Roswell Smith, 16 July 1885, LC MSS GK Box 6. However, although Senese, *S. M. Stepniak-Kravchinskii*, pp. 92-93 claims that Kravchinskii subsequently had a hand in writing *Siberia and the Exile System*, there appears to be no substantial evidence for this.

¹⁰⁵ See, for instance, Kennan to Roswell Smith, 14 August 1885, LC MSS GK Box 6, in which he notes that his travels have led him to 'the whole nihilist and political exile world' and reiterates his intention to produce 'a thorough study not only of the life of political exiles, but of the entire history of the whole Russian revolutionary movement'.

practicable and there, if anywhere, was to be obtained the information that I desired.¹⁰⁶

It is in this context that Kennan's depiction of the ordinary criminals should be understood. Comprehensively anonymised, barbarised and othered, their lingering background presence serves only to consolidate the emotional and civilisational bond between Kennan's readers and the political exiles. That such is their sole purpose in the text becomes clear in the final two chapters of *Siberia and the Exile System*, of which the first is a glowing encomium to the nobility and heroism of the political exiles, the second a bitter condemnation of penal colonisation. Having affirming the politicals as 'men and women of extraordinary ability, courage and fortitude', Kennan turns his attention to the ordinary criminals, whom he dehumanises as a 'flood of ten thousand vagrants, thieves, counterfeiters, burglars, highway robbers and murders' and renders indistinguishable from Siberia's physical environment itself. 'It is hardly an exaggeration', he declares, 'to say that Siberia literally swarms with *brodyags* [sic], escaped exiles and runaway convicts of the worst class'.¹⁰⁷

Not content to merely humanise Siberia's political exiles, Kennan effectively sanitised their political views and personal histories for the benefit for his Anglo-American readers. In the process, he demonstrated very little understanding – for a self-styled expert – of the revolutionary situation as it stood in the 1880s. His sketch of the 'character of political exiles', included towards the end of *Siberia and the Exile System*, is worth quoting at length for its remarkable vagueness and naïve simplicity:

¹⁰⁶ Kennan, *Siberia and the Exile System* I, iii.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, II, p. 456, 459, 461. It should be noted that the inclusion of this chapter appears to have been almost an afterthought on Kennan's part, since it is largely based on rewritten material from his aforementioned 1882 lecture: see 'Siberia: The Exiles' Abode', pp. 58-62.

It has been my fortune to make the personal acquaintance of more than five hundred members of the anti-government party in Russia, including not less than three hundred of the so-called ‘nihilists’ living in exile at the convict mines or in the penal settlements of Siberia [...] [The party’s] members belong to all ranks, classes and conditions of the Russian people; they hold all sorts of opinions with regard to social and political organisation, and the methods by which they propose to improve the existing condition of things extend through all possible gradations, from peaceful remonstrance in the form of collective petition to terroristic activity in the shape of bomb-throwing and assassination. The one common bond that unites them is the feeling, which they all have, that the existing state of affairs has become unsupportable and must be changed.¹⁰⁸

Such reductive bromides were commonplace throughout Kennan’s writing on the revolutionary movement. Elsewhere, he divided the ‘anti-government party’ into ‘liberals, revolutionists and terrorists’, assuring his readers that all three essentially envisaged the same progressive reforms and that the liberals – amongst whose ranks he included, somewhat surprisingly, the famous *narodnik* publicist Nikolai Mikhailovskii – were by some distance the largest group.¹⁰⁹ This anodyne, distorted portrayal of the revolutionary situation subsequently drew criticism from Volkhovskii, who complained that Kennan had ‘everywhere spoken of revolutionary socialists as if they were liberals or radicals, ignoring their socialism and their methods of struggle.’¹¹⁰

Kennan’s striking misapprehension of the revolutionary situation can be explained on two levels. Firstly and most obviously, he was essentially typical of that peculiar brand

¹⁰⁸ Kennan, *Siberia and the Exile System* II, pp. 431-433.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 439.

¹¹⁰ F. V. Volkhovskii, ‘Dzh. Kennan i ego mesto v russkom osvoboditel’nom dvizhenii’, in Dzh. Kennan, *Sibir' i ssylka*, trans. I. N. Kashintsev (V. Raspopov, St Petersburg, 1906), xx.

of enlightened Protestantism, characteristic of the late nineteenth-century Anglosphere, that freely imputed Manichaeian dimensions to virtually any injustice at the expense of nuances and complexities;¹¹¹ in this sense, Volkhovskii's remark some years later that Kennan had been exclusively interested in the 'ethical and political side' of the exile question may be considered something of an understatement.¹¹² More importantly, however, his views were not inconsistent with what his Russian contacts were telling him about the revolutionary situation at the time. To some extent this was coincidental: after all, many of those Kennan met in Siberia had been sentenced in the *bol'shoi protsess* nearly a decade earlier, were cut off from Russian life and thus unaware of the unfolding Marxist-populist split, while those that were aware of it likely considered it unimportant (most *narodniki* having been broadly uninterested in theoretical questions).¹¹³ Others, such as Kravchinskii and Breshkovskaia, were instinctually more reformers than they were revolutionaries and inclined to the view that such differences as existed between the various parties would naturally evaporate with the collapse of autocratic rule.¹¹⁴ All the same, there is also evidence that Kennan's sanitised, anodyne depiction of the revolutionary movement resulted from a deliberate and successful public relations exercise on the part of his Russian contacts – something Volkhovskii's later criticism of the American carefully concealed. In a bid to publicise their plight on the international stage, a number of Siberia's political exiles portrayed themselves as cosmopolitan

¹¹¹ See the introduction written by Kennan's relative and Cold War namesake, George Frost Kennan, to George Kennan, *Siberia and the Exile System*, abridged edition (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1958), ix-xix.

¹¹² Volkhovskii, 'Dzh. Kennan i ego mesto', xx.

¹¹³ For instance, Volkhovskii, writing to Kravchinskii shortly after his escape from Siberia in 1889, confessed that his years in exile had left him almost totally ignorant of the revolutionary situation. See his letter of 30 March 1890, RGALI f. 1158.1.232, p. 49.

¹¹⁴ Both Senese, *S. M. Stepniak-Kravchinskii*, pp. 34-36 and Jane E. Good and David R. Jones, *Babushka: The Life of the Russian Revolutionary Ekaterina K. Breshko-Breshkovskaia, 1844-1934* (Newtonville, MA: Oriental Research Partners, 1991), pp. 80-90 argue that this character trait was crucial to the popularity enjoyed by Kravchinskii and Breshkovskaia amongst the Anglo-American public. Breshkovskaia's reception in the United States is discussed in detail in Chapter 6.

liberals, downplaying their socialist politics for the benefit of their bourgeois Anglo-American sympathisers.

The aforementioned Egor Lazarev, who first met Kennan in Chita in 1885, later recalled having ‘ascribed enormous political significance to Kennan’s arrival in Siberia’.¹¹⁵ Some sense of what this meant in practice can be gleaned from Volkhovskii’s 1906 foreword to the first edition of *Siberia and the Exile System* ever published legally in Russia, in which he vividly described the immense impact of Kennan’s arrival at Tomsk in 1885 on the town’s administrative exiles. While his remarks undoubtedly demonstrate that the chimerical image of a Siberian ‘America *sui generis*’, as described by the Decembrists, Gertsen and Bakunin in previous decades, had retained its attraction for later revolutionaries, they also provide a valuable clue as to how the exiles Kennan met in Siberia actually explained – and to some extent sanitised – the revolutionary struggle in their conversations with him:

We could not forget the names of Washington and Franklin [...] These gigantic figures seemed to stand tall before us, fixing us with their noble eyes, whenever we thought of the great transatlantic republic [...] Our own situation, that of slaves bound hand and foot [...] bought to the fore those glistening features of American life so unlike our own, and we, perhaps, idealised them, with America’s darker side retreating into the background.¹¹⁶

Further evidence of this public relations exercise can be found in the pages of the SFRF’s *Free Russia*. By the end of 1890, some copies of the newspaper had been successfully smuggled into Russia, reproduced by hectograph and thereafter circulated across the

¹¹⁵ Lazarev, ‘Dzhordzh Kennan’ II, p. 32.

¹¹⁶ Volkhovskii, ‘Dzh. Kennan i ego mesto’, iv-v.

country. A number of these bootleg editions reached Siberia and were read by political exiles; in January 1891, Spence Watson's editorial duly announced that 'in Siberia itself', *Free Russia* had 'given joy and hope to the martyrs in the sacred cause of freedom'.¹¹⁷ Following this, the SFRF's London committee began to receive an irregular series of letters from administrative exiles living in Siberia's outlying provinces. By depicting the region as a barren wilderness and identifying themselves with the vaguely-articulated liberal cosmopolitanism encapsulated in Kennan's journalism, the SFRF's Siberian correspondents explicitly sought to flatter the progressive self-image of their Anglo-American supporters. As one particularly striking letter from Kolyma, published by *Free Russia* in June 1891, read:

And so, onwards! You are our brothers, and we the joint heirs of the greatest minds and hearts' bequest – are not Lincoln, Garibaldi, Mazzini, Kossuth and Victor Hugo as dear to us, the sons and daughters of Russia, as they are to you? Did not Gladstone's speeches on the Bulgarian atrocities stir our hearts as deeply as they did yours? [...] The mails only reach us three times a year. Will they tell us something cheering of you, free brothers? At any rate we shall await them eagerly in our desert, beyond the polar circle. In the meantime we have to struggle for our daily bread and dream of free old England, where you, her children, can fight for liberty, truth and right.¹¹⁸

'One must know what political prison and exile are in Russia', another exile wrote the following year, 'to understand how much such an expression of sympathy on the part of

¹¹⁷ 'An Appeal by Dr. Spence Watson', *FR* 2.1 (January 1891), p. 3.

¹¹⁸ 'From Beyond the Arctic Circle: A Political Exile's Letter from Siberia', *FR* 2.6 (June 1891), p. 3. Burtsev later obtained and published the Russian original of this letter in full, thus confirming that Volkhovskii had not taken any particular artistic license in translating it: see *Za sto let*, pp. 247-249.

foreigners means for us, to learn that in England and America statesmen, preachers, men of science bless our cause from their pulpits and tribunes and that the hearts of Englishmen and Americans beat in harmony with the hearts of unknown Russians, their brothers for humanity's sake.'¹¹⁹ As in Kennan's writing, it was again Siberia itself – a terrifying wilderness into which 'a little handful of Europeans' had been thrown – that simultaneously consolidated and corrupted the exiles' ties to the civilised world. As a third correspondent, again writing from Kolyma, put it in 1894:

I think the ghosts that wandered mournfully along the banks of Acheron, lamenting aloud for their lost earthly life, must have felt what we feel, dragging out our lives alone on the banks of the river Kolyma [...] There are only a few among our number who have had the courage and vitality to fling themselves head first into the filthy swamp of local needs and desires, and to become defiled by it. These few have married native women (ugh!), have provided themselves with fishing tools and nets, bring up families of children and little by little grow into the likeness of the natives among whom they live.¹²⁰

This public relations exercise was, if anything, too successful, since it essentially reduced the revolutionary struggle to a Manichaeian contest between civilisation and barbarism and obfuscated the real issues at stake. We have already seen that the SFRF's campaign against Siberian exile became one of the great progressive enthusiasms of the Anglo-American public sphere during the late nineteenth century, and one major reason for this was that those involved not only saw it as an affirmation of their own progressivism, but as part of the all-encompassing struggle for progress and freedom – that constant

¹¹⁹ Edward Pease, 'Message from Siberian Exiles', *FR* 3.1 (January 1892), p. 3.

¹²⁰ 'A Cry of Despair', *FR* 5.2 (February 1894), pp. 15-16.

preoccupation of Victorian liberalism. At Hyde Park, the trade unionist John Burns declared that ‘the Russian nihilists only ask today what the Whigs would have conceded fifty years ago, which the Tory democrat would not object to today, which the Radical would be disgusted with for its extreme moderation.’¹²¹ It was in the belief, Spence Watson opined, ‘that our own freedom places upon us in a very peculiar way the duty of aiding others to obtain the same blessing that some of us have, after long and careful consideration, determined to take up the Russian question’.¹²² The exalted terms in which some participants conceived of their support for the ‘Russian freedom movement’ cannot easily be understated. In an unpublished letter written in response to *Siberia and the Exile System* and apparently intended for the editors of *Free Russia*, Mark Twain wrote that ‘only in hell could one find the likes of the Tsar’s government’.¹²³ Both the editor of the short-lived American edition of *Free Russia*, Edmund Noble, and the American writer and sometime diplomat Robert Underwood Johnson outright likened the SFRF’s campaign to the struggle for the abolition of slavery. Johnson referred to Kennan’s *Century* articles as ‘the *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* of the Siberian exiles’.¹²⁴ ‘There has always seemed a true and close analogy’, Noble wrote, ‘between the agitation which aimed at the abolition of slavery in the United States and the movement that now seeks to bring the blessing of free institutions to the political serfs of Russia.’¹²⁵

In sum, we have seen that both Kennan’s Siberian writings and the SFRF’s campaign against the exile system – so far as its Anglo-American participants were concerned – did not reflect any specific sympathy with or understanding of the Russian

¹²¹ ‘Treatment of Russian Prisoners’, *The Times* 32955 (10 March 1890), p. 6.

¹²² Robert Spence Watson, ‘The Movement in England: A Free Platform for the Russian Reformers’, *FR* 1.1 (June 1890), p. 17.

¹²³ Cited in Kravchinskii, *V londonskoi emigratsii*, p. 424.

¹²⁴ Robert Underwood Johnson, *Remembered Yesterdays* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1923), pp. 224-225. First published in 1852, Harriet Beecher Stowe’s novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was one of the most famous abolitionist texts of the nineteenth century.

¹²⁵ Cited in Foglesong, *The American Mission and the Evil Empire*, p. 19.

revolutionary movement's multifarious political aims so much as they revealed the foundational discourses of contemporary Anglo-American liberalism. Moreover, we have seen that many Russian radicals, both in Siberian exile and in the emigration, consciously indulged the Western misconception that they were engaged in an anodyne struggle for liberty and constitutional democracy in a bid to secure international publicity – a trade-off that had serious consequences for how the revolution was perceived overseas, and to which we shall have cause to return. For the moment, however, it is important to note that the SFRF's campaigns did not simply provide Anglo-American progressives with the opportunity to recast the figure of the Siberian martyr-hero in their own image. As we shall now see, the agitation's Russian participants, in turn, repurposed such Western narratives to serve their own ideological and political purposes.

4.4. George Kennan and the revolutionary underground

In December 1889, a *narodnik* named Aleksandra Cherniavskaia, recently returned from Siberian exile, wrote to Kennan to inform him of his newfound fame amongst Russia's radicalised youth:

By complete chance, I got hold of your book about Siberia and learned from it that you retain fond memories of me. This served, in effect, as a letter of recommendation. I must tell you that on 15 July, my exile term of fifteen years came to an end, and I decided to return to Russia. In August, I left Tomsk on a steamer. The majority of my fellow passengers were young. Suddenly, one approached me and asked, 'Tell me, please, do you know Kennan?' [...] You should have seen the warmth that surrounded us from the moment I confirmed

that I did. Only then, for the first time, was I able to read your book, which holds such great significance for Russia.¹²⁶

At first glance, it seems improbable that a series of essays about the Siberian exile system written by an American journalist for an Anglo-American audience should have found a wide readership amongst those to whom their contents were least likely to have been a revelation. Yet the evidence suggests that such was the case. From 1888 onwards, several translated editions of the *Century* articles were published in Geneva, London, Paris and Berlin, the principal redoubts of the revolutionary emigration.¹²⁷ Printed on India paper for ease of smuggling, they were reprinted by hectograph and widely distributed across Russia and Siberia. Within months of the first edition's appearance, Kravchinskii informed Kennan that 'in Russia your articles are read as nowhere else and by nobody else'.¹²⁸ In a letter to Vera Zasulich written in April 1890, Friedrich Engels observed that 'the faith of Russian liberals in the tsar's reforming zeal has been badly shaken by the news from Siberia and by Kennan's book'.¹²⁹

Such assessments were apparently not exaggerated. In later years, Volkhovskii claimed to have read one of the articles in the course of his escape from Siberia, having acquired a copy of *Century* whilst passing through Vladivostok.¹³⁰ Ivan Belokonskii – a journalist exiled administratively to Minusinsk and befriended by Kennan in 1885 – described his wife, Vera Levandovskaia, translating the articles herself for distribution

¹²⁶ Cherniavskaia to Kennan, 3 December 1889, LC MSS GK Box 1.

¹²⁷ Dzh. Kennan, *Poslednee zaiavlenie russkikh liberalov* (Geneva: M. Elpedine, 1888), *Zhizn' politicheskikh arestantatov v russkikh tiur'makh* (Geneva: M. Elpedine, 1889); *O Rossii. Sibir' i ssylka* (Paris: Sotsial'no-revoliutsionnyi literaturnyi fond, 1890); *Ruskaia politicheskaia tiur'ma Petropavlovskaia krepost'* (Geneva: M. Elpedine, 1891); *Russkie gosudarstvennye prestupniki* (Geneva: M. Elpedine, 1891); *Sibir'!* (Berlin: Z. Z. Krombach, 1891) and *Golos za russkii narod* (Geneva: M. Elpedine, 1896).

¹²⁸ Kravchinskii to Kennan, 26 December 1888, LC MSS GK Box 1.

¹²⁹ Engels to Zasulich, 3 April 1890, cited in Taratuta, *S. M. Stepniak-Kravchinskii*, p. 417.

¹³⁰ Volkhovskii, 'Dzhordzh Kennan i ego mesto', xxiv.

amongst the local exile community.¹³¹ Several decades later, no less a figure than Mikhail Kalinin remarked to Kennan's nephew and namesake, George Frost Kennan, that his relative's essays on Siberian exile had been 'a real bible for the early revolutionaries'.¹³² That Russian émigrés in Europe should have sought to exploit Kennan's exposé with a view to attracting foreign support for their cause is quite understandable. Yet the aspects of his work that proved so beguiling for Western audiences ought, by any conventional measure, to have precluded it enjoying comparable success in the revolutionary underground. Why, then, did Russian readers attach such significance to it?

The available sources, it must be conceded, do not yield straightforward answers to this question, and it is probably not a coincidence that the comparatively few scholars who have written on Kennan devote little attention to it.¹³³ There are essentially two reasons for this. Firstly and most obviously, the censorship ensured that his work was never discussed in the legal press.¹³⁴ Secondly, it is hard to infer much from Kennan's own statements on the matter. There is a good deal of evidence that he knew he was writing as much for a Russian audience as an Anglo-American one: several of those mentioned in his *Century* articles apparently received copies of the magazine from him in the post, and his private correspondence of the late 1880s confirms his involvement in disseminating his work illegally within Russia ('If only it were possible to get the magazines past the censor unmutilated', he informed Roswell Smith, 'you would soon

¹³¹ I. P. Belokonskii, *V gody bezpraviia: vospominaniia* (Moscow: Izd-vo politkatorzhan, 1930), p. 55.

¹³² Cited in E. I. Melamed, *Dzhordzh Kennan protiv tsarizma* (Moscow: Kniga, 1981), p. 68. As Kalinin's remarks imply, Kennan's writing remained popular in the revolutionary underground in later years. For example, Breshkovskaia reported finding illegal editions of his *Century* articles circulating in 'every major Siberian town' she visited during her return from exile in 1896, and as late as 1911 was able to inform him that 'your book is translated and read everywhere: see respectively E. K. Breshko-Breshkovskaia, 'Drug Rossii: Dzhordzh Kennan v Sibiri', *Dni* (6 June 1924), p. 6 and Alice Stone Blackwell, *The Little Grandmother of the Russian Revolution: reminiscences and letters of Catherine Breshkovsky* (Boston, MA: Little & Brown, 1918), p. 155.

¹³³ The one serious treatment of the subject can be found in Melamed, *Dzhordzh Kennan protiv tsarizma*, pp. 60-71.

¹³⁴ One exception to this was 'Malen'kii fel'eton: Amerikantsy o Rossii', *Novoe vremia* (3 June 1888), p. 2.

have a very large Russian subscription list').¹³⁵ Yet this proves little beyond the depth of his emotional commitment to those he had met in Siberia and the extent of his gift for self-promotion. Indeed, given his rather simplistic understanding of the political situation in Russia, he had no reason to doubt that his articles would be well received by members of the 'anti-government party'.

The simplest explanation for the popularity enjoyed by Kennan's Siberian essays amongst revolutionary readers is that there was little other illegal literature to be had at the time. This, at any rate, is the impression gained from occasional references to the subject in the memoirs of revolutionaries with whom Kennan was personally acquainted.¹³⁶ His timing was undoubtedly auspicious, for the late 1880s and early 1890s – in Burtsev's words, the 'time of trifles (*vremia malen'kikh del*)'¹³⁷ – were almost unique in the history of the revolutionary movement for the absence of any significant émigré press operation. In 1886, the year of Kennan's return from Siberia, *Narodnaia volia*'s eponymous newspaper and another party title, *Listok narodnoi voli*, both of which had been based in Geneva along with the remnants of the group's leadership, were forced to suspend publication through a mix of Okhrana interference and dwindling resources.¹³⁸ Elsewhere, Plekhanov and Zasulich's Marxist *Osvobozhdenie truda* (Liberation of Labour) group was still gestating, with no significant newspaper or journal of its own, and the London émigrés' Free Russian Press Fund (*Fond vol'noi russkoi pressy*, an unofficial sibling of the SFRF vaunted as a successor to Gertsen's London press) did not become

¹³⁵ Kennan to Roswell Smith, 29 May 1888, LC MSS GK Box 6. See also (inter alia) Kennan to Fraser, 2 July 1888, Kennan to Roswell Smith, 4 July 1888, LC MSS GK Box 10, and Kravchinskii to Kennan, 1 February 1889, LC MSS GK Box 1. On Kennan posting his *Century* articles to his Siberian contacts see Melamed, *Dzhordzh Kennan protiv tsarizma*, pp. 60-61.

¹³⁶ Beyond those already cited, see I. I. Zhukovskii-Zhuk, 'Pamiaty Dzhordzha Kennana', *Katorga i ssylka* 12 (1924), pp. 314-320; S. L. Chudnovskii, *Iz davnikh let: vospominaniia*, ed. M. A. Braginskii (Moscow: Izd-vo politkatorzhan, 1934), pp. 262-263; I. P. Belokonskii, *Dan vremeni: vospominaniia* (Moscow: Izd-vo politkatorzhan, 1928), pp. 300-306; I. N. Moshinskii, 'Devianostie gody v Kievskom podpol'e', *Katorga i ssylka* 35 (1927), pp. 35-53 and D. Petrenko, 'O pervykh shagakh sotsial-demokratii v Kieve', *Katorga i ssylka* 40 (1928), pp. 33-40.

¹³⁷ Burtsev, *Bor'ba za svobodnuiu Rossiiu*, p. 88.

¹³⁸ S. S. Volk, *Narodnaia volia, 1879-1882* (Moscow-Leningrad: Nauka, 1966), p. 151.

fully active until 1893.¹³⁹ The lack of a powerful émigré press was a source of considerable unease for several revolutionaries at the time. Burtsev later claimed that rectifying the situation was his principal motivation for fleeing Siberia in 1888, while both Kravchinskii and Volkhovskii, in a series of letters to Kennan, emphasised the seriousness of the problem and the potential for a powerful overseas press to influence domestic Russian affairs.¹⁴⁰ The American's articles on Siberia, hurriedly translated and smuggled across the border in 'steamship holds, contraband wagons and secret suitcase compartments', represented a first step in this direction.¹⁴¹

Yet this, of course, is only half the story, for if it was merely a question of plugging a gap in the supply of illegal literature, why promote Kennan in particular? On this question, the sources reveal a good deal more: while we cannot ascertain what the majority of Russian readers took from his work, we can say how the émigrés involved in disseminating it chose to present it to their audience, and thus how Kennan's writing intersected with certain programmatic issues under discussion by a variety of revolutionaries at the time. The most important of these was a controversy surrounding the use of political violence, in which the Siberian exile system, as exposed by Kennan, provided justification for the efforts of several influential revolutionaries to extricate the practice of terrorism from the disastrous legacy of *Narodnaia volia's* regicidal misadventures.

Kennan probably owed the best part of his Russian readership to the aforementioned Geneva émigré journal *Samoupravlenie*, which – as noted earlier – printed translations of two of his *Century* articles early in 1889 and sponsored the

¹³⁹ Senese, 'S. M. Kravchinskii and the National Front Against Autocracy', p. 517.

¹⁴⁰ Kravchinskii to Kennan, 26-29 March and 25 April 1889 and Volkhovskii to Kennan, 13 April and 7 May 1890, LC MSS GK Box 1; Burtsev, *Bor'ba za svobodnuiu Rossiiu*, p. 62.

¹⁴¹ Melamed, *Dzhordzh Kennan protiv tsarizma*, p. 70.

publication of several more in pamphlet form the following year.¹⁴² In order to understand why this journal promoted Kennan so assiduously, it is important to say something about the political context in which it operated and the programme it endorsed. A collaboration between a small group of *narodovol'tsy* still at large in Russia and various émigrés known for their bipartisan political views – primarily Kravchinskii, Dragomanov and Burtsev – the *Samoupravlenie* project was the culmination of repeated calls from Russian liberals and socialists alike for short-term reconciliation with a view to the acquisition of political rights, and thus symptomatic of the parlous state of Russia's fragmented opposition forces in the late 1880s.¹⁴³ Despite only running to four issues between 1887 and 1889, it was the most influential overseas organ of the time, as evidenced by the considerable police attention it attracted and the fact that it coaxed Nikolai Mikhailovskii out of semi-retirement to oversee the final two numbers.¹⁴⁴

Scholars have portrayed the *Samoupravlenie* project variously as a reheated version of *Narodnaia volia* and as a prototype for the short-lived *Narodnoe pravo* (People's Right) group of 1895 and Petr Struve's more successful *Soiuz osvobozhdeniia* (Union of Liberation), both of which aimed to oppose the autocratic state within existing legal parameters.¹⁴⁵ That the reality of the situation actually lay between these two positions is most evident from the journal's somewhat circumspect endorsement of terrorism, which involved deliberate concessions both to inveterate proponents of terror

¹⁴² See notes 21 and 127 above. The pamphlet in question, *O Rossii: Sibir' i ssylka* (*About Russia: Siberia and Exile*) was published by the otherwise-unknown Parisian 'Social-Revolutionary Literary Fund', which seems likely to have been an offshoot from the journal (*Samoupravlenie*'s byline was 'the organ of the socialist-revolutionaries').

¹⁴³ In general, see V. V. Shirokova, 'Gazeta "Samoupravlenie"', *Voprosy istorii* 11 (1982), pp. 180-184. The journal's Russia-based contributors were A. S. Belevskii, O. N. Florovskaia-Figner, P. F. Nikolaev and, from 1889, Mikhailovskii; the émigré collaborators were Lavrov, Kravchinskii, Dragomanov, Burtsev, V. K. Debogorii-Mokrievich and I. I. Dobrovol'skii. See O. V. Budnitskii, *Terrorizm v rossiiskom osvoboditel'nom dvizhenii: ideologiia, etika, psikhologiia* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2000), p. 85.

¹⁴⁴ On Mikhailovskii's involvement see E. Kolosov, 'N. K. Mikhailovskii v 80-e gody', *Byloe* 9-10 (1909), pp. 38-41.

¹⁴⁵ For these contrasting positions, see James H. Billington, *Mikhailovsky and Russian Populism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), pp. 154-160 and Budnitskii, *Terrorizm*, pp. 85-89. The former emphasises Mikhailovskii's moderating influence, the latter the centrality of violence to its programme.

and those of more moderate sensibilities alike. *Samoupravlenie* assigned terrorism a fundamental role in the revolutionary struggle on the sole condition that it served a distinct political purpose, criticising *Narodnaia volia*'s use of the tactic not on ethical grounds but because it exemplified the naïve Jacobinism that had doomed the group to failure. In effect, the journal's programme assumed that terrorism protected the rights of the individual in an autocratic system in the way statute law did in a constitutional system.¹⁴⁶

In 1888, the viability of this tenuous compromise position came under attack when Lev Tikhomirov, a veteran *narodovolets* who had participated in the conspiracy to kill Alexander II, publicly abandoned his revolutionary activities and returned to Russia in the hope of atoning for his past sins. This development, unsurprisingly, provoked an outcry amongst his fellow émigrés: in the judgement of one historian, Tikhomirov's apostasy represented one of 'the most severe disasters which the Russian revolutionary movement sustained' throughout the course of the 1880s.¹⁴⁷ The essence of his widely-circulated recantation, *Pochemu ia perestal byt' revoliutsionerom (Why I Ceased to be a Revolutionary)*, was that terrorism and the radical opposition as a whole were inextricably linked to the point that his loss of faith in the one had precipitated his loss of faith in the other.¹⁴⁸

The final issue of *Samoupravlenie*, which appeared in April 1889, was largely devoted to refuting Tikhomirov's claims. Of particular importance was a lengthy essay that appeared alongside Mikhailovskii's acerbic leader and which defended the ethics and

¹⁴⁶ 'Po povodu 1-go marta 1881 goda', *Samoupravlenie* 1 (December 1887), pp. 4-8.

¹⁴⁷ Abbott Gleason, 'The Emigration and Apostasy of Lev Tikhomirov', *Slavic Review* 26.3 (1967), p. 414. See also Kyril Tidmarsh, 'Lev Tikhomirov and a Crisis in Russian Radicalism', *Russian Review* 20.1 (1961), pp. 45-63.

¹⁴⁸ L. A. Tikhomirov, *Pochemu ia perestal byt' revoliutsionerom* (Moscow: Tipografiia Vil'de, 1895).

practice of revolutionary terrorism.¹⁴⁹ Although the authorship of this piece is uncertain, there are good reasons to conclude that it was written by Kravchinskii, both on account of the recognisably breezy tone – the author repeatedly states his disinclination towards ‘lengthy theoretical deliberations’ – and the argument advanced by the essay, which resembles his views far more closely than those of the other known contributors to the journal. In response to Tikhomirov’s suggestion that William Gladstone, had he been born Russian, would have abhorred the revolutionaries’ violent methods, the author argues that:

There is no foundation (*pochva*) in Russia for a Gladstone; that territory is still to be captured. God knows the practice of English politics is better and more beneficial than underground revolutionary activity, but the point is whether the choice is always there [...] When a degraded, persecuted man has no legal means of defence, it is hardly surprising that he makes do with a revolver. Perhaps it is criminal, but in such cases the crime does not stem from the criminal’s evil will. On the contrary, it has been nurtured and nativised by the practice of Tsarist malfeasance (*proizvol*).¹⁵⁰

The latter half of this passage could easily be a précis of *Smert' za smert'* (*A Death for a Death*), a pamphlet written in 1878 by Kravchinskii in an attempt to justify his own act of terrorism.¹⁵¹ The resemblance to Kennan’s argument – in effect, that the lawlessness of

¹⁴⁹ ‘Soiuz ili bor’ba’, *Samoupravlenie* 4 (April 1889), pp. 4-13. See also N. K. Mikhailovskii, ‘Po povodu vosvrashcheniia v Rossiiu L. Tikhomirova’, *ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

¹⁵⁰ ‘Soiuz ili bor’ba’, pp. 12-13. One might tenuously attribute the essay to Burtsev instead, since his justification of terrorism was and remained virtually identical to this: see Budnitskii, *Terrorizm*, pp. 89-92. However, the style resembles Kravchinskii’s and, while Taratuta does not attribute any published refutations of Tikhomirov’s argument to Kravchinskii, she does suggest that he was considering writing one, partially due to pressure from Vera Zasulich: see *S. M. Stepniak-Kravchinskii*, pp. 380-381.

¹⁵¹ S. Kravchinskii, *Smert' za smert': ubiistvo Mezentseva* (Petrograd: Gos. izd-vo, 1920).

the autocratic state as exemplified by Siberian exile legitimised, or at least explained, the violent actions of the revolutionaries – is unmistakable. The decision of *Samoupravlenie*'s editors to publish two of Kennan's *Century* articles in translation over the spring of 1889 was thus far from coincidental, since they appeared alongside a number of other articles that likewise sought to draw attention to the conditions faced by political offenders in prison and exile.¹⁵² In particular, *Samoupravlenie* was the first revolutionary organ to obtain and publish the directive from the central prison authorities that permitted officials in Siberia to use corporal punishment against *politkatorzhane*, and which led directly to the events in Kara later that year. As the editors' comments made clear, the object of highlighting such abuses was to provide a justification for the resumption of political violence:

Corporal punishment is recognised not only as a barbarous and ineffective method, but a violent insult to a man's dignity and personality. But how much more offensive must it be for a developed, educated person who expects their dignity to be respected and is accustomed to defending their honour and good name? Who will be to blame when this unheard-of and inhuman cruelty, this impudent outrage of human dignity is met with a dignified, energetic rebuff by the victims of the government's abuse? Who will truly be guilty if the gauntlet is thrown down, and violence answered with violence?¹⁵³

This point was not lost on Burtsev, who was responsible for one of the first edited compilations of Kennan's *Century* articles to appear in Russian translation. Burtsev's own newspaper, *Svobodnaia Rossiia*, had been founded in Geneva in February 1889 as a *de*

¹⁵² 'Politicheskie ssyl'nye v Sibiri', *Samoupravlenie* 3 (February 1889), pp. 2-3; 'O novom razporiazhenii glavnogo tiuremnogo upravleniia', *Samoupravlenie* 4 (April 1889), pp. 2-3.

¹⁵³ 'O novom razporiazhenii glavnogo tiuremnogo upravleniia', p. 3.

facto continuation of *Samoupravlenie* and was written and edited by substantially the same people. Like its predecessor, *Svobodnaia Rossiia* endorsed the use of political terrorism and regularly sought to justify it by drawing attention to Siberian horrors – indeed, it was precisely for this reason that Burtsev hastened to break the news of the Yakutsk massacre in April.¹⁵⁴ The following month, however, *Svobodnaia Rossiia* abruptly ceased publication. Although Burtsev agreed upon the need for a liberal-socialist alliance and the acquisition of political rights, his fanatical support for violence and calls for the immediate reformation of *Narodnaia volia* in pursuit of these goals had unnerved Dragomanov and several other associates, who quickly withdrew their support for the paper on the grounds that such means were incompatible with their intended ends.¹⁵⁵ Following the newspaper's implosion, Burtsev left Switzerland and relocated to Paris, where he moved into a flat on the Boulevard Saint-Jacques with another recent Siberian escapee and former *narodovolets*, Ivan Kashintsev.¹⁵⁶ It was apparently at this point that Kravchinskii – whom Burtsev, as we have seen, had earlier supplied with evidence of the Yakutsk affair – returned the favour by forwarding a further selection of Kennan's *Century* articles to Paris for translation and publication. Since Burtsev did not read English fluently at the time, he entrusted the translation work to Kashintsev, who completed it during the winter of 1889 while converting their shared living room into a bomb-making factory.¹⁵⁷

As may be inferred from this detail, Kashintsev wholeheartedly shared Burtsev's commitment to terrorism. This was clearly reflected in the lengthy introduction he wrote

¹⁵⁴ Beyond 'Krovoprolietie v Yakutske' see 'S ostrova Sakhalina' and 'Iz Sibirskoi zhizni', *Svobodnaia Rossiia* 2 (April 1889), pp. 12-13, 17-20.

¹⁵⁵ Burtsev retained these views in later years and, in 1897, produced another short-lived newspaper, *Narodovolets*, that promoted essentially the same programme: see Budnitskii, *Terrorizm*, pp. 89-92, 108.

¹⁵⁶ Burtsev, *Bor'ba za svobodnuiu Rossiiu*, p. 75. On Kashintsev see *Revoliutsionnoe narodnichestvo 70-kh godov XIX veka* II, p. 402.

¹⁵⁷ O. V. Budnitskii, 'Kennan, Dzhordzh' in *Otechestvennaia istoriia: istoriia Rossii s drevneishikh vremen do 1917 goda*, ed. V. L. Yanin, M. Ia. Volkov and V. V. Zhuravlev, 2 vols (Moscow: Izd-vo 'Bol'shaia rossiiskaia entsiklopediia', 1996) II, p. 548; Burtsev, *Bor'ba za svobodnuiu Rossiiu*, pp. 89-90.

for his translation of Kennan's *Century* articles, which were published in pamphlet form in early 1890 under the title *O Rossii: Sibir' i ssylka (About Russia: Siberia and Exile)* on the basis of donations solicited by the two men the previous year.¹⁵⁸ In the context of *Svobodnaia Rossiia*'s untimely demise, the publication of Kennan's *Century* articles served as a vindication of Burtsev and Kashintsev's views, with Kennan's tacit approbation of terrorism presented as all the more significant because he was a foreigner whose 'impartiality and authority' was recognised by all.¹⁵⁹ The previous year, editorials in both *Samoupravlenie* and *Svobodnaia Rossiia* that drew attention to the impact of Kennan's Siberian lectures in the United States had rehearsed this argument, noting with satisfaction that Mark Twain had apparently spoken for much educated opinion in the West when he declared that, had he been born in Russia, he too 'would have been a nihilist'.¹⁶⁰ In much the same way, Kashintsev opined that precisely because he was a citizen of a free and law-abiding country, Kennan had immediately perceived in Siberia that to which many Russians remained oblivious – not merely the 'inevitability and legality' of the revolutionary struggle, but the legitimacy of violence as the 'sole and obligatory means of resistance to slavery'.¹⁶¹

Herein, Kashintsev argued, lay the broader significance of Kennan's Siberian writings for Russian readers. Explicitly addressing the latter, he attempted to explain why, after all, Russians ought to take an interest in a book written by an American concerning 'one particular aspect of our national life, and by no means the most important at that – the exile system, the drama unfolding backstage'. In reality, he argued, Siberian exile was both a metaphor for and microcosm of Russian life in its entirety:

¹⁵⁸ 'Literaturnoe ob'iaвление', *Svobodnaia Rossiia* 2 (April 1889), p. 20.

¹⁵⁹ I. I. Kashintsev, 'Predislovie perevodchika' in Kennan, *O Rossii: Sibir' i ssylka*, v-iv.

¹⁶⁰ 'Russkie voprosy pered zagranichnoi publikoi', *Svobodnaia Rossiia* 2 (April 1889), p. 21; see also 'Iz N'iu Iorka', *Samoupravlenie* 4 (April 1889), pp. 18-20.

¹⁶¹ Kashintsev, 'Predislovie perevodchika', v-vi.

Large numbers of entirely law-abiding people not infrequently encounter in [Russia] a real exile regime, with painstaking police supervision and thousands banished for thoughts and actions. Then in [Siberia] they find a relative degree of freedom, enjoy the sympathy of those around them and have the opportunity to influence a congenial, accepting environment for the better. Thus by some sort of curse that hangs over us, exile itself (*ssylka sobstvenno*) represents only the open expression, taken to its logical outcome, of a whole way of life [...] that all-encompassing, systematised ‘exile in the motherland’ (*ssylka na rodine*). Indeed, for one arriving in Siberia deprived of all means and possessions, exile is an excellent basis on which to observe and get acquainted with the real foundations of political life in Russia.¹⁶²

In Russian translation, to conclude, Kennan’s Siberian exposé was repurposed to serve the ideological priorities of those revolutionaries who still pined for *Narodnaia volia* at the end of the 1880s. Deployed both as a response to Tikhomirov’s attack on his former comrades and as a justification of political violence, the American’s essays became, in essence, a further iteration of the Siberian text that we have established as central to the revolutionary movement’s internal mythology. Kennan’s Siberia, like that depicted by many radical publicists before him, was a battlefield whereupon heroic revolutionaries delegitimised, confronted and defeated the autocracy both in word and deed. It is not unreasonable to conclude that much of his popularity amongst Russian readers was due to this fact – in effect, that the space and place of the action largely elided the rather reductive terms in which he depicted the revolutionary struggle for the benefit of his Anglo-American readers, and located him instead within a Russian literary tradition

¹⁶² Ibid., vii.

traceable to the Decembrists themselves. As they made their way from the émigré presses of Europe to underground circles across Russia, Kennan's Siberian essays thus acquired a degree of literariness that he himself did not intend, and which was wholly extraneous to his intended aims.

4.5. Conclusion

For the best part of a decade during the late 1880s and early 1890s, the SFRF's campaign against Siberian exile transnationalised the Russian revolutionary movement for the first time, uniting a wide variety of Russian political refugees and Anglo-American progressives in common cause. Yet the common rhetorical framework employed by the agitators concealed the extent to which the Siberian question served the distinct political and ideological priorities of those involved. For Kennan and the SFRF's supporters, it reaffirmed the basic universality of the liberal Victorian worldview; for the Russians involved, it made the case for revolutionary unity and the resumption of terrorism. As is clear both from the lengths to which various Russian exiles and émigrés went to win their Western supporters' approbation and from the way that approbation was rapidly repurposed in the context of revolutionary politics, these priorities were in essence mutually exclusive. The *narodniki* of the 1870s and 1880s were not the moderate 'anti-government party' of Kennan's imagination, and they could not be understood as such without essentially missing the point, but Siberia – long feared and cherished by credulous Britons and Americans as a dismal, snow-bound land from which successive generations of sympathetic heroes issued forth – obfuscated such inconsistencies. From the 1890s onwards, it was in Siberia that Westerners' idealistic expectations of the Russian revolution became indistinguishable from the reality of the situation, the region's

old romantic overtones and Decembrist genealogies inextricably bound together by Kennan and Kravchinskii's concerted efforts.

Although this was strategically beneficial for revolutionary agitators, it also posed longer-term problems. From the early 1890s onwards, the Anglo-American progressives attracted to the 'Russian freedom movement' began not only to conceive of Russia's revolutionaries as their own mirror image, but to dream of remaking Russia in the image of the free and democratic West, with the revolution understood as an extension of their own universal civilising mission. The longer-term consequences of this misconception during the years immediately prior to the outbreak of war and revolution in the early twentieth century are the subject of our final chapter. Before this, however, it is important to briefly account for the intervening decade, 1895-1904 – an anomalous period during which rapid change came to Siberia and, as a result, many in the West temporarily rejected the notion of the 'land of exile and suffering'.

5. 'The Canada of the eastern world', 1896-1904

The attention once given to Africa as the latest novelty in the way of continents is now being turned upon Siberia.

– *The Review of Reviews*, 1898¹

In the mid-1890s, the transnational campaign against the Siberian exile system declined sharply in importance. One major reason for this was the overall decline of the SFRF itself, which – as noted earlier – failed to secure not only the backing of senior Russian émigrés on the continent, but the mainstream political support it had anticipated in Britain, and thus quickly found itself swimming against the tide of events. The turn of the century saw both the resurgence of the revolutionary movement in Russia itself and a gradual warming of Anglo-Russian relations prior to the Entente of 1907. Such tectonic political shifts rendered the quintessentially Victorian outbursts of indignant enthusiasm which had formerly sustained the SFRF increasingly inadequate for the task. Yet Siberia itself, around the same time, temporarily relinquished much of its ability to shock and enrage. The period considered here, between 1896 and 1904, was marked by a paucity of interaction between Russian émigrés and Western progressive opinion, and can thus be considered somewhat extraneous to the main argument of this thesis. It is nonetheless important to account for shifting Western perceptions of Siberia during this time, both for reasons of chronological consistency and because that shift in perception illustrates the relationship between Siberia's image in the West and that of Russia in general.

¹ 'Siberia as the Latest Surprise', *The Review of Reviews* 18 (July 1898), p. 28.

The most important reason for the decline of the SFRF's campaign against the exile system was simply that, as the 1890s wore on, the Russian émigrés hitherto involved in it were increasingly disinclined to expend any more effort on the enlistment of foreign public opinion. This was primarily due to developments at home that absorbed the attentions of most revolutionaries and, for the time being, eliminated the need for those in emigration to enlist the sympathy of their hosts. From 1892 onwards, Russia's rapid industrialisation and urbanisation under the direction of the pioneering finance minister Sergei Witte unleashed the political forces that would eventually topple the autocracy in 1917 and disrupted the traditional social and economic structures of Russian life, creating a new and readily-politicised working class, turning many peasants into proletarians and impoverishing the rural population in the interests of economic modernisation.² This state of affairs, which lent itself equally to Marxist and populist analyses, led directly to the mass membership opposition parties of the early twentieth century, with the formation of the Marxist Social Democrats (*Rossiiskaia sotsial-demokraticheskaia rabochaia partiia*) in 1898 followed by that of the neo-populist Socialist-Revolutionary Party (*Partiia sotsialistov-revoliutsionerov*) in 1901.

Consequently, like their counterparts elsewhere in Europe, the London émigrés entered the twentieth century overwhelmingly preoccupied with the emergent revolutionary situation at home. Volkhovskii, Chaikovskii and Lazarev were closely involved in the negotiations surrounding the formation of the SRs in 1899, and the SFRF's sister organisation, the Free Russian Press Fund (*Fond vol'noi russkoi pressy*) affiliated to the party in 1902.³ This was a long way from the situation a decade earlier, when the priority given to the Siberian question by the London émigrés had formed the

² The literature on this is immense. Useful outlines can be found in Walter Sablinsky, *The Road to Bloody Sunday* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 3-33 and, in general, Richard Pipes, *Social Democracy and the St Petersburg Labor Movement 1885-1897* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963).

³ Grant, 'The Society of Friends of Russian Freedom', p. 13.

centrepiece of a broader project which aimed to unite a variety of Russian revolutionaries and foreign sympathisers in an anti-autocratic coalition based around the SFRF. At the time, with the revolutionary movement defeated and fragmented, this irenic approach had arguably been a viable strategy. A decade later, with the situation reversed, it seemed irrelevant. Moreover, the Russian side of the project had been so closely associated with Kravchinskii personally that his sudden death in December 1895 brought it to an abrupt end. At the height of the SFRF's powers in the early 1890s, most Russian émigrés had refrained from criticising the accommodation with Anglo-American liberalism out of respect for him, but the pressure from all sides for the SFRF to adopt a more explicitly socialist stance of one sort or another became irresistible shortly after his death.⁴ As the Society retreated from its old alliance with the progressive elements of the English bourgeoisie, so declined its emphasis on the apolitical, humanitarian issues – such as the Russian penal system – which had formerly been its stock in trade.

Another major reason for the émigrés' disinclination to prolong the campaign against the Siberian exile system was Vladimir Burtsev's conviction for incitement to regicide in 1898.⁵ In December the previous year, the veteran revolutionary had been arrested in connection with a series of inflammatory statements calling for the assassination of Nicholas II which had appeared in his journal *Narodovolets*. Because Burtsev refused to deny his own authorship, his defence largely hinged on mitigating circumstances, including his experiences in Siberian exile and constant harassment by police spies. Yet despite lengthy cross-examinations on these points, and the judge and prosecution's conduct throughout the trial betraying obvious and significant collusion between the British and Russian intelligence services, the jury found him guilty, and he

⁴ Senese, *S. M. Stepniak-Kravchinskii*, pp. 99-100.

⁵ On Burtsev's trial see Donald Senese, 'Le vil Melville': Evidence from the Okhrana File on the Trial of Vladimir Burtsev', *Oxford Slavonic Papers* 14 (1981), pp. 147-153 and Alan Kimball, 'The Harassment of Russian Revolutionaries Abroad: The London Trial of Vladimir Burtsev in 1898', *Oxford Slavonic Papers* 6 (1973), pp. 48-65.

was sentenced to eighteen months' hard labour. The episode was a bitter blow for the SFRF and for the London émigrés, many of whom had sincerely believed in Britain's reputation as a sanctuary for political refugees. After the trial, Volkhovskii retaliated with an angry editorial in *Free Russia* in which he argued that Burtsev's only crime was taking Victorian liberal rhetoric too seriously and conceded that British prisons, as Lansdell, de Windt and others had long claimed, were as bad as their Russian equivalents.⁶ The SFRF devoted no further attention to the Russian penal system until the onset of the reaction that followed the 1905 revolution.

Such practical considerations reflected a broader truth: that Siberia was no longer seen exclusively to be a 'land of exile and suffering'. The turn of the nineteenth century brought profound, lasting change to the region. As Petersburg increasingly abandoned its dependence upon penal colonisation, it adopted instead a range of policies aimed at proactively modernising Siberia and further integrating it with the European metropolis.⁷ Chief amongst these was the construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway, which began in 1891 and opened to passenger traffic as far as Irkutsk ten years later. The enormous impact of the railway registered primarily in patterns of migration and commerce, enabling the first of two enormous waves of voluntary peasant resettlement from the heartlands of European Russia and opening Siberia up to global markets and foreign investment. Under the auspices of the MVD's newly established Resettlement

⁶ F. Volkhovsky, 'English & Russian Prisons', *FR* 9.5 (May 1898), pp. 33-36.

⁷ The literature on Siberian colonisation during the late imperial period is extensive. See primarily Hartley, *Siberia*, pp. 163-182; Willard Sunderland, *Taming the Wild Field: Colonization and Empire on the Russian Steppe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 'The Colonization Question: Visions of Colonization in Late Imperial Russia', *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 48.2 (2000), pp. 210-232 and 'Peasant Pioneering: Russian Peasant Settlers Describe Colonization and the Eastern Frontier, 1880s-1910s', *Journal of Social History* 34.4 (2001), pp. 895-922; Eva-Maria Stolberg, 'The Genre of Frontiers and Borderlands: Siberia as a Case Study' in *The Siberian Saga: A History of Russia's Wild East*, ed. Eva-Maria Stolberg (Frankfurt-am-Main: Peter Lang, 2006), pp. 13-27; Alberto Masoero, 'Territorial Colonization in Late Imperial Russia: Stages in the Development of a Concept', *Kritika* 14.1 (2013), pp. 58-91; Donald Treadgold, *The Great Siberian Migration: Government and Peasant in Resettlement from Emancipation to the First World War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957) and 'Siberian Colonization and the Future of Asiatic Russia', *Pacific Historical Review* 25.1 (1956), pp. 47-54.

Administration (*Pereselencheskoe upravlenie*) – the closest Russia ever got to a colonial office – 177,000 migrants crossed the Urals in 1896 alone, their journeys facilitated by cheap train fares and land grants modelled on provisions of the United States’ 1862 Homestead Act.⁸ A decade later, Petr Stolypin’s reforms of 1906-1911, which offered further financial and legal incentives for resettlement in Siberia, saw net migration to the region average 600,000 per year prior to 1910.⁹ The exile reforms of 1900, and the transfer of much of Siberia’s *katorga* infrastructure away from the Siberian mainland to Sakhalin, were designed to ameliorate (if not altogether eliminate) the social problems resulting from the overuse of exile and from vagrancy that had hitherto discouraged free migration to the region. By the outbreak of the First World War, Siberia was – at least in some respects – scarcely recognisable as the ‘land of fur and exile’ familiar to previous generations. Visiting the region in 1910, Stolypin himself feared the rise of an ‘enormous, rudely democratic country which soon will throttle European Russia’.¹⁰

In Britain, these events were followed with great interest. The gradual warming of Anglo-Russian political ties characteristic of the time went hand in hand with educated Britons’ newfound fascination with Russian culture and a tentative upturn in attitudes towards Russia amongst the general public.¹¹ In keeping with this, British readers became less receptive to Siberian horror stories and more interested in the region’s potential as an Asiatic entrepôt, a hitherto unrealised opportunity for trade and investment, and as a

⁸ Sunderland, *Taming the Wild Field*, p. 179.

⁹ Hartley, *Siberia*, pp. 170-172.

¹⁰ Stolypin cited in Treadgold, ‘Siberian Colonization and the Future of Asiatic Russia’, p. 51. The preceding turn of phrase is also Treadgold’s.

¹¹ See variously Keith M. Wilson, *The Policy of the Entente: Essays on the Determinants of British Foreign Policy, 1904-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Claire McKee, ‘British Perceptions of Tsar Nicholas II and Empress Alexandra Fedorovna 1894-1918’ (unpublished PhD thesis, UCL SSEES, 2014); Peter Kaye, *Dostoevsky and English Modernism 1900-1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Richard Garnett, *Constance Garnett: A Heroic Life* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1991); Philip Bullock, *Rosa Newmarch and Russian Music in Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century England* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009) and Carol Peaker, ‘We are not Barbarians: Literature and the Russian Émigré Press in England, 1890-1905’, *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century* 3 (2006), pp. 1-18.

travel destination.¹² In previous years, several of those who had written on Siberia with a view to absolving the Russian government of wrongdoing in its treatment of political exiles – principally Novikova and Harry de Windt – had occasionally sought to encourage this more positive image, but met with little success. Yet the situation from the early 1890s onwards was different. While the development of the Sakhalin penal colony produced several English monographs attesting to some continued interest in the subject,¹³ most published accounts of Siberia during this period paid greater attention to the rapid modernisation of the region than to its penal infrastructure, and newspaper editors were more likely to commission Siberian travelogues than exposés of conditions in prison and exile.

In 1896, the Edinburgh journalist and scientist James Young Simpson accompanied a party of minor Russian royals on a colportage tour of Siberian prisons, in the course of which he witnessed the ongoing construction of the railway. Reporting on his experiences the following year for *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, he informed readers that he ‘should not be surprised if, when the railway is completed as far as the town of Nertchinsk, the need even for it in the capacity of convict-transporter will have entirely disappeared, for one gets the impression that we are seeing the last phases of a system that is passing away.’¹⁴ When the line reached Lake Baikal in 1901, the excitement of the British public over Siberia’s unfolding globalisation reached unprecedented heights. The following year, de Windt returned to Russia at the expense of

¹² As Neilson, *Britain and the Last Tsar*, p. 99 observes, neither the total British capital invested in Russia around the turn of the century nor the value of trade between the two countries were terribly significant in the overall context of Britain’s global economic relations. For Russia, however, foreign capital played a major role in industrialisation from the early 1890s onwards. See in general P. V. Ol’š, *Inostrannye kapitaly v Rossii* (Petrograd: Gosudarstvennaia tipografiia, 1922) and John P. McKay, *Pioneers for Profit: Foreign Entrepreneurship and Russian Industrialisation 1885-1913* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1970). On British investment in Siberia see Janet Hartley, ‘“A Land of Limitless Possibilities”: British Commerce and Trade in Siberia in the Early Twentieth Century’, *Sibirica* 13.3 (2014), pp. 1-21.

¹³ Harry de Windt, *The New Siberia* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1896); Benjamin Howard, *Prisoners of Russia: A Personal Study of Convict Life in Sakhalin and Siberia* (New York, NY: Appleton, 1902) and Charles Henry Hawes, *In The Uttermost East* (London: Harper Bros, 1904).

¹⁴ J. Y. Simpson, ‘The Prisons of Siberia’, *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 161.979 (May 1897), p. 667.

The Daily Express to ascertain the feasibility of a railway connecting Paris and New York by way of Siberia, which he declared to be no longer ‘the Siberia of the English dramatist – howling blizzards, chained convicts, wolves and the knout – but a smiling land of promise and plenty, even under its limitless mantle of snow’.¹⁵ Meanwhile, the editor of *The Yorkshire Post* commissioned the adventurer John Foster Fraser to write about the journey to Irkutsk. In the resulting book – the first edition of which appeared with an advertisement for a new cross-channel ferry service proclaimed the ‘best and most direct route to Russia and Siberia’ – Fraser disabused his readers of their hackneyed clichés:

We have all supped of Siberian horrors. We shudder, cry out for their ending, but have a gruesome satisfaction in reading about them. Yet Siberia, the land of criminals and exiles, is pushed into the dusk when we think of Siberia with its millions of miles of corn-growing land, minerals waiting to be won, great tracks of country to be populated. Siberia is the Canada of the eastern world.¹⁶

Such descriptions of the ‘new Siberia’ tended to invert the western rhetoric of similarity familiar from previous accounts of the region, such as Kennan’s, that had focused on prison and exile. From the late 1890s onwards, the comparisons were based not on the political exiles, but on the region itself. The Swedish anthropologist Jonas Stadling devoted a whole chapter of his study, *Through Siberia*, to considering Siberia’s economic development alongside that of the United States, something he considered ‘only natural’ in respect of their respective geographies and natural wealth.¹⁷ Although Stadling ultimately criticised the Russian government’s failure to exploit Siberia’s resources

¹⁵ Harry de Windt, *From Paris to New York by Land* (London, 1902), p. 25.

¹⁶ John Foster Fraser, *The Real Siberia, Together with an Account of a Dash Through Manchuria* (London: Cassell, 1902), pp. 4-5.

¹⁷ J. Stadling, *Through Siberia* (London: Archibald Constable, 1901), p. 283.

properly, others that instituted the comparison struck a far more positive note. Fraser likened Irkutsk to San Francisco and repurposed Nerchinsk *katorga*, closely associated in the British mind with gold mining, as ‘the California of Siberia’,¹⁸ while de Windt – although his description of Irkutsk as the ‘Paris of Siberia’ was mostly in jest – nonetheless predicted the city’s development as a ‘teeming centre of commercial activity’ ever improving under the ‘higher civilisation introduced by a foreign element.’¹⁹ As this suggests, such comparisons to the West were often grudging, and accompanied by a veneer of British superiority and well-worn Russophobic tropes. Upon receiving a censored copy of a newspaper, Fraser ‘felt like mounting a table in the hotel dining room and delivering an impassioned address upon the liberty of the press’, while others sought to remind their readers that Siberia, its economic potential notwithstanding, remained ‘even more barbarous and primitive than the most barbarous and primitive of the British colonies’.²⁰ Overall, however, such coverage reflected a growing interest in and sympathy towards Russia as a European partner and a modernising empire, and left little room for more conventional images of Siberia. In the mid-1890s, Constance Garnett’s attempts to find a British publisher for Anton Chekhov’s study of Sakhalin *katorga* came to nothing.²¹ When *Free Russia* reported in 1904 that convoy troops had opened fire on a party of political exiles in Yakutsk – an explicit re-enactment of the events of 1889 – no major newspaper ran the story, and no public outcry resulted.²²

In many ways, the Siberian agitation a decade earlier had been a flash in the pan. Yet the more optimistic and nuanced picture of the region that followed in its wake ultimately proved just as fleeting. Even at the apex of British Russophilia on the eve of the First World War, one scholar has concluded, the rhetoric of a Russian El Dorado

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 88, 142.

¹⁹ De Windt, *From Paris to New York by Land*, pp. 38-39.

²⁰ Fraser, *The Real Siberia*, p. 275; Hartley, ‘A Land of Limitless Possibilities’, p. 2.

²¹ Richard Garnett, *Constance Garnett*, pp. 119-120.

²² ‘The Yakoutsk Catastrophe’, *FR* 15.6 (June 1904), pp. 67-68.

continued to ‘merge uneasily with the image of Siberia as a place of oppression, cruelty and hardship’.²³ If this judgement partially attests to how deeply engrained the Siberian literary tropes of the nineteenth century were in the British imagination, it also reveals the direct impact of contemporary events – namely the waves of convulsive violence that consumed Russia during the years 1905-1907, and the way in which they catapulted Siberian exile, as a synecdoche of autocratic rule and the revolutionary struggle, back to the forefront of international attention.

²³ Hartley, “A Land of Limitless Possibilities”, p. 15.

6. ‘Apostles of the gospel of reform’: The revolutionary hero in
transnational perspective, 1905-1917

Take in your hand once more the pilgrim’s staff

Your delicate hand misshapen from the nights

In Kara’s mines; bind on your unbent back

That long has borne the burdens of the race

The exile’s bundle, and upon your feet

Strap the worn sandals of a tireless faith.

– Elsa Barker, ‘Breshkovskaya’, 1910¹

In late October 1910, a young revolutionary terrorist, Mariia Shkol’nik, disguised herself in menswear and escaped from the hospital of Irkutsk’s Aleksandrovskaiia prison. Despite the exhaustive efforts of local gendarmes to find her, she successfully evaded capture and crossed the border into China in September the following year; upon reaching Shanghai, she boarded a steamer bound for Europe. Shkol’nik’s escape from Siberia - her second and last – was one of many dramatic episodes in a brief but remarkable revolutionary career.² As a propagandist in Odessa, she had first been arrested and exiled by administrative order in 1903, only to flee to Europe at the height of the 1905 revolution. Upon arriving in Geneva, she joined the terrorist wing (*boevaia organizatsiia*) of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party and returned to Russia in 1906, where she unsuccessfully attempted to assassinate the governor of the Chernigov region. Convicted by a military

¹ Blackwell, *Little Grandmother of the Russian Revolution*, pp. 334-335.

² M. M. Shkol’nik, ‘Moi pobeg’ in *Na zhenskoi katorge*, ed. V. N. Figner (Moscow: Izd-vo politkatorzhan, 1930), pp. 110-121.

field court and condemned to death, her sentence was commuted to *katorga* at the eleventh hour. During the years of prison and exile that followed, she befriended some of the most famous terrorists of the era, including Egor Sozonov, Mariia Spiridonova and Georgii Gershuni. All of this was naturally fascinating for an international audience accustomed to ‘nihilistic’ drama, and when Shkol’nik arrived in New York in late 1912 following her second absconscion from exile, she was duly approached by Kennan’s American publishers, the Century Company, with a book deal. Her memoir, entitled *The Life-Story of a Russian Exile* and written under the anglicised *nom de plume* Marie Sukloff, was published in 1914.³

The discrepancies between the historical Mariia Shkol’nik and Marie Sukloff, her literary avatar, reveal not only the tensions between Russian and Anglo-American perceptions of the revolutionary struggle, but the role played by representations of Siberian prison and exile in obfuscating those tensions. The protagonist that emerges from the pages of Shkol’nik’s memoir is entirely consistent with the expectations of her Anglo-American audience. Depicted as fighters for ‘liberty and justice for my oppressed and downtrodden country’, Sukloff and her fellow *boeviki* are seen to direct violence only against those ‘whose activity was most injurious to the liberal movement [and] hateful to all who had the welfare of Russia at heart’.⁴ Yet it is hard to imagine that Shkol’nik could have been so familiar with the generic conventions of Russian revolutionaries’ Anglophone propaganda as to conform so closely to them herself. A factory worker born into a poor Jewish family near Vilnius, she lacked any formal education, had been illiterate until the age of 15 and did not speak English.⁵ She was thus both representative of the mass of workers, soldiers and peasants that made up the opposition ranks in the

³ Marie Sukloff [M. M. Shkol’nik], *The Life-Story of a Russian Exile*, trans. Gregory Yarros (New York, NY: Century Co., 1914).

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 106, 128.

⁵ For a short sketch of Shkol’nik’s background and character written by one of her fellow inmates in Nerchinsk, see P. F. Metter, ‘Stranichka proshlogo’ in *Na zhenskoi katorge*, p. 97.

years after 1905 and, by the same token, about as far from the platonic Western ideal of the Russian revolutionary hero as was possible to imagine. All the same, Shkol'nik provided the raw materials – a dramatic tale of underground agitation, capture, incarceration and Siberian exile – from which such heroes had traditionally been fashioned. Writing as a Russian memoirist in a foreign land where she did not speak the language, her experiences were easily repurposed in translation so as to be both palatable and comprehensible to local readers.⁶ The ways in which such Russian texts were appropriated on the international stage, and the varying degrees to which their protagonists both dissented from and consciously exploited the sanitised narratives resulting thereby, are the main focus of this chapter.

The decade following 1905 saw the traditional Siberian behavioural text of the Russian revolutionary movement imbued with renewed significance. The failure of the revolution, characterised both by extreme violence and the sudden expansion of the revolutionary franchise from the *raznochintsy* to the working classes, embroiled the Russian left in a moral crisis in which thorny questions of revolutionary ethics proved inseparable from anxieties over revolutionary identity and, in particular, the corruption of the radical intelligentsia's idealised underground hero by the dawning age of mass politics. These issues refocused observers' attention on the system of political exile, which had been revived on an enormous scale during the unrest and seemed, consequently, to represent the revolution's personality crisis in microcosm: as one journalist put it, Siberia was no longer primarily the domain of the heroic, self-sacrificial *intelligent* but rather that of a 'grey, uncultured mass', comprised of people who neither knew or cared what they were fighting for.⁷ By way of response, radical propagandists

⁶ See, by contrast, M. M. Shkol'nik, *Zhizn' byvshei terroristki* (Moscow: Izd-vo politkatorzhan, 1930), a later Russian version of the same memoir.

⁷ V. Komkov, 'Sukhaia gil'otina: ocherk sovremennoi politicheskoi ssylki v Rossii', *Obrazovanie: zhurnal literaturnyi i obshchestvenno-politicheskii* 8.2 (1908), p. 49.

and writers set out to highlight particularly heroic examples of protest and resistance in prison and exile. In so doing, they aimed to reassert the former significance of Siberian punishment for revolutionaries as a battleground on which to confront the autocratic state and, more broadly, to extricate the revolution from its moral quagmire. Most of the first half of this chapter explores this process by examining the political and ideological ramifications of one particularly famous case – that of the notorious SR terrorist Egor Sozonov, whose 1910 suicide in Nerchinsk *katorga* not only elevated him to martyr status but left him a contested figure in the ongoing debate over revolutionary ethics.

Inevitably, several such cases also generated considerable publicity and interest beyond Russia's borders, occasionally with the direct participation of their protagonists. This chapter does not, of course, offer an exhaustive treatment of all such cases. Nevertheless, by examining two particularly famous examples – those of the legendary *Narodnaia volia* terrorist Vera Figner and Ekaterina Breshkovskaia, the self-styled 'grandmother of the Russian revolution' – I explore the ways in which the transnationalisation of Russian revolutionary martyrologies in the early twentieth century interdicted and distorted their native meanings. In the Russian context, political exiles' heroic tales of martyrdom and sacrifice were deployed by party propagandists as a means of redeeming the revolution's moral worth. Once redeployed on the international stage with a view to attracting funds and sympathy for the cause, however, such narratives were prone to appropriation in ways their protagonists could not always control. In the hands of their Anglo-American supporters, Russian revolutionaries' biographies were reworked to conform to Western expectations and their sufferings in prison and exile repurposed to serve priorities they themselves did not share, or to which they affected to subscribe for purely pragmatic reasons. Such misapprehensions, I argue, resulted directly from tangled genealogies of punishment and protest established over a decade earlier by the SFRF's

campaign against the Siberian exile system. As the common thread that ran between their iconic status amongst other Russian socialists and their powerful attraction they held for Westerners who, in many cases, had originally come to see Russian revolutionaries as their own mirror image in the early 1890s, the rhetoric of Siberian exile and political martyrdom was both fundamental to and problematic for Russian revolutionaries' emergence as international celebrities.

6.1. The dry guillotine

The events of 1905-1907 ushered in the final decade of Russia's revolutionary struggle with an unprecedented wave of bloodshed. Although different estimates exist, the overall scale of the violence and repression that gripped the country during this period, in which tens of thousands were summarily executed under martial law and condemned by military courts to prison and *katorga* terms, is hard to overstate. In Susan Morrissey's words, Russia entered the twentieth century 'divided into two camps, the executioners and the condemned', consumed by an 'epidemic of trauma' sweeping the land.⁸ During this period, the authorities' bloody suppression of the revolution was only one aspect of the opposition forces' comprehensive strategic and moral defeat. The 1905 revolution did not represent the beginning of Russia's age of mass politics, but rather marked the moment at which the radical intelligentsia began to reckon with its consequences. The scale of the

⁸ Susan K. Morrissey, *Suicide and the Body Politic in Late Imperial Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 299, 302. The best overview of the 1905 revolution is Abraham Ascher, *The Revolution of 1905*, 2 vols (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988-1992). On revolutionary violence and terrorism see Budnitskii, *Terrorizm*; Anna Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill: Revolutionary Terrorism in Russia 1894-1917* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993) and R. A. Gorodnitskii, *Boevaia organizatsiia partii sotsialistov-revoliutsionerov v 1901-1911 gg* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 1998). For two contemporary overviews of state-sponsored violence and repression, the first covering the period from the October Manifesto of 1905 to the election of the first Duma in April 1906 and the second covering the duration of the Duma from April to July 1906, see V. P. Obninskii, *Polgoda russkoi revoliutsii* (Moscow: Tipografiia V. M. Sablina, 1906) and *Letopis' russkoi revoliutsii: дума i revoliutsiia* (Moscow: Tipografiia V. M. Sablina, 1907).

violence and the broadening of the revolutionary franchise through randomised, spontaneous acts of terrorism, agrarian disturbances and peasant *jacqueries* caught many veteran radicals unawares. For some, the role of the masses permanently corrupted the revolution and confirmed the Marxists' insistence that the individual was meaningless before history; for others, the eruption of violence across the country irrevocably blurred the lines of guilt and innocence.

The moral crisis that engulfed the Russian left in the aftermath of 1905 peaked with two consecutive cataclysms in the spring of 1909. In February, the leadership of the SR Party was forced to publicly concede that Evno Azef, the leader of the *boevaia organizatsiia*, had been working as a police spy for the past decade.⁹ The exposure of Azef's treachery – compounded by the lengths to which senior party figures had gone to dismiss the allegations against him – represented a catastrophe, thoroughly corrupting the practical and intellectual basis of the SRs' commitment to terrorism and largely obfuscating the difference between the revolutionaries themselves and their autocratic opponents. Writing in the conservative newspaper *Novoe vremia* (*The New Times*), the influential publicist Vasilii Rozanov spoke for many in arguing that the SR leadership had failed to notice Azef's deceit precisely because they were, in essence, no different from him.¹⁰ Worse, however, was shortly to follow. The Azef affair supplied a fitting prelude to the publication weeks later of a collection of essays entitled *Vekhi* (*Signposts*) that openly attributed the revolution's moral collapse to the shortcomings of the radical intelligentsia itself and, in so doing, created a sensation.¹¹ Written by a group of

⁹ See in general Anna Geifman, *Entangled in Terror: The Azef Affair and the Russian Revolution* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 2000).

¹⁰ V. V. Rozanov, 'Mezhdu Azefom i 'Vekhami'', *Novoe vremia* (20 August 1909), pp. 3-4. On the close relationships and occasional interchangeability of spies and terrorists around this time see L. Praisman, *Terroristy i revoliutsionery, okhranniki i provokatory* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2001).

¹¹ *Vekhi: sbornik statei o russkoi intelligentsii*, ed. M. O. Gershenzon (Moscow: Tipografiia V. M. Sablina, 1909). The best précis of this episode is Christopher Read, *Religion, Revolution and the Russian Intelligentsia 1900-1912: The Vekhi Debate and its Intellectual Background* (London: Macmillan, 1979).

dissenting intellectuals convened by the literary historian Mikhail Gershenzon and the lapsed Marxist Petr Struve, *Vekhi* charged the revolution's leaders with having abdicated their responsibilities as Russia's avant-garde, arriving in 1905 armed only with the cryogenically frozen radicalism of the 1860s and a contempt for the 'integral personality' that had turned the revolution to violent chaos and revolutionaries into criminals. Gershenzon's damning verdict has become well known:

A bunch of revolutionaries went from house to house and knocked on every door: 'Everyone into the streets, it's shameful to stay at home!' – and every consciousness spilled out into the square, the lame, the blind and the armless [...] At home there's filth, poverty and disorder, but the master of the house doesn't care; he's out saving the people.¹²

Such anxieties informed contemporary discussions of the Siberian exile system, which had been revived on an enormous scale in the course of the reaction and consequently seemed, in the eyes of some, to epitomise the problem. In 1909, Petr Kropotkin estimated the combined figure of administrative exiles and those exiled to settlement by the courts in the space of less than five years at 78,000, fractionally revising the MVD's unpublished internal figures up from 74,000 on the basis of leaked evidence from the central transfer prisons at Moscow, Tiumen', Tobol'sk and Irkutsk.¹³ Although this upsurge arguably constituted the least viscerally shocking of Russia's many traumas at the time, the sheer number of people banished to Siberia from European Russia nonetheless generated widespread public interest in political exile as an object of study, a

¹² M. O. Gershenzon, 'Tvorcheskoe samosoznanie' in *Vekhi*, p. 80.

¹³ P. A. Kropotkin, *The Terror in Russia: An Appeal to the British Nation* (London: Methuen, 1909).

living microcosm of the newly transformed revolutionary movement through which the events both of 1905-1907 could be analysed and understood.

In 1908, the radical journalist Vladimir Komkov published a groundbreaking investigation on the subject which referred to political exile as a 'dry guillotine'.¹⁴ Like Kropotkin, Komkov deliberately overlooked hard labour convicts, instead circulating a series of questionnaires amongst the tens of thousands of administrative exiles and exile settlers he encountered in three months' travel around Siberia. The data provided by his 15,500 respondents painted a picture of a political exile system changed beyond recognition from just a few years before. The vast majority, 11,328 in all, were from the working classes, predominantly agricultural labourers and factory workers (3,879 and 6,362 respectively) as opposed to just 4,190 loosely-defined *intelligenty* (primarily *meshchan'e*, *dvorian'e* and *raznochintsy*). Similarly, an overall majority of 8,226 were between twenty and thirty years of age, strongly suggesting the importance of generational factors as well as social class. In terms of party alignment, the biggest single block - over 3,000 - belonged to the Social Democrats, followed closely by the SRs. Crucially, however, nearly 6,000 respondents claimed no party allegiance whatsoever. 'The truth is', Komkov wrote, 'that both representatives of the freethinking avantgarde and the working classes have been exiled to Siberia; in a word, political exile now represents a miniature Russia.'¹⁵

Komkov found the implications of this deeply troubling. Although the injustices and privations of political exile before the revolution had been well known, he argued, the 'sound spirit, iron character and sure moral foundations' of those who endured it had imbued the penal system with a distinct moral economy that neatly intersected with a readily comprehensible class politics. Only a select few, drawn from social and economic

¹⁴ Komkov, 'Sukhaia gil'otina', pp. 34-52. The term 'dry guillotine' was borrowed from Victor Hugo.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 39-40.

elites, had been willing to sacrifice all that was dear to them in the name of the liberation struggle, and this had allowed them to convert the Russian penal system into a battleground for confrontation with the state, demanding treatment befitting members of their class whilst simultaneously defending the dignity and distinct status of the 'political'. In 1905, however, the revolutionary movement had suddenly and dramatically expanded, capturing the 'very depths of the people'. From this point onwards began the 'decomposition' of the revolution, and thus of the exile system too: although the former had 'won in terms of its strength and breadth', the latter had 'lost its purity and consciousness'. Most of the tens of thousands deported to Siberia in recent years, Komkov declared, were 'unthinking rioters' (*bezsoznatel'nye buntari*) who discredited the minority of 'true exiles'.¹⁶

As the revolutionary ranks swelled with representatives of the working classes, the government increasingly treated political offenders in a similar way to ordinary criminals. At the beginning of 1909, a young Jewish socialist named Andrei Sobol' escaped from a prison in the Amur province and fled overseas. Having been arrested in 1904 for membership of a revolutionary organisation in Vilnius and subsequently sentenced to *katorga*, Sobol' had spent three years working in a chain gang on the construction of a new highway between Khabarovsk and Blagoveshchensk – a project apparently conceived as a primarily punitive exercise. In April, shortly after his arrival in Paris, he published an account of his Siberian experiences in Burtsev's influential revolutionary almanac *Byloe (The Past)* in which he detailed numerous instances of political offenders being subjected to corporal punishment and obliged, for the first time, to perform penal

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 49.

labour.¹⁷ In the aftermath of 1905, Sobol' argued, the formerly crucial distinction between ordinary and political exile had all but collapsed:

There are no political offenders there, and no ordinary criminals. Both are attacked mercilessly and indiscriminately by the guards, both go barefoot and wear filthy, torn clothes, both are exhausted, crippled and tormented by midges. Both live by the law of the rifle butt.¹⁸

Sobol''s conclusions were echoed later that year by Kropotkin, who reported that 'persons sentenced for theft and other breaches of the ordinary law [were] being sent to Siberia in company with administrative exiles transported for rebellion or other political offences'.¹⁹ Charging the Russian authorities with opportunistically seizing upon the prevailing violent disorder to arraign recidivist criminals for trumped-up political offences, Kropotkin wrote that Siberians themselves no longer perceived political exiles as a positive influence on the region, but rather considered them as dangerous and parasitical as common criminals.

The Siberian exile system thus seemed to some indicative of Russian radicalism's personality crisis during the years of revolution and reaction. Others, however, saw in it a possible solution to the problem. Around the end of the decade, revolutionary writers and activists seized upon the heroic exploits of famous political exiles, framing their experiences in Siberia as part of a broader 'behavioural text' in an attempt to provide other revolutionaries with suitable examples for emulation. As the following case – that of the notorious SR terrorist Egor Sozonov – demonstrates, this effort was largely

¹⁷ 'Andrei' [I. M. Sobol'], 'Amurskaia kolesnaia doroga', *Byloe* 11-12 (1909), pp. 18-26. Sobol' later expanded this account into a monograph entitled *Kolesukha: Amurskaia kolesnaia doroga* (Moscow: Izd-vo politkatorzhan, 1925).

¹⁸ Sobol', 'Amurskaia kolesnaia doroga', p. 24.

¹⁹ Kropotkin, *The Terror in Russia*, p. 44.

directed at resolving the moral and ethical contradictions laid bare in the violent confusion of 1905. Inscribed in party propaganda as *nevolia*, a state of captivity encompassing both physical incarceration and the human will, Siberian exile was depicted as restoring meaning and legitimacy to the revolutionary struggle.

6.2. 'An eagle in captivity': Egor Sozonov in prison and exile

On 15 July 1904, an SR terrorist by the name of Egor Sozonov assassinated the Russian interior minister, Viacheslav von Pleve, in the middle of Petersburg. Promptly arrested and brought to trial, Sozonov evaded the death penalty, but was nonetheless sentenced to *katorga* on account of his crime's severity. After two years in Moscow's Butyrka transfer prison, he arrived at Nerchinsk in late 1906. Four years later, after a prolonged battle with the local prison authorities over the treatment of political offenders, he committed suicide as an act of protest. Both in life and death, Sozonov appeared to come close to the traditional revolutionary ideal of the Siberian martyr-hero. Depicted, interpreted and contested in literature and SR propaganda both at the time and for years afterwards, his persona and actions played an important role in the post-1905 debate on revolutionary morality.

Shortly before his death, Sozonov provided the model for the fictional protagonist of *Kon' blednyi* (*The Pale Horse*), a notorious 1909 novella written pseudonymously by the former SR terrorist Boris Savinkov.²⁰ Despite having briefly succeeded Azef as the head of the *boevaia organizatsiia*, Savinkov retired from revolutionary activity shortly after the scandal and, in emigration, composed *Kon' blednyi* as a critique of the radical intelligentsia. By relating the story of an SR terrorist detachment tasked with

²⁰ V. Ropshin [B. V. Savinkov], *Kon' blednyi* (Nice: M. A. Tumanov, 1913).

assassinating the governor of St Petersburg, the novel juxtaposes the lives of two caricature revolutionaries, Zhorzh and Vania, who together illustrate the fatal consequences of uncritical adherence to the monolithic revolutionary archetype: the former is a cynical murderer killing less for political reasons than to satisfy sociopathic impulses, the latter a Christian struggling to reconcile his faith to the rationalism of his student years.²¹ As the first synopsis of the revolution's moral crisis to originate from within the revolutionary movement itself, *Kon' blednyi* generated considerable debate in both the legal and underground press.²²

One of the more ambivalent responses elicited by the novel was that of the decadent writer and critic Dmitrii Merezhkovskii. Already embroiled in polemics with several of the *Vekhi* group, Merezhkovskii was close to the SR leadership and, although appalled by the violence of the preceding years, never broke with the party.²³ After the publication of *Kon' blednyi* in Struve's journal *Russkaia mysl'* (*Russian Thought*), he prepared a review for the Kadet newspaper *Rech'* (*Speech*) in which he inverted Savinkov's intended critique by reframing it in religious terms. The problem Savinkov had unwittingly identified, he argued, was not whether to kill or not to kill, but rather how to kill within the limits of sanctity, in contradistinction to 'today's sexless, tribeless murderers, tomorrow's condemned (*visel'niki*)'.²⁴ Seen from this perspective, Zhorzh was the 'weakness and shame of the Russian revolution', and Vania – who acknowledged his

²¹ The existence of such problematic revolutionary characters in real life had been frequently noted by non-radical observers (most famously Dostoevskii) from the Nechaev affair onwards, and the controversy surrounding Tikhomirov's apostasy two decades earlier had in effect revolved around many of the same issues. See Aileen Kelly, 'Self-Censorship and the Russian Intelligentsia, 1905-1914', *Slavic Review* 46.2 (1987), pp. 200-203.

²² For two illuminating discussions of the critical debates surrounding the novel at the time of its publication see Mogil'ner, *Mifologiya podpol'nogo cheloveka*, pp. 102-120 and Daniel Beer, 'The Morality of Terror: Contemporary Responses to Political Violence in Boris Savinkov's *The Pale Horse* (1909) and *What Never Happened* (1912)', *Slavonic and East European Review* 85.1 (2007), pp. 25-46.

²³ Bernice Rosenthal, *Dmitri Sergeevich Merezhkovsky and the Silver Age: The Development of a Revolutionary Mentality* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1975), pp. 175-187.

²⁴ D. S. Merezhkovskii, 'Kon' blednyi' in idem., *Bol'naiia Rossiia* (St Petersburg: Obshchestvennaia pol'za, 1910), p. 30.

own crimes to be great, but Christ's mercy to be greater – was the true hero of the novel. Taking upon himself the burden of the 'heaviest sin' by virtue of his Orthodox belief in transfiguration and absolute faith in the coming of a new world, the children of which would have no recourse to violence, Vania redeemed his lesser comrades, and thus the revolution as a whole.²⁵

Vania's strong resemblance to Sozonov, whom Savinkov had befriended during their student days in Geneva and later worked alongside in the *boevaia organizatsiia*, is extremely unlikely to have been coincidental.²⁶ Pleve's assassination registered in later years as one of the SR Party's greatest victories, both for the target's high profile and the relative moral clarity of the case against him: as with Ivan Kaliaev's killing of the Grand Duke Sergei Aleksandrovich earlier that year, the juxtaposition of von Pleve's notorious cruelty with Sozonov's willing embrace of captivity and death seemed to apportion guilt and innocence in such a way as to elide the act of murder itself.²⁷ Yet Sozonov – like Savinkov's Vania – never became fully reconciled to his crime throughout the years in prison and exile that followed, by turns convinced of its necessity and sickened by its recollection. Presumably recognising himself upon reading *Kon' blednyi* in 1909, he wrote a review of the novel that repeated Savinkov's denunciation of the 'moral levity' (*moral'naia legkokrylost'*) which had taken over the revolutionary movement after the rise of the SR Maximalists, and later wrote to the SR leadership threatening to resign his membership were Savinkov expelled from the party.²⁸ In later years, others perceived the resemblance too. Writing shortly after Sozonov's death in November 1910, the SR Party

²⁵ Ibid., pp 27-29.

²⁶ See B. V. Savinkov, *Vospominaniia terrorista* (Moscow: PROZAIK, 2013), pp. 21-66 for Savinkov's recollections of Sozonov in the early 1900s. On the ties between Sozonov, Savinkov and Merezhkovskii, see *Eto ia vinovat. Evoliutsiia i ispoved' terrorista: pis'ma Egora Sozonova s kommentariami*, ed. S. Bocharov (Moscow: Iazyki slavianskoi kul'tury, 2001), pp. 245-254.

²⁷ Susan K. Morrissey, 'The "Apparel of Innocence": Toward a Moral Economy of Terrorism in Late Imperial Russia', *Journal of Modern History* 84.3 (2012), pp. 618-620.

²⁸ B. Koz'min, 'E. S. Sozonov i ego pis'ma k rodnym' in E. S. Sozonov, *Pis'ma Egora Sozonova k rodnym, 1895-1910 gg*, ed. B. Koz'min and N. I. Rakitnikov (Moscow: Izd-vo politkatorzhan, 1925), p. 15.

leader Viktor Chernov echoed Merezhkovskii's image of Vania. Even when killing one as depraved and cruel as Pleve, Sozonov could neither ignore his victim's humanity nor admit the legitimacy of the crime. 'His right to the blood of such a beast did not readily enter his consciousness', Chernov wrote, 'but when it did, it did so as an obligation of violence against himself, as a negotiation on behalf of the highest principle of that natural and powerful feeling that prevents one man raising his hand against another, and as a heavy moral sacrifice.'²⁹

Although Savinkov had used Sozonov's case to problematise the mythology of the revolutionary hero, events late the following year appeared to confirm Merezhkovskii's contradictory interpretation. On 27 November 1910, Sozonov's suicide in Nerchinsk secured his status as both a revolutionary icon and a model of heroic behaviour. His death was the result of a running battle with the local prison authorities over the rights and status of political offenders. Although he recorded shortly after his arrival in Siberia that the politicals' regime in the Akatui prison, to which he was initially assigned, were not unreasonable, the situation soon worsened dramatically.³⁰ Towards the end of 1906, six female revolutionaries had arrived in Akatui, amongst them the aforementioned Mariia Shkol'nik and Mariia Spiridonova, whose assassination of a local official in Borisoglebsk and subsequent mistreatment in prison had made her an icon amongst the SR membership.³¹ In February 1907, the authorities began to implement a revised regime that officially abolished the distinction between political and ordinary criminals and called for the female prisoners' removal to a separate prison at Mal'tsevka. Reluctant to implement the order in full, the Akatui commandant allowed both Spiridonova and Shkol'nik to

²⁹ V. M. Chernov, 'Pamiati E. Sozonova', *Znamia truda: tsentral'nyi organ partii sotsialistov-revoliutsionerov* 33 (January 1911), p. 7.

³⁰ Koz'min, 'E. S. Sozonov', p. 17.

³¹ Sally A. Boniece, 'The Spiridonova Case, 1906: Terror, Myth and Martyrdom', *Kritika* 4.3 (2003), pp. 571-606. At the time of Spiridonova's arrival at Akatui, Sozonov recorded that 'every one of us tried to bestow our love and blessings upon this glorious woman': see *Eto ia vinovat*, p. 123.

remain behind on account of their poor health until the night of 13 February, when another officer from the neighbouring Algachinskaia prison, Borodulin, arrived to demand their transfer.³² Sozonov, who led the male prisoners' protest against Borodulin's actions, soon found himself amongst a group of fifteen political 'troublemakers' (*bespokoinye*) specially selected for transfer to Algachinskaia. Arriving on 3 March, Borodulin had the group immediately beaten, forcibly shaved and dressed in the grey uniform of the ordinary criminals. Sozonov saw the new regime as a calculated insult to the political offenders' dignity and status:

That morning, we met our comrades [who] somehow managed to coexist with Borodulin. The problem was simple – they had allowed themselves to be demoted to the status of ordinary criminals. They took orders and physical abuse, they doffed their caps to the officers and stood to attention [...] Their degradation obliged us still further to protest in the name of the politicals (*radi podderzhanii imeni politika*).³³

Sozonov and the others accordingly responded with insubordination, refusing to stand to attention or submit to searches. After a short conflict, Borodulin relented, reinstating some of the politicals' privileges. Although he was assassinated whilst on leave shortly afterwards, the pattern of official provocation and prisoner resistance was repeated by his replacement, Izmailov, whose abuses forced the prisoners to declare a hunger strike that resulted in his suspension after a week. Shortly after this, in early 1908, Sozonov was transferred for the final time to Gornyi Zerentui, where events once more took a turn for the worse. From mid-1909 onwards, the prison's garrison was increased in size and the

³² On this episode see Sukloff, *The Life-Story of a Russian Exile*, pp. 174-188.

³³ Koz'min, 'E. S. Sozonov', pp. 18-19.

inmates ordered to stay away from their own barrack windows. One inmate recorded more than forty incidents of the guards opening fire on the prisoners over the latter half of the year, with Sozonov himself almost killed on one occasion.³⁴ The denouement came on 25 November 1910 when command of the prison was handed over to Vysotskii, a veteran officer whose reputation for cruelty from his time commanding a punishment battalion in Ukraine preceded him. It was widely believed at the time that Vysotskii had been appointed specifically in order to drive Sozonov to his death, since the latter, who ‘could not remain silent when the politicals’ honour was directly insulted, always responded by means of struggle’.³⁵ True to form, the new commandant announced himself to the inmates with a speech ‘in which he declared that all in hard labour were equal and no distinction would be made between common criminals and politicals’, addressing the latter with the informal second person pronoun and arbitrarily ordering several of them to be flogged.³⁶ Vysotskii’s tenure quickly had the desired effect: on the evening of 27 November, Sozonov took an overdose of morphine in his cell and died.

Lionised as a martyr in SR propaganda both at the time and afterwards, Sozonov was seen as having defended the dignity of exiled revolutionaries in life and death, his actions re-establishing Siberia as a spatially and temporally distinct battlefield upon which incarcerated politicals confronted the autocracy on their own terms. Shortly after his suicide, Chernov noted that the Right and Octobrist deputies who discussed the affair in the Duma had ‘danced on our freshly-dug graves like Polovtsians dancing on the bodies of their prisoners and the corpses of their dead enemies’.³⁷ Many years later, Paula Metter, an SR terrorist incarcerated in Mal’tsevka at the same time who had chanced to

³⁴ Ibid., p. 23.

³⁵ N. Rostov, ‘Smert’ Egora Sozonova’ in *Pis'ma Egora Sozonova k rodnym*, pp. 31-32. The view that Vysotskii had effectively been tasked with killing Sozonov was widely accepted at the time and subsequently: see Metter, ‘Stranichka proshlogo’, pp. 108-109.

³⁶ Koz'min, ‘E. S. Sozonov’, p. 25.

³⁷ Chernov, ‘Pamiati E. Sozonova’, p. 7.

meet Sozonov in the days prior to his death, offered a glowing tribute to his undimmed militancy:

Our eyes met, and immediately I understood everything. His eyes burned with the ideas, the power and the resolve that each of us had thought and experienced upon preparing to go to the barricades. Overtaken by a burning sensation, I realised that all of us embroiled in the struggle had only our own bodies as weapons.³⁸

Such rhetoric affirmed that the politicals' struggle with the authorities within the prison walls enjoyed separate but equal status to the broader struggle they had left behind. Sozonov always opposed other prisoners' escape attempts, seeing it as a sign of weakness and conduct unbecoming an exiled revolutionary.³⁹ In keeping with this, when the central prison authorities released a statement in the days following the events in Zerentui claiming that a large quantity of the same poison taken by Sozonov had recently been confiscated by the prison guards, and that the consignment had been smuggled into the prison with the aim of killing the guards and facilitating a mass escape, Chernov denounced it as a cynical attempt to destroy Sozonov's legacy and reputation (*moral'no ubit' ego pamiat'*).⁴⁰

Sozonov himself had earlier drawn this distinction in terms of *volia* and *nevolia*, seeing in it a resolution to the moral contradictions of his crime. On the one hand, whatever ambiguities he had felt about the violent struggle in the outside world were eliminated by the harsh realities and abuses of the prison environment: in Siberia, Sozonov was partial to the same *moral'naia legkokrylost'* for which he had criticised the

³⁸ Metter, 'Stranichka proshlogo', p. 108.

³⁹ Koz'min, 'E. S. Sozonov', p. 17.

⁴⁰ Chernov, 'Pamiati E. Sozonova', p. 7. The story quickly began to unravel as it transpired that the guards had in reality confiscated not morphine but harmless anti-tuberculosis drugs connected neither to Sozonov's death nor to any escape plan: see Rostov, 'Smert' Egora Sozonova', pp. 43-44.

SR Maximalists, the conviction that all those connected with the government existed in a state of absolute guilt. On the other, the substitution of *volia* (freedom of will) for *svoboda* (freedom from captivity or oppression) made Sozonov's *nevolia* a parallel state of innocence in which he abdicated his right to commit acts of violence. This he made clear in a conversation with Borodulin shortly after his transfer to the Algachinskaia prison in 1907. Aware that he was a target for an SR assassination squad and convinced that Sozonov had already ordered his death, Borodulin directly asked what crime he had committed, pointing out that he was only following orders. Sozonov's reply was telling:

You know the answer to that, just like the whole of Russia does [...] Neither my letters nor my word will change anything. You have always been the master of your own destiny, and your actions warrant the known consequences, but whether or not they will come to pass will be decided by those living in freedom [*liudi na vole*], not by us.⁴¹

Writing *Kon' blednyi*, Savinkov had drawn on Sozonov's example to argue paradoxically that the SR policy of terror was both wrong and necessary. In prison and exile, Sozonov himself appeared to reach the inverse conclusion, portraying *nevolia* as a state of relative moral equilibrium in which revolutionary violence was wholly justifiable yet ultimately impossible except when committed against oneself.

In 1919, just under a decade after Sozonov's death, an obscure party activist by the name of Sholom Erukhimovich-Ravdin elaborated on these problems in a short play entitled 'Eagles in Captivity, or Hard Labour Convicts' (*Orly v nevole, ili katorzhniki*) that illustrates the extent to which Sozonov's case had become a fixture of the Socialist-

⁴¹ Cited in Chernov, 'Pamiati E. Sozonova', p. 7. The source was a letter from Sozonov to the inmates of the Mal'tsevka prison. There appears to be no evidence that Sozonov was connected with Borodulin's subsequent assassination.

Revolutionaries' moral economy amongst the party rank and file as much as leading figures such as Chernov.⁴² Although Ravdin's play does not directly mention Sozonov, it is transparently based upon the events surrounding his death. The action takes place in 1909, and the protagonist Al'perovich (likewise an SR terrorist) refers to the real-life assassinations of Borodulin and the Nerchinsk *katorga* director Metus, both of whom were involved in Sozonov's case. Meanwhile, Ravdin's fictional prison, like Zerentui, sees an influx of troops who begin to fire indiscriminately through the prisoners' barrack windows, killing one of Al'perovich's comrades and sparking the same exchange of insubordination, hunger strikes, floggings and spells in solitary confinement.

Although these allusions would presumably have been obvious to any readers, the play's dénouement remains ambiguous: Al'perovich is evidently resolved either upon suicide or killing the prison commandant, Lebedinskii, but we do not discover which he ultimately opts for. Ravdin's fictionalised reading of Sozonov's final days thus represents a debate on the choice facing revolutionaries in prison and exile between stoical yet passive endurance and active, direct resistance. In both recalling and problematising Sozonov's decision in favour of the latter, it situates the spatial and temporal distance between *volia* and *nevolia* as central both to the problem itself and, ultimately, to the solution. Initially the prison's inmates suffer tremendously from their forced absence from the revolutionary struggle, but see no option beyond waiting out their sentences in the hope of eventually rejoining the party ranks. Finding Al'perovich overcome with grief for his distant wife and children and frustration at his own inactivity one night, his comrades console him:

⁴² S. Ravdin, 'Orly v nevole, ili katorzhniki', IISG ARCH01038/1035, pp. 1-32. The title is a reference to Pushkin's 1822 poem 'Uznic', dedicated to his friend V. F. Raevskii and written shortly after the latter's arrest in Kishinev.

Timofeev: What are you dreaming of, freedom? Rid your head of such thoughts and forget about your personal interests: be a Napoleonic general, who thinks only of his emperor. Remember the sacred task for which you're in prison, and it'll be easier for you. Remember the work you carried out in freedom [...]

Al'perovich: But is this really life? I cannot be a slave – I have taken part in the struggle my whole life, and still do insofar as time and circumstances allow. But what sort of work is there here for us? I need incessant activity, but here my wings are clipped [...]

Zabezhinskii: By day you're practical, you're our teacher and a joker; by night you turn into an overthinking pessimist. Forget about the past and live in the present. You're in *katorga*, and you have eight years of your sentence left.⁴³

It is only later, with the death of one of their fellow inmates, that the politicals discover the possibilities for active resistance within the prison environment and ultimately come to see their struggle as equivalent to that ongoing in Russia. Yet by equating and distinguishing between the two fields of battle, Ravdin's protagonists inevitably return to the intractable question of the legitimacy of violence. After they declare a hunger strike and raise the whole prison in a chorus of the SR motto ('In the struggle you will obtain your rights'), Lebedinskii arrives with a detachment of convoy troops. As he seizes Al'perovich and places him in solitary confinement, the others can only threaten him with the party's retribution, later despairing of their own powerlessness:

We, the avant-garde of this slumbering people, are ourselves asleep in this case.

They torment and pray upon us, they take our very best comrades from amongst

⁴³ Ibid., pp. 3-5.

us and still we don't fight tooth and nail to free them [...] Where is our revolutionism, our fighting spirit? True, we are in captivity, but in captivity we remain the same revolutionaries we were in freedom. We've waited enough.⁴⁴

Subsequently released from solitary confinement, Al'perovich argues for restraint, dismissing his comrade Timofeev's insistence upon violent retaliation against Lebedinskii. 'Have you really ceased', he asks, 'to believe in the power and might of our party? Do you really think that our appeals will go unanswered?'⁴⁵ In the end, however, it is precisely Al'perovich's undimmed faith in the party's power beyond the prison walls that lends significance to his eventual turn to violence. His willing embrace of death, whether through suicide or assassinating Lebedinskii, is in the first place sacrificial: by abandoning the hope of reunion with his loved ones with which he began the play for the sake of the revolution, he confirms freedom and captivity as irreconcilable antiworlds. Yet the character of Al'perovich, distinguished by the same ambiguity towards acts of violence that characterised his historical counterpart, also reveals the true significance of Sozonov's case for revolutionary politics. The violent, capricious world of *nevolia* inhabited by the latter was determined by the very moral absolutes conspicuous by their absence from *volia*. In Chapter 4, we saw how Kennan's Siberian essays, translated into Russian and circulated in the revolutionary underground two decades earlier, were repurposed to provide a justification for the resumption of political violence. In a very similar way, set against the backdrop of the crisis that engulfed Russia's revolutionary elites at the end of the decade, the retelling of Sozonov's final days in Siberian exile through literature and party propaganda once again cast Siberia as a battleground – both

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 22.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 29.

figuratively and literally – upon which banished revolutionaries confronted and defeated the autocracy.

The publicity given to Sozonov's case was by no means an isolated example. Around the same time, several other well-known political exiles received comparable levels of attention in revolutionary circles for similar reasons. Several of these also generated much interest beyond Russia's borders, usually with the active participation of their protagonists. The way in which they were presented abroad, however, often diverged sharply from their native meaning. In devoting the second half of this chapter to a discussion of two particularly famous cases, I explore how international publicity conflicted with the terms in which such cases were discussed by other Russian socialists, and the various ways in which their protagonists attempted to diffuse the resultant tensions.

6.3. Vera Figner in Britain, 1909

Vera Figner was released from the Shlissel'burg fortress in September 1904, following more than two decades' incarceration for participation in the *Narodnaia volia* terrorist circle responsible for Alexander II's assassination. Physically and emotionally shattered, she played no role in the political turmoil of the years that followed, aware that the revolutionary movement had changed beyond recognition but temporarily unable to comprehend precisely how. When rioting peasants destroyed her childhood home near Kazan' in 1906, Figner decided to emigrate: she left Russia for Europe at the end of the year, and did not return until after the outbreak of the First World War.⁴⁶ It was during this period as an émigré that Figner's newfound interest in the Siberian exile system

⁴⁶ Lynne Ann Hartnett, *The Defiant Life of Vera Figner: Surviving the Russian Revolution* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2014), pp. 188-189.

allowed her to come to terms with the revolutionary tumult which had all but passed her by. She later recalled how, upon reading Komkov's investigation in 1908, she had begun to understand the 'enormous realignment which had taken place during my absence from life in the makeup of what one might call the revolutionary army', which no longer consisted of hundreds of radicalised intellectuals, but tens of thousands of workers and peasants representing all Russia in microcosm.⁴⁷ Later that year, she compiled her own study of the subject for the liberal newspaper *Russkoe bogatstvo* (*Russia's Wealth*), finding in the shared experience of political prison and exile a means of bridging the gap between her own generation's experiences and the dawning age of mass politics. Proofreading her own work, she imagined herself 'in an autumn garden', in which 'not a single ray of sunshine penetrated the dark grey clouds':

Fallen leaves rustled underfoot, and all around was the smell of slowly decaying vegetation. A whole generation of fallen leaves, and they had been so fresh, so bright and so young! [...] My work was finished, and I thought: Maksimov wrote *Siberia and Hard Labour*, Iadrintsev wrote *The Russian Commune in Prison and Exile*, and in the 1870s every young man and woman that dreamed of working for the good of society got hold of these books and, through them, learned to sympathise with the victims of social discord, with suffering and human misfortune. In these books, as if in an awful premonition, they learned that such pages would one day speak of them, of prison and exile, of the external circumstances and inner sufferings of entire generations cast aside by the political strife of our motherland.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ V. N. Figner, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 7 vols (Moscow: Izd-vo politkatorzhan, 1929) III, pp. 335-336.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 338-339. The essay Figner wrote for *Russkoe bogatstvo* was never published.

In emigration, Figner took up the cause of Siberia's political exiles. From 1909 onwards, she regularly travelled across Europe to lecture on their behalf, her public appearances paradoxically raising awareness of the exile system with reference to her own incarceration in Shlissel'burg and subsequent administrative exile in Arkhangelsk. Figner's campaigns largely bankrolled the work of the Committee for the Aid of Political Hard Labour Convicts (*Komitet pomoshchi politicheskim katorzhanam imeni V. N. Figner*), a charitable organisation based in Paris which she founded in early 1910 to channel funds to a number of Siberian *katorga* prisons. Around the same time, she also began to work on her memoirs, *Zapechatlennyi trud* (better known in English under the title *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*), which primarily focused on her long years in Shlissel'burg, and published an in-depth study of prison and exile in French.⁴⁹

During this period, Figner's public appearances were closely related to the production of her textual self, since both involved the decentering of her socialist politics and the articulation of a new identity based largely on notions of martyrdom and sacrifice. There were obvious pragmatic reasons for this. Figner had resigned from the SRs in the aftermath of the Azef affair, and given her terrorist background and prominent role in the official party response to the scandal (she had participated, along with Kropotkin and German Lopatin, in the court of honour convened in late 1908 to investigate Burtsev's allegations), she was understandably keen to distance herself from the ongoing moral quagmire. Moreover, like many a Russian émigré before her, she understood that European audiences were easily bored by the intricacies of Russian socialist politics and responded better to revolutionary propaganda framed in simplistic moral terms. Yet she also had important personal motivations. Aware that her days of revolutionary activity were behind her and yet desperate for a great cause to distract her from 'inner torments',

⁴⁹ V. N. Figner, *Les Prisons Russes* (Lausanne: Unions Ouvrieres, 1911).

Figner refashioned herself as the matriarch and guardian of Russia's political prisoners and exiles, restoring meaning and purpose to her life after Shlissel'burg by 'caring for unknown revolutionary comrades'.⁵⁰ By identifying incarceration as the defining theme of her public persona, she self-memorialised, inscribing her own martyrology on that of others and thereby eliding the factual distinctions between her own case and those of Siberia's exiles.⁵¹

Figner's release from Shlissel'burg four years earlier had been widely reported in the British and American press. *Free Russia* had hailed her as 'one of the most glorious figures of the party', while one San Francisco newspaper described her as 'Vera the beauty, beloved of the poor and downtrodden, apostle of the gospel of reform in Russia' and claimed erroneously that she had been exiled to Siberia.⁵² As a result, when she visited London in June 1909, she received the celebrity welcome traditionally afforded to famous political prisoners in general, and to Russian revolutionaries in particular.⁵³ On 22 June, the liberal *Daily News*, which promoted Figner more assiduously than any other British paper, published a lengthy character sketch written by Kropotkin's wife Sofia which depicted her as the 'heroine of Russian freedom'.⁵⁴ The following evening, she was presented to the public at a packed meeting near Liverpool Street station, at which she was introduced by Volkhovskii and Kropotkin and received 'with tremendous cheering lasting some minutes'; after she gave a short speech, the rostrum was besieged by

⁵⁰ Figner, *PSS* III, p. 336, 420. This remained an important part of Figner's public persona after 1917, when she became a senior figure in the Society of Former Political Hard Labour Convicts and Exile-Settlers and wrote extensively on the history of the Tsarist penal system.

⁵¹ Figner's biographer, Lynne Ann Hartnett, identifies her actions as a type of self-memorialisation consonant with that of Christian martyrs in antiquity. Both her public appearances and memoirs pertaining to this period were substantially free of ideological content, and she accepted neither SRs nor SDs as members of her Paris committee: see Figner, *PSS* III, pp. 384-385.

⁵² 'The Release of Vera Figner', *FR* 15.12 (December 1904), p. 103; 'Vera Figner's Twenty Years in a Dungeon', *San Francisco Chronicle* (4 December 1904), p. 2.

⁵³ The exact period of Figner's visit in 1909 is not clear, but no British newspaper mentioned her presence prior to mid-June. She returned to Paris in December, by which point she had spent 'six or seven months' in Britain: see Figner, *PSS* III, p. 370.

⁵⁴ 'Vera Figner: Heroine of Russian Freedom', *Daily News* (22 June 1909), p. 5.

enthused Britons requesting a handshake and her autograph.⁵⁵ Figner came to Britain primarily to publicise the plight of administrative exiles, reasoning that they would evoke greater sympathy amongst the British public than would *katorzhniki*:

The English, who had lived under the rule of law since time immemorial and were accustomed to respecting it, considered any abuses of administrative power (*administrativnaia rasprava*) an intolerable evil. Despite being well aware of the severity of the Russian courts and the constant pressure applied to them by the governing authorities, they nonetheless thought that – whatever else might be said of them – they were still courts, in which the defendant received a hearing, had legal representation and enjoyed the right of appeal. But administrative malfeasance and extrajudicial abuses represented, in their eyes, the most outrageous injustice, and they related to the victims thereof with unfettered sympathy.⁵⁶

The timing of Figner's arrival in Britain was no accident. Two weeks earlier, *The Times* had announced a forthcoming state visit by Nicholas II, who was then in the middle of a European tour and intent upon continuing the Anglo-Russian political rapprochement that had culminated in the 1907 entente.⁵⁷ Nicholas's imminent arrival sharply divided British opinion between Tory politicians and members of the public, who were generally in favour, and a diverse coalition of progressive politicians, clergymen, prominent social reformers and trade union activists, who were vehemently opposed to it.⁵⁸ As the *Daily*

⁵⁵ 'Meeting to Welcome Vera N. Figner', *FR* (July 1909), pp. 5-8; 'Tribute to Vera Figner', *Daily News* (24 June 1909), p. 5.

⁵⁶ Figner, *PSS* III, p. 340.

⁵⁷ 'Russian Foreign Policy: The Tsar's Visits to France and England', *The Times* 38984 (11 June 1909), p. 5.

⁵⁸ McKee, 'British Perceptions of Tsar Nicholas II', p. 232.

News led the campaign against the visit and Kropotkin testified on the mass repressions of the previous years before the Parliamentary Russian Committee, one newspaper ran a cartoon of Nicholas being denied entry to Britain under the terms of the 1905 Aliens Act, the Labour Party organised protest meetings and petitions across the country, and a number of churches devoted Sunday 11 July to praying for the souls of Russia's political prisoners, with the Nonconformist minister John Clifford expressing the hope that 'the Lord would raise up a new Moses to restore the Russian people from the desert of slavery to the promised land of liberty'.⁵⁹ In the July issue of *Free Russia*, Volkhovskii's editorial noted this broad progressive consensus with some satisfaction.⁶⁰ This was understandable, since in spirit it was very close to the alliance that the SFRF – by this time a shadow of its former self – had first tried to assemble two decades earlier. This may partially explain why the SFRF attempted to reprise their bipartisan tactics from the 1890s, placing Russians' sufferings in prison and exile at the heart of their appeal to public opinion. The words of one speaker at a protest meeting held at Tower Hill on 8 July – apparently intended as a paraphrase of John Burns' words in Hyde Park two decades beforehand – are representative of the agitation's general tone:

There are thousands of men and women in Russia who were not at all connected with the revolutionary movement, but were sent to the mines in Siberia. I say we have no right to throw their political rights to one side and receive this dastardly assassin, the Tsar of Russia.⁶¹

⁵⁹ 'In Russian Prisons: By an Ex-Prisoner', *The Review of Reviews* 43.258 (June 1911), p. 585. Although the controversy surrounding Nicholas's visit represented the last major flourish of the Russian freedom movement in Britain prior to the outbreak of war and revolution, little has been written about it. The best general description can be found in Figner, *PSS* III, pp. 340-369. The archival record is limited to 'Visit of the Czar', TNA HO 45/10400/180714. One fascinating recent study that deals at some length with Figner's role in the events of that summer is Kevin Grant, 'British Suffragettes and the Russian Method of Hunger Strike', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 53.1 (2011), pp. 113-143.

⁶⁰ F. Volkhovsky, 'The Tzar's Visit to England', *FR* (July 1909), pp. 1-4.

⁶¹ TNA HO 45/10400/180714/12, p. 8.

As a former political prisoner of international renown, Figner appeared to represent an ideal figurehead for the campaign. When the news of Nicholas's impending visit broke, she was quickly summoned to London to counterpose his presence. Welcoming Figner to Britain on 22 June, Volkhovskii described her as 'the embodiment of all the sorrows, all the martyrdom, but also of the best hopes and sublime aspirations of our beloved country'. 'I do not hesitate', he continued, 'to call her the true representative of the Russian people, and I am happy that that representative should be a woman. We are proud of our women because it is so much more sublime to see an unbending love for freedom and justice, a lucid intellect and endless self-sacrifice in the frail form of a woman.'⁶²

Both the explicitly gendered terms in which Volkhovskii and the liberal press presented Figner to the public, and the genealogy of Siberian punishment with which such rhetoric was closely associated, go some way towards explaining her curiously ambivalent appraisal of her time in Britain. The campaign against the state visit in which she participated was in many ways successful. Nicholas was forced to abandon his original plan to visit London, instead remaining on his yacht and meeting his nephew, Edward VII, under heavy security at Cowes between 2-5 August.⁶³ The nationwide protests culminated in a large demonstration in Trafalgar Square on 25 July, organised by the Labour Party, in which Figner participated. She later wrote that she had 'never been part of such a huge popular gathering', estimating the turnout at 15,000.⁶⁴ The archival record likewise suggests a vigorous and well-organised campaign at multiple levels of society that caused the British government significant consternation. Speakers at the aforementioned Tower Hill protest meeting apparently compared the agitation favourably

⁶² 'Meeting to Welcome Vera N. Figner', p. 5.

⁶³ 'The Tsar at Cowes', *The Times* 39029 (4 August 1909), p. 10.

⁶⁴ Figner, *PSS*, pp. 354-355. The police estimated a significantly lower turnout in the region of 6000-7000. See 'The Labour Party and the Tsar', *The Times* 39021 (26 July 1909), p. 5.

with the SFRF's campaigns of the early 1890s.⁶⁵ The Home Office expressed concern about the political implications of the Trafalgar Square rally, and the King's private secretary reported that the campaign was viewed 'with much displeasure' in Buckingham Palace.⁶⁶ Yet one almost gets the opposite impression from Figner's own recollections. She appears to have conducted few public engagements, ultimately spending more time as a tourist than a political agitator and eventually returning to Paris upon concluding that, with the SFRF so diminished and Volkhovskii's health declining, she could achieve little in Britain.⁶⁷ These concerns were of course valid, and again one must account for personal factors. She struggled with her spoken English and found public speaking difficult after her long years of solitary confinement, something that saw her decline to address the Trafalgar Square rally.⁶⁸ Nonetheless, as she herself came close to conceding, the main reason Figner's agitation in Britain failed to get off the ground was her refusal to join forces with another wave of protest then sweeping the country and laced with rhetoric borrowed from the Russian freedom movement: the campaign for women's suffrage.

Less than two weeks after Figner's arrival in Britain, a member of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), Marion Wallace Dunlop, was sentenced to a month in the 'second division', reserved for non-recidivist offenders, at Holloway Prison for stencilling a passage from the 1689 Bill of Rights onto a wall inside the Houses of Parliament. She immediately demanded promotion to the 'first division' – i.e. de facto recognition as a political prisoner – and, when this demand was not met, declared a hunger strike. Fearing widespread civil unrest in the event of her death, Herbert Gladstone, the Home Secretary, sanctioned Wallace Dunlop's early release on 9 July.

⁶⁵ TNA HO 45/10400/180714/12, pp. 7-8.

⁶⁶ TNA HO 45/10400/180714/7, p. 1; TNA HO 45/10400/180714/19, p. 2.

⁶⁷ Figner, *PSS III*, p. 370.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 341, 354.

With the efficacy of the tactic thus demonstrated, a wave of imprisoned WSPU activists followed suit throughout the summer.⁶⁹ As Kevin Grant has shown, the timing of Wallace Dunlop's protest, after which WSPU propaganda heralded the strikers' adoption of the 'Russian method' and likened Asquith's Liberal government to the Russian autocracy, was entirely deliberate *vis a vis* both Figner's visit to Britain and that of the Tsar, for the genealogy of Siberian punishment and protest within which Figner consciously located herself largely supplied the tactical and emotional dynamic that underpinned British suffragists' turn to militancy in the early twentieth century.⁷⁰ Veteran suffragists such as Annie Besant and Emmeline Pankhurst had known many of London's Russian émigrés well and been closely involved with the SFRF from the beginning.⁷¹

It was through this connection in general, and the considerable publicity garnered by the 'Kara tragedy' in particular, that Britain's suffragists first discovered the hunger strike and invested it with ideological significance: one ally of the WSPU, Henry Brailsford, observed in 1909 that Wallace Dunlop had 'adopted the method of protest which Russian political use in a like case'.⁷² They did so for two reasons. Firstly, the original deployment of hunger strikes in Siberian exile during the 1880s had been largely aimed at defending the dignity and status of the political offenders, and this intersected closely with the suffragists' aim of securing their own recognition as such. Secondly, the very fact of the tactic's Russian origin lent it a distinct symbolic significance, since the Russian freedom movement was amongst the most important causes on the British progressive horizon during many suffragists' formative years. Therein, however, lay the problem, for the anodyne portrayal of Russian oppositionists that dominated the SFRF's propaganda had led many suffragists to conclude that the women of the revolutionary

⁶⁹ On this episode see E. Sylvia Pankhurst, *The Suffragette Movement: An Intimate Account of Persons and Ideals* (London: Virago, 1977), pp. 307-311.

⁷⁰ Grant, 'British Suffragettes and the Russian Method of Hunger Strike', pp. 117-124.

⁷¹ Pankhurst, *The Suffragette Movement*, p. 90.

⁷² Brailsford quoted in Grant, 'British Suffragettes and the Russian Method of Hunger Strike', p. 117.

movement closely resembled them and shared their goals. This misconception endured for many years. Sylvia Pankhurst's idealised and semi-fictionalised account of Spiridonova's case, written in response to a series of arrests that followed suffragist protests in the summer of 1906, is an illuminating case in point:

Our comrades [...] were happy and contended to suffer imprisonment for the women's cause. And now it seemed to us as though the spirit of revolt against oppression were flowing onward and spreading, like some great tide to all the womanhood of the world. We read of that wonderful Marie Spiridorovna [sic], the Russian girl who after enduring the most incredible and unspeakable torture, and dying in the agony of her wounds, was yet upborne by the greatness of the cause for which she suffered and cried with her last breath, 'Mother, I die of joy!'⁷³

While in Britain, Figner's legacy was appropriated in a similar way. As befitted the sanitised image she herself sought to cultivate, she was genericised as a freedom fighter, a 'political martyr' and representative of the 'Russian reform movement':⁷⁴ those that claimed her allegiance either ignored (or were simply unaware of) the fact that she was a former terrorist with views some distance from those of most British progressives. It was thus quite understandable that the WSPU should have attempted to enlist her as an ally, and equally understandable that Figner should have refused, although she recognised that this limited her ability to raise funds and publicity for Siberia's exiles.⁷⁵ To some extent, her decision not to associate with the WSPU was a pragmatic one. She evidently valued her relationship with the *Daily News*, which had done much to promote her appearances

⁷³ E. Sylvia Pankhurst, *The Suffragette: The History of the Women's Militant Suffrage Movement, 1905-1910* (Boston: Woman's Journal, 1911), p. 91.

⁷⁴ 'A Martyr's Story', *Daily News* (24 June 1909), p. 5.

⁷⁵ Figner, *PSS* III, p. 376.

in London and would later solicit British donations for her Parisian committee.⁷⁶ This paper, in keeping with much of the liberal public upon which Figner's fundraising efforts depended, was highly critical of the suffragists' turn to militancy and backed the prison authorities' decision in September 1909 to begin forcibly feeding the WSPU's hunger strikers. (The obvious contradiction between this stance and the paper's earlier lionisation of Figner bought charges of hypocrisy upon it from Sylvia Pankhurst and two of its most respected journalists, the aforementioned Brailsford and Henry Nevinson, both of whom resigned on the grounds that 'we cannot denounce torture in Russia and support it in England'.⁷⁷)

Nonetheless, Figner's decision reflected more principled motives too. Primarily, she did not agree with the WSPU's fixation on securing votes for women and disinterest in universal suffrage: it is significant that the one British suffragist with whom Figner did meet was Charlotte Despard of the Women's Freedom League, a more avowedly socialist organisation which had broken with the Pankhursts in 1907 and 'signalled wider visions of freedom than mere enfranchisement'.⁷⁸ She therefore viewed the WSPU's use of Russian revolutionary rhetoric and tactics for their own political ends as illegitimate and, moreover, misguided. When visiting Britain in 1909, Figner had chosen not to publicise the fact that she herself had participated in a hunger strike in Shlissel'burg twenty years earlier⁷⁹ – an important detail, since it affirms that the WSPU sought her out less for the particulars of her own case than the generic political tradition to which, in their eyes, she belonged. Just under three years later, however, she broke her silence. When the WSPU began a second wave of hunger strikes in prisons across Britain in March 1912, Figner sent a then-unpublished passage from *Zapchatlennyi trud* describing her own adoption

⁷⁶ 'Vera Figner's Appeal', *Daily News* (10 March 1910), p. 4.

⁷⁷ Pankhurst, *The Suffragette*, pp. 436-437.

⁷⁸ Hilary Frances, 'Dare To Be Free: The Women's Freedom League and its Legacy' in *Votes For Women*, ed. Jane Purvis and Sandra Stanley Holton (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 183; Figner, *PSS III*, p. 375.

⁷⁹ Hartnett, *The Defiant Life of Vera Figner*, p. 164.

of the tactic to Constance Garnett, who translated it and published it anonymously in the *Manchester Guardian* on 29 March.

In this extract, Figner directly prefaces her experiences in Shlissel'burg with a synopsis of the 'Kara tragedy'. Reiterating the details of Nadezhda Sigida's flogging and suicide, she observes that 'the history of the political prisons in Russia is full of examples of the incessant warfare waged with the prison officials for humane treatment, a warfare that often ended in prisoners being shot or led to such awful tragedies as that at Kara in 1889',⁸⁰ thereby affirming the genealogy of incarceration and protest that was central to both her own public persona and the suffragists' actions. It is this, however, which allows her to reject the suffragists' appropriation of her experiences and those of her comrades. By presenting her own hunger strike as a desperate response to the prison authorities' cruelty, the summary execution of several other inmates and the voluntary self-immolation of another, she highlights the differences between the revolutionary situation in Russia and the constitutional order prevailing in Britain, and reminds her British readers that – contrary to many suffragists' assumptions – there was nothing ideological about the adoption of the tactic. On the contrary, it was a weapon of last resort:

A hunger strike had no chance of success, yet we settled on that form of a general protest as the only one available, and the universal depression of our spirits was in keeping with the plan. Death, attempts at suicide, cases of madness continued to occur. The physical and moral health of the prison was completely shattered [...]. From its very nature, this form of protest is doomed to failure. With the decline of physical strength, the will grows weaker.⁸¹

⁸⁰ 'Prison Strikers: Translated by Mrs Garnett from the Notes of a Russian Prisoner in the Schlüsselburg', *The Manchester Guardian* (29 March 1912), p. 14.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

Figner's encounter with Britain's militant suffragists illustrates the malleability of the Tsarist penal system's image both within and beyond Russia's borders. After her release from prison in 1904, and especially during her years in emigration from 1906 onwards, Figner's self-stylisation as a martyr and the living representative of Russia's political exiles depended upon her ability to obfuscate the factual distinctions between her own case and those for whom she spoke. When she came to Britain, however, it was this very tendency that related her to the Siberian martyrs of the previous generation and attracted the attentions of political activists with whom she did not wish to associate, and of whose methods and motives she disapproved. In 1909, both Figner and the suffragists of the WSPU appeared to trace their descent from Kara, an imagined lineage that should have united them in common cause but which actually placed them at loggerheads. Yet Figner's case, illuminating in some respects, was atypical in others. Free from both prison and the practical and ideological constraints of active revolutionary work, she was free to withhold her blessing from the suffragists that sought it. For other high-profile revolutionaries who remained in prison and exile, overseas publicity represented a far more precious commodity that, for better or worse, they were obliged to use to their own advantage. Such was the case with Ekaterina Breshkovskaia after her return to Siberia in 1910, and it is to her that we finally turn.

6.4. Grandmother of the revolution

During her final Siberian exile term in the years prior to the 1917 revolution, Ekaterina Breshkovskaia became an international celebrity. Having returned to Russia at the outset of the 1905 revolution after a spell in emigration, she spent two years carrying out underground propaganda work for the SRs before Azef betrayed her to the authorities in

December 1907. She was belatedly brought to trial in March 1910, convicted of belonging to an illegal organisation and exiled for life to Kirensk, an isolated hamlet four hundred miles north of Irkutsk. Despite being held behind closed doors, Breshkovskaia's case generated enormous interest around the world, shocking Russian society and attracting unanimous condemnation in the Anglo-American press.⁸² Poems were written in her honour and petitions raised to protest her treatment; one overzealous American even likened her, somewhat confusingly, to Odysseus.⁸³ In the immediate aftermath of her trial and throughout the years that followed, Breshkovskaia's comrades and her overseas supporters – principally the scores of American progressives with whom she was personally acquainted from the time she had spent in the United States – hailed her as the human embodiment of the revolution, framing her Siberian sufferings as the defining theme of her life. After 1910, Russians and Americans could readily agree that Breshkovskaia was the 'little grandmother (*babushka*) of the Russian revolution', a moniker so pervasive that even the Bolshevik leadership were forced to acknowledge it begrudgingly after her return from exile in 1917.⁸⁴ Yet interpretations of what the term signified, and what Breshkovskaia herself represented, differed sharply. For Russian socialists in general and the SR leadership in particular, she was a heroic matriarch whose martyrdom redeemed the dignity and personality of the revolution. For her American devotees, however, the crucial point was Breshkovskaia's supposed civilisational kinship with the United States and the ease with which her Siberian sufferings were repurposed to serve the triumphalist Protestant ethos characteristic of the time. As we shall see, the fact

⁸² For a sense of the coverage received by the trial in Britain and America see 'Great Russian Reformer on Trial', *The Manchester Guardian* (8 March 1910), p. 9; 'The Tchaikovsky Trial', *The Times* 39216 (10 March 1910), p. 5; 'Russian State Trial', *Daily News* (12 February 1910), p. 5 and Alice Stone Blackwell, 'Mme Breshkovskaya', *New York Times* (30 March 1910), p. 10. For a wide selection of Russian and international press reports on the case see IISG ARCH01038/1154.

⁸³ 'Breshkovskaya', *New York Times* (22 March 1910), p. 10.

⁸⁴ Good and Jones, *Babushka*, p. 99.

that she survived her final exile term relatively unscathed owed much to her skilful navigation between these two contradictory narratives.

Breshkovskaia's experiences in prison and exile did not feature prominently in her legend prior to 1910.⁸⁵ An activist by nature, she hated inactivity and was never inclined towards the lengthy deliberations upon the theme of exile common amongst other revolutionaries with greater literary talent. In a conversation with an American journalist in 1904, she had described her years in Selenginsk during the 1880s as the worst of her life, recalling having grown 'frantic with loneliness'.⁸⁶ Yet her latter-day Siberian apotheosis was not as incongruous as this may suggest. Before 1910, Breshkovskaia's *babushka* sobriquet had referenced her reputedly selfless work on behalf of the downtrodden Russian peasantry. After her return to Siberia, both she and her interlocutors worked to perpetuate this image in a slightly modified form, with the *narod* substituted for her fellow exiles as the objects of her maternal devotion. In 1911, one political reported of her arrival in Kirensk that 'the whole of imprisoned and exiled Siberia was waiting to see this miracle woman.'⁸⁷ The following year, Volkhovskii wrote in *Free Russia* that for other exiled revolutionaries in Siberia, she was 'a thousand times more than a mother: she keeps up the spirits of the weak, chastises those who occasionally slip and shows by her steadfastness how a revolutionist ought to behave'.⁸⁸ In a letter written to an American friend around the same time, Breshkovskaia herself struck a similar note:

⁸⁵ It is probably not coincidental that out of Breshkovskaia's many fragmentary attempts at autobiography, her time in Siberia only receives extended discussion in *Hidden Springs of the Russian Revolution*, her final and most comprehensive effort published in emigration shortly before her death. Even in *Hidden Springs*, however, the discussion is quite perfunctory. Breshkovskaia was forced to leave the manuscript behind while fleeing Russia in 1918 and did not recover it until 1920, by which point she had revised her views on autobiographical writing and adopted a more thematic style. As such, *Hidden Springs* only covers Breshkovskaia's life as such up to 1881 and her Kara *katorga* term. An exhaustive list of her numerous autobiographical sketches and lengthier attempts at memoir can be found in Good and Jones, *Babushka*, pp. 239-240.

⁸⁶ Blackwell, *Little Grandmother of the Russian Revolution*, p. 100.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 146-147.

⁸⁸ 'Madame Breshkovskaya in Exile', *FR* (January 1912), p. 2.

The number of good and honest people that constitute the majority among our exiles have made a favourable impression on the population, and the inhabitants are not able to distinguish a true political from a false one. Hundreds of such are here, too, for the government throws in one heap with people struggling for the right many unworthy people who have had no share in any honest activity. So our enemies are spoiling the reputation of the whole mass of politicals [...] One cannot be severe enough in such a position as ours. If anyone wishes to preserve his human dignity and his calling of a struggler for the right, he must be an example to the rest of the population in all his concerns, in his exterior as in his interior life. And here [in Siberia] - where no other means exist to prevent degeneration but self control and the public opinion of our comrades - here we must be stronger in our principles than elsewhere.⁸⁹

Breshkovskaia's matriarchal self-stylisation neatly intersected with the priorities of the SR leadership, which was keen, in the aftermath of the Azef affair, to propagandise her case (like Sozonov's) as a moral victory over the autocracy. In keeping with the best traditions of revolutionary populism, the party argued, she had turned both the courtroom and Siberia itself into battlegrounds, successfully contesting the legitimacy of the state that persecuted her. In an interview with the émigré newspaper *Parizhskii listok*, Chernov suggested that Breshkovskaia's conviction had restored a degree of moral equilibrium and purpose to the revolutionary cause after the previous year's catastrophe. 'Under current circumstances', he opined, 'it is hardly surprising that a tragedy such as judicial violence against an elderly woman emerges, by virtue of its very resonance with public life, as a

⁸⁹ Breshkovskaia to Alice Stone Blackwell, March 14-27 1912, *Little Grandmother of the Russian Revolution*, pp. 222-223.

positive fact.’⁹⁰ Many shared this analysis. A group of SR-aligned émigrés in Paris declared Breshkovskaia’s trial a ‘day of socialist ideals and revolutionary principles’, writing that she had faced down a ‘kangaroo court (*sudebnaia komediia*)’ and thereby forced Russian society to ‘bow to the moral purity and willpower of those who truly deserve the name of revolutionaries’.⁹¹ Party newspapers echoed this sentiment, describing Breshkovskaia as the human embodiment of the revolutionary spirit:

On February 23rd, the Russian autocracy began court proceedings against the Russian revolution. It has done so before, but bit by bit (*po chastiam*), against one part or another of the revolutionary cause. Yet now it has prosecuted the revolution all at once, in one person, for the fact that she is the revolution, for all the defeats she has inflicted upon the autocracy and its kulak allies, and for the victory over autocracy which will come sooner or later [...] They have prosecuted Ekaterina Konstantinovna Breshkovskaia, the ‘grandmother’ of the Russian revolution.⁹²

Such invocations of Breshkovskaia’s defiant courage refocused attention on her earlier years in prison and exile, which now appeared her principal contribution to the revolutionary struggle: if, as Chernov put it, she represented the ‘constant embodiment of our challenge to the existing order’,⁹³ she evidently remained such in captivity as well as freedom. In Kara and Selenginsk, one SR newspaper wrote, she had ‘never once retreated before the guards, defending her comrades and enduring everything through her mighty

⁹⁰ ‘O Ekaterine Konstantinovne Breshkovskoi’, *Parizhskii listok* 3 (26 March 1910), p. 3.

⁹¹ ‘Privetstvie tovarishchu’, n/d, IISG ARCH01038/1154.

⁹² ‘Babushka russkoi revoliutsii’, *Za narod! Izdanie tsentral'nogo komiteta partii sotsialistov-revoliutsionerov* 27 (March 1910), p. 1.

⁹³ ‘O Ekaterine Konstantinovne Breshkovskoi’, p. 3.

will'.⁹⁴ On her 70th birthday in January 1914, Burtsev paid tribute to her, writing that despite being 'surrounded by spies and sentries, torn apart from her friends and comrades in the struggle, but with faith in the righteousness of her task and our coming victory', she had always represented 'that which always and everywhere, but especially right now in Russia, is vital for the revolutionary struggle'.⁹⁵ On the same occasion, the permanent SR representative at the Second International, Il'ia Rubanovich, reflected upon her participation in the *bol'shoi protsess* of 1878. Despite previous treatments of the trial in party literature having tended to focus on Breshkovskaia's coinage of the term 'socialist revolutionary party' in a throwaway remark to the court,⁹⁶ it was now her role as a revolutionary martyr that took precedence:

Which of you does not know of the legendary trial of the hundred and ninety-three, in which Breshkovskaia played a leading role? Which of you does not know the famous testament signed by Breshkovskaia and her comrades on the eve of their departure for hard labour and exile? [...] For her comrades in prison and exile, Breshkovskaia was a shining example of inexorable strength and indefatigable energy. She spent two decades of her life in exile for the motherland, reconciling herself to her new circumstances with exemplary energy.⁹⁷

After 1910, the sanctification of Breshkovskaia in émigré newspapers and SR proclamations ran in parallel to the international outcry generated by her case, and to some extent influenced it. News of her generally reached Europe and the United States

⁹⁴ 'Babushka russkoi revoliutsii', p. 2.

⁹⁵ V. L. Burtsev to I. A. Rubanovich, n/d, IISG ARCH01038/585.

⁹⁶ Good & Jones, *Babushka*, pp. 60-62. See also 'Primechaniia E. K. Breshkovskoi', IISG ARCH01038/188, pp. 1-3 for Breshkovskaia's own recollections of the trial as circulated privately amongst senior party members in 1903.

⁹⁷ I. A. Rubanovich to the SR central committee, n/d, IISG ARCH01038/584.

through émigré contacts: Volkhovskii provided British readers with regular updates on her whereabouts and wellbeing in the pages of *Free Russia*, while Figner and Egor Lazarev did the same for continental and American audiences respectively.⁹⁸ Nonetheless, as may be judged from *Free Russia*'s lament that 'such a brilliant, cultivated woman should be driven into exile because she loved her land and longed to set it free', much was lost in translation.⁹⁹ As was traditional by this point, international support for Breshkovskaia depicted her in simplistic moral terms and genericised her as a fighter for freedom and democracy; those who agitated on her behalf did so primarily because she seemed to validate their own political and ideological convictions. This was of course also true of Figner's experiences in Britain the previous year, but where Figner had resisted efforts to appropriate her legacy, Breshkovskaia readily perceived the practical advantages and enthusiastically acquiesced.

This was less evident in Britain than in the United States, where Breshkovskaia was far better known and commanded greater public sympathy. Her veneration in American progressive circles dated from the winter of 1904-1905, during which she had undertaken a fundraising tour of the major East Coast cities at the behest of the SR leadership. This visit was essentially a speculative attempt to dissuade American financiers from backing the Russian war effort with Japan and to raise money sufficient for a shipment of arms to the *boevaia organizatsiia*, something of which her eminently respectable American associates remained blissfully unaware. The party hoped to exploit anti-Russian sentiment amongst the American public by sending a high-profile emissary, and Breshkovskaia, with her sympathetic image and name familiar to American audiences

⁹⁸ See, for instance, 'The Grandmother of the Russian Revolution', *FR* (April 1910), pp. 1-4 and 'News of Katherine Breshkovsky', *FR* (October 1910), pp. 4-5. See also Lazarev, 'Dzhordzh Kennan' III, p. 18 and Figner, *PSS* III, p. 395.

⁹⁹ 'News of Katherine Breshkovsky', p. 5.

from Kennan's lectures a decade earlier, was the obvious choice.¹⁰⁰ Her public appearances were organised by the hitherto-dormant American branch of the SFRF, and thus unsurprisingly followed the pattern previously set by Kennan, who appeared on stage with her on several occasions: her speeches focused predominantly on her experiences in Siberia, glossed over the theoretical and practical distinctions between the various parties, and generally painted all Russian revolutionaries in the same anodyne, Americanised colours that Kennan had favoured.¹⁰¹

This fact was just as important to Breshkovskaia's success in the United States as the fortuitous timing of her visit, for although news of the Bloody Sunday massacre in January 1905 considerably increased her lectures' takings, she had been revered by Americans in semi-sacralised terms for weeks beforehand. Speaking in Philadelphia, she dutifully broke down in tears at one clergyman's tremulous proclamation that Russia would eventually have a Liberty Bell of its own, while the resolution adopted after her speech at Boston's Faneuil Hall honoured 'the enlightened Russians who are sustaining [...] the self-same struggle for liberty and human rights which made our republic possible'.¹⁰² In an interview with the journalist Ernest Poole, she reduced the SRs' political aims to the following bromide:

In this last year the movement has suddenly swelled. Already four hundred thousand strong! Day and night they work: in place of sleep and food and drink – the dream of freedom! Freedom to think and speak! Freedom to work! Justice to

¹⁰⁰ Good and Jones, *Babushka*, pp. 78-90 and Chatterjee, 'Imperial Incarcerations', pp. 855-857.

¹⁰¹ After news of Bloody Sunday broke in America at the end of January, she replaced her practiced speech (which was primarily about her experiences in prison and exile) with a new one attempting to explain the unfolding revolutionary situation. See IISG ARCH01038/687-705 for an extensive collection of documents pertaining to Breshkovskaia's tour, including drafts of a number of these speeches.

¹⁰² Press clipping entitled 'Kiss for a Clergyman', IISG ARCH01038/701; Good and Jones, *Babushka*, p. 86.

all! For this cause I shall travel three months in your free country. For this cause, I have the honor of making to free Americans our appeal.¹⁰³

For Americans, Breshkovskaia's apparent deference to their values was as infectious as her stoical heroism. She was mobbed in public and found herself the toast of educated society. Schoolgirls hung her portrait on their dormitory walls, and her example inspired a number of wealthy young men (the self-styled 'gentlemen socialists') to renounce their worldly possessions and travel to Russia in the service of the *narod*.¹⁰⁴ In an article for *Free Russia* written a year after Breshkovskaia's departure, her friend Alice Stone Blackwell credited her with single-handedly reviving the Russian freedom movement across the United States.¹⁰⁵ The impact she made in America is not difficult to explain. It was no coincidence that Breshkovskaia's most prominent supporters in the United States, including the missionary and prison reformer Isabel C. Barrows and Julia Ward Howe, the composer of the Battle Hymn of the Republic, were both abolitionists and suffragists. She unfailingly emphasised her maternal devotion to the Russian peasantry – 'degraded slaves' whom she 'longed to see free'¹⁰⁶ – and thus created an alter ego that neatly intersected Victorian gender norms, the abolitionist temperament and the enlightened Protestantism which substantially defined the worldview of *fin de siècle* American progressivism.¹⁰⁷

This sanitised image of Breshkovskaia proved remarkably enduring, and shaped the American response to her trial and exile in 1910. Public meetings were held to raise

¹⁰³ Ernest Poole, *Katherine Breshkovsky: For Russia's Freedom* (Chicago: Kerr & Co., 1905), p. 29.

¹⁰⁴ For accounts of the 'gentleman socialists' see Jane E. Good, 'Strangers in a Strange Land: Five Russian Radicals Visit the United States' (unpublished PhD thesis, American University, 1979) and Foglesong, *The American Mission and the Evil Empire*, pp. 38-43.

¹⁰⁵ Alice Stone Blackwell, 'The Friends of Russian Freedom in America', *FR* 17.1 (April 1906), p. 10.

¹⁰⁶ Poole, *For Russia's Freedom*, p. 5.

¹⁰⁷ Her reputation in Britain, while not of the same order as her American celebrities, was similar in nature: upon her return to Siberia in 1910, 'Mme Breshkovsky', *The Manchester Guardian* (14 March 1890), p. 5 referred to her as merely an 'eminent social reformer' who had selflessly devoted 'the whole of a long life to agitation amongst the Russian peasantry'.

awareness of her situation, and Stolypin received not only petitions from New York, Chicago, Boston and Philadelphia but a telegram from several members of Congress and justices of the Supreme Court demanding that Breshkovskaia receive a fair trial.¹⁰⁸ Those that protested her return to Siberia again highlighted the contrast between her refined character and the barbarous Asiatic surroundings in which she would, it was assumed, be forced to live out her remaining days: Blackwell wrote that she was headed for ‘some remote place under the Arctic Circle inhabited by only a few degraded savages’, and the *New York Times* complained that Nizhniikolymk (where reports later suggested the authorities planned to resettle her) had ‘practically no white inhabitants except the scattered officials’.¹⁰⁹ The vivid contrast between her saintly persona and the Siberian horrors to which she had been condemned produced, amongst other things, a large amount of dubious poetry dedicated to her, of which the following is fairly representative:

Thou whose sunny heart outglows
 Arctic snows;
 Russia’s hearth-fire, cherishing
 Courage almost perished;
 Torch that beacons oversea
 Till a world is at thy knee
 Babushka the beloved!
 What Czar can exile thee?¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ ‘Tchaykovsky Freed, Woman to be Exiled’, *New York Times* (10 March 1910), p. 6.

¹⁰⁹ Alice Stone Blackwell, ‘Russian Prisoners’, *New York Times* (23 September 1910), p. 12; ‘Mme Breshkovsky’s Exile’, *New York Times* (7 July 1914), p. 8.

¹¹⁰ Blackwell, *Little Grandmother of the Russian Revolution*, p. 336. Numerous other examples can be found in IISG ARCH01038/701.

During her final years in Siberia, Breshkovskaia's saintly reputation amongst Americans paid undoubted dividends. For one thing, she was largely sustained by material support from the United States. Lazarev, her principal émigré amanuensis, later reported that he was able to forward her no less than one hundred rubles every month from her arrival in Kirensk in 1911 until her release in February 1917.¹¹¹ In March 1913, Breshkovskaia herself wrote that the post never failed to bring her something from the United States, usually clothes or reading material.¹¹² For another, there is some evidence, albeit inconclusive, that the intercession of American public opinion saved her from a far worse fate halfway through her exile term. It was occasionally suggested that the Russian government's disinclination to upset relations with the United States occasioned the relative leniency of the sentence handed down to Breshkovskaia in 1910 (she was exiled to settlement, evading the *katorga* term which was widely anticipated and would probably have killed her).¹¹³ Given the widely-reported flaws in the prosecution's case, this is unlikely.¹¹⁴ It is, however, a more plausible explanation for the indecisive response of the authorities to her foiled escape attempt three years later. On 18 November 1913, Breshkovskaia fled Kirensk in disguise, only to be recaptured five days hence. She spent the two years that followed in the Aleksandrovskaiia prison while the MVD and Third Section debated what to do with her.¹¹⁵ It was eventually announced that she would be resettled to Bulun', a tiny village beyond the Arctic Circle in the far north of Iakutsk province. In the event, however, she only made it as far as Iakutsk itself before her transportation order was rescinded. She was returned south to the more hospitable climes

¹¹¹ Lazarev, 'Dzhordzh Kennan', p. 18. Lazarev had visited Breshkovskaia in prison shortly before her departure for Siberia in 1910: see *idem.*, *Moia zhizn': vospominaniia, stat'i, pis'ma, materialy* (Prague: Tipografiia legiografiia, 1935), pp. 165-166.

¹¹² Blackwell, *Little Grandmother of the Russian Revolution*, p. 256.

¹¹³ 'Russia Sees the Light', *Washington Post* (12 March 1910), p. 6.

¹¹⁴ 'The Trial of M. Tchaikovsky', *The Times* 39215 (9 March 1910), p. 5 reported that the first of the prosecution's witnesses failed to appear in court, while the second was revealed under cross-examination to be a convicted murder.

¹¹⁵ Blackwell, *Little Grandmother of the Russian Revolution*, pp. 276-277.

of Minusinsk, where she remained until the collapse of autocratic rule in February 1917.¹¹⁶

At the time, it was widely assumed that Aleksandr Kerenskii, who had met Breshkovskaia in 1912 and had petitioned on her behalf after her recapture, was responsible for the government's climbdown. Some years later, however, Lazarev offered a different explanation. Upon receiving news of Breshkovskaia's imminent departure for Bulun', he had written to all her influential American friends and promptly raised an agitation that reached members of Congress. This done, he asked the Americans to delay petitioning the Russian government and wrote to Breshkovskaia stressing that he did not really believe she would be sent to Bulun', knowing that their correspondence would be intercepted and read by the Third Section. In essence, he claimed that he had orchestrated the public response in such a way as allowed the authorities to back down without losing face.¹¹⁷ Lazarev's version of events is supported by correspondence published by Blackwell in 1918, and is more convincing anyway: after the outbreak of war with Germany the previous year, the autocracy was probably more concerned with pacifying its American creditors than they were Kerenskii, who was still a relatively junior figure at the time.¹¹⁸ It is certainly true that rumours of her resettlement to the Far North provoked considerable anger in the United States. Further petitions were raised, and the journalist Arthur Bullard – a friend of Breshkovskaia's, and formerly one of her 'gentleman socialist' disciples – opined in the *New York Times* that it seemed 'a gratuitous cruelty to send this noble old patriot to such certain and lonely death'. The *Boston Daily Globe* informed readers that Breshkovskaia was bound for 'the end of the world'.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ 'Attempted Escape from Siberia', *The Times* 40391 (10 December 1913), p. 8.

¹¹⁷ Lazarev, 'Dzhordzh Kennan', pp. 17-19.

¹¹⁸ See Blackwell, *Little Grandmother of the Russian Revolution*, pp. 290-291 for the correspondence in question.

¹¹⁹ Arthur Bullard, 'Mme Breshkovsky's Exile', *New York Times* (7 July 1914), p. 8; 'Mme Breshkovskaya to be Sent to the End of the World', *Boston Daily Globe* (23 August 1915), p. 9.

This outpouring of public sentiment attests to the skill with which Breshkovskaia maintained her ties to the United States during her final years in exile. Her numerous letters written to friends there overflowed with flattering references to American freedom and democracy, contained frequent reflections on the American national character and lavished particular praise on American women, whom she believed to excel in ‘energy, will, sincerity and stability’.¹²⁰ In 1911, she wrote to one correspondent that ‘I have my family in the United States of America [...] and I look upon all your homes as my own’; to another, she confided that ‘North America is my second *patrie*. I have often said that the United States is the country I would choose to inhabit after my own great and poor country.’¹²¹ Throughout Breshkovskaia’s final years in Siberia, and particularly in the eighteen months in Irkutsk during which her fate hung in the balance, a very great deal of this correspondence was published in the major American newspapers courtesy of interlocutors such as Blackwell, Isabel Barrows and George Kennan, who reported regularly on her case for the influential periodical *Outlook*.¹²² Such contacts provided a means for Breshkovskaia to maintain the ties of emotional and civilisational kinship she had earlier established with the United States, and, it is fair to assume, played an important role in prolonging public interest in her case.

Siberian exile thus represented the common denominator in Breshkovskaia’s emergence as a transnational figure, the ‘grandmother of the revolution’ lionised by both Russian socialists and American progressives with a superficially similar rhetoric that signified completely different things to each. After 1910, from the Russian perspective, Siberia – in keeping with tradition – provided the setting for Breshkovskaia’s proud

¹²⁰ Blackwell, *Little Grandmother of the Russian Revolution*, p. 250.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 164-166.

¹²² See, for example, the references to Isabel Barrows and Alice Stone Blackwell in ‘Russian Exile’s Escape Fails’, *New York Tribune* (10 December 1913), p. 3; ‘To Penal Colony in the Far North’, *Boston Daily Globe* (30 June 1914), p. 16; ‘Noted Woman Exile May be Sent to Arctic’, *New York Times* (15 August 1915), p. 6.

forbearance in the face of government persecution and, as the excesses of SR propaganda had it, for her victories over the autocracy. Breshkovskaia's image, at least, conformed to the behavioural text dictated equally by the exigencies of the revolutionary struggle and by the historical precedent of her forebears in political exile. At the same time, the centrality of Siberian exile to her public persona proved critical to the way in which she simultaneously conformed to Americans' expectations of her. It was, after all, via Kennan's exposé of the exile system that many Americans had originally grown accustomed to the idealistic, self-referential notion that Russia's revolutionaries actually resembled them closely, and it was Breshkovskaia, more than anybody else, who had fulfilled their expectations in this respect. Her legendary sufferings in Siberia underpinned her complex personal mythology and lent coherence to the maternal honorific by which she was hailed all the way from Minusinsk to Petrograd in March 1917, returning from exile as the internationally-recognised symbol of her revolution's fleeting victory.¹²³

6.5. Conclusion

During the final years of autocratic rule in Russia, the rhetoric of Siberian punishment and protest remained central not only to the moral economy of the revolutionary movement, but to how the international public interpreted, sympathised with and responded to the revolution. Both within and beyond Russia's borders, Siberia continued to provide a durable symbol of autocratic misrule and the self-sacrificial nobility of the radical opposition. Nonetheless, the publicity, sympathy and material support Russia's revolutionaries gained from the transnationalisation of Siberia's carceral mythology must

¹²³ 'Mme Breshkovskaya is Called from Exile', *New York Times* (18 March 1917), p. 2.

be offset against the extent to which it obfuscated the real issues involved. After 1905, as our discussion of Sozonov's case reveals, the radical intelligentsia's traditional Siberian text was rewritten and revised by way of response to an ongoing moral and political crisis: imagined once more as a stage for the performance of heroic deeds and a battleground upon which to confront the autocracy, Siberia yielded a new generation of revolutionary heroes. On the international stage, however, such native meanings were indicted and subverted not only by the tendency of foreign audiences to inscribe the *tabula rasa* of the Siberian martyr-hero with their own texts, but the tendency of revolutionary celebrities to facilitate their doing so. For several decades, successive generations of émigré propagandists exploited both the rhetorical overlap between their own Siberian text and the literary tropes beloved of the Anglo-American public and the simplistic juxtaposition of heroic political exiles with a cruel and arbitrary penal system to cast the Russian revolution in conveniently simplistic moral terms for the benefit of sympathetic foreigners. When the autocracy collapsed in 1917, the onus was suddenly on the revolution to conform to the homogenous, moderate image in which many in the West had long sincerely believed. This, of course, it singularly failed to do.

7. Conclusion

What to [the revolutionary] are Siberia, exile, death? Full of his sublime idea, clear, splendid, vivifying as the midday sun, he defies suffering, and would meet death with a glance of enthusiasm and a smile of happiness.

– `Sergei Stepniak-Kravchinskii¹

This thesis has examined the role played by representations of political exile to Siberia in international responses to the Russian revolutionary movement during the decades prior to 1917 and, by extension, the origins of Siberia's modern image as a vast carceral space metonymous with notions of Russian despotism. It is not only the first attempt at a cultural history of Siberian exile, but the first study to relate Siberia's carceral mythology to the broader transnational mythology of Russia's radical intelligentsia and, moreover, the first to illuminate the ways in which these myths allowed for the construction and contestation of Russia's image on the international stage.

The two central arguments may be briefly reprised as follows. Firstly, we have seen that Siberia's carceral mythology was neither purely Russian in origin nor an exclusively Anglo-American invention, but rather a joint enterprise with roots in both the heroic paradigm that dominated revolutionary culture and the foundational narratives of the free and democratic West. Propagated through the efforts of Russian revolutionaries and a diverse array of Anglo-American sympathisers, the motif of Siberian exile circulated freely across borders, languages and cultures during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the process, it provided many with a compelling means of

¹ Stepniak, *Underground Russia*, p. 12.

thinking about the revolutionary struggle, Russia's place in the world and – to some extent – themselves. Secondly, however, we have seen that this process actually exposed serious tensions and contradictions in how the revolutionary struggle was perceived within and beyond Russia's borders. As the motif migrated from its roots in Russian folk memory to the culture of the revolutionary movement and, from there, to the international stage, it transnationalised the revolution in the guise of an attractively simple and universally-comprehensible literary trope: exile as the liminal stage of the heroic protagonist's journey. Rewritten and revised by Siberian escapees, émigrés, Western journalists, writers and travellers, the revolutionary movement's exilic plotlines not infrequently led to strikingly different conclusions. In sum, this thesis has demonstrated that representations of Siberian exile were central not only to how Russians and Westerners alike understood the revolution, but to how they misunderstood one another.

Chapter 2 demonstrated that literary representations of Siberian exile played a crucial role in fashioning the self-image of the Russian revolutionary movement throughout the nineteenth century. Having been depicted in Russian culture as a liminal zone combining elements of heaven and hell – both a place of exile and punishment and a land of freedom and rebirth, at once separate from and an integral part of Russia – from the early modern period onwards, Siberia was easily repurposed by radical writers and publicists as a versatile motif for the revolutionary struggle. The region's literary terrain was first mapped by the exiled Decembrists of 1826 and, by extension, Aleksandr Pushkin. In the conspirators' memoirs and poetry, Siberia served not only as a stage for rebellion and the performance of heroic deeds, juxtaposing the nobility of the political rebel with the cruelty of the autocratic state, but as a *tabula rasa*, a transformative frontier and a second United States. These two tropes together constituted an essentially coherent behavioural text to which many of the Decembrists' heirs conformed. Despite never

having seen Siberia, Aleksandr Gertsen both utilised the rhetoric of exile to illustrate his own revolutionary development in his memoirs and, as a publicist, envisaged the region as a fountain of historical youth – a preoccupation shared by his contemporary Mikhail Bakunin, for whom Siberia represented the staging post of a chimerical Panslavic revolution. Later texts, including the 1861 edition of the Archpriest Avvakum's *Zhitie* and Nikolai Nekrasov's 'Russkie zhenshchiny', modified this bifurcated image. The Siberian topos became sacralised, with its legendary inhabitants envisaged as, or rewritten in the image of, the revolutionary youth of the 1870s. In short, Siberia provided Russia's radical intelligentsia with a mirror on the self that both encapsulated the righteousness of their cause and accommodated their visions of the nation's post-autocratic future.

As we saw in Chapter 3, many of these tropes were equally present in contemporary Anglo-American discourse about Russia, but were deployed to rather different ends. Although Western journalists and travellers likewise found the pervasive imagery of prisons, chains and the knout a convenient shorthand for the evils of the Russian autocracy, their immediate object was less to legitimise the revolutionary struggle – of which, for many years, little was known – than to assign Russia its correct place in their own hierarchy of civilisation. Throughout the nineteenth century, polemics over Siberian exile served as proxies for a much broader debate on Russia's status as a European (or non-European) nation, and thereby served the foundational narratives of the liberal, democratic West. Yet while this international iteration of Siberia's carceral image was – at least discursively – distinct from its Russian counterpart, the two attained a superficial similarity through the literary medium, since the region's name became a byword for Russia's oppressiveness and backwardness amongst the Anglo-American public primarily through the appropriation and polemical redeployment of fictional material. The romantic topos created by Mme Cottin's *Elisabeth; ou, Les Exilés de*

Sibérie and subsequently populated by exiled Polish patriots blurred the line between the mythology and realities of the exile system. While Siberian texts such as Dostoevskii's *Zapiski iz mertvogo doma* and the early parts of Gertsen's *Byloe i dumy* – unwittingly received as documentary works and tested for factual veracity – lost much of their literariness in English translation, that same literariness came nonetheless to dominate most Anglophone readers' understanding of the topic. Siberia was reduced to a vast snowbound tundra populated by political exiles whose nobility and heroism was underscored by their wild surroundings and brutal gaolers. From the 1880s onwards, as political émigrés such as Kravchinskii and Kropotkin began to couch their own Siberian text in the sentimentalist language familiar to the Anglophone public, the idealised figure of the revolutionary martyr – no longer typically a Polish insurgent, but rather a Russian *narodnik* – began to play the leading role in Westerners' efforts to include Russia within and exclude it from the ambit of the civilised world.

In the late 1880s, Russian émigrés in London – with no little help from George Kennan – began to devote significant effort to publicising dramatic tales of political exiles' mistreatment in Siberian captivity as a means of appealing to overseas public opinion and securing material support for their cause. As Chapter 4 argued, the émigré-led campaigns of the late nineteenth century reveal, first and foremost, the extent to which the rhetoric of Siberian punishment and protest elided the differences between Russian perspectives on the revolutionary struggle and how it was interpreted abroad. The clearest case in point is that of Kennan, whose journalistic exposés were written from the perspective of an American liberal and primarily intended for an Anglo-American audience but, once translated into Russian, rapidly became part of the revolutionary movement's prison-writing canon as well. Despite the fact that Kennan's perspective on the revolutionary situation in Russia was by any standard extremely reductive – and,

moreover, intended less to shed light on the issues at stake than to flatter his American readership and reassure them of the universal applicability of classical liberal democracy – the way in which he unwittingly adhered to the generic conventions of his Russian associates’ Siberian text ensured the enduring success of his essays in underground circles.

Upon his return to Siberia in 1885, Kennan quickly abandoned his former sympathy for the Tsarist state. In his subsequent exposé of the exile system, he humanised his heroic ‘nihilistic’ protagonists against the familiar backdrop of an inhospitable environment and a brutal penal regime, producing an account that was more literary than documentary in character and thus readily comprehensible to his Russian and Western readers alike. Together with news of the 1889 Yakutsk and Kara massacres, Kennan’s investigations produced an international sensation and, in effect, transnationalised the revolutionary struggle. As banished revolutionaries such as Volkhovskii, Burtsev and Lazarev escaped from Siberia to Europe and America to participate in the SFRF’s campaigns, they brought with them the literary paraphernalia of prison and exile. In the years of the SFRF’s first agitation against the exile system, these émigrés and their Western allies appropriated and repurposed one other’s Siberian texts to serve their own political and ideological priorities. Americans projected themselves upon the figure of the exiled revolutionary martyr; Britons adopted the Siberian question as a rule for the debates over Irish home rule; Russians deployed Kennan’s journalism as a justification of political violence. The mistreatment of political exiles in Siberia became an international *cause célèbre*, but it also reduced the revolutionary struggle to a Manichaean contest between the forces of light and darkness, eliding many of the concrete political and ideological differences between Russia’s radical intelligentsia and their Western sympathisers. As the agitators of the early 1890s depicted Russia’s revolutionaries as

anodyne fighters for freedom and justice, so many Anglo-American progressives came to associate the revolution with their own universal civilising mission and the Russian people with the downtrodden of the earth. The ‘liberation movement’ (*osvoboditel'noe dvizhenie*) to which Russia's revolutionaries themselves often referred could be mistaken for an extension of the European colonial project.

Such misapprehensions, as we saw in Chapter 6, came to the fore in the final decade of the revolutionary struggle. The mass politics, extreme violence and widespread repressions of the years 1905-1907 blurred the moral profile of the platonic revolutionary ideal, thus investing the traditional figure of the Siberian martyr with a renewed significance in the eyes of many amongst the radical intelligentsia. By lionising the defiance and heroism of political exiles such as Egor Sozonov and Ekaterina Breshkovskaia, revolutionary propagandists not only proclaimed the autocracy's defeat on the Siberian battleground but associated their protagonists with the heroic Siberian text bequeathed by the Decembrists and their epigones, thereby attempting to restore a degree of moral equilibrium to their cause. Yet the new generation of revolutionary heroes that emerged from Siberia were considerably more ambiguous figures than their nineteenth-century predecessors, and this became clear when their cases were publicised overseas. As iconic figures such as Breshkovskaia and Vera Figner became political celebrities on the basis of their sufferings in prison and exile, they were obliged to conform not only to the expectations of their fellow revolutionaries but to those of their Anglo-American devotees; recast in terms dictated by Victorian gender norms and the enlightened Protestant temperament, both Figner and Breshkovskaia were presented to the international public as moderate liberals and advocates for constitutional reform. The variations in how each responded to this process – Figner, at liberty and effectively retired from the revolutionary movement, rebuffed the attempts of British suffragists to

coopt her legacy, while Breshkovskaia actively participated in shaping her American alter ego – reveal much about not only the international appeal, but the distinct ambivalence, of the modern Russian oppositionist.

Siberia was neither the only recurrent trope of revolutionary culture, nor the only image that came to mind when Western progressives contemplated Russia from afar. Nevertheless, it provided a measure of common ground between the two. To borrow Lynn Ellen Patyk's description of Kravchinskii's dramatised 'Underground Russia', the region emerged as 'a new topos in the European imagination, suspended between Western ideas of political liberty and eastern despotism'.² A liminal zone populated by equally liminal figures, Siberian exile served as an extended metaphor for the radical intelligentsia's isolation from both the state and *narod* and from East and West, and thereby became a metaphor for the Russian revolution as a whole. Many of the key progenitors of the heroic paradigm that defined the revolutionary movement's mythmaking – Gertsen, the self-styled heir to the Decembrists; Kravchinskii, one of the first revolutionary terrorists and the author of *Underground Russia*, arguably the revolution's most important heroic text; Figner and Breshkovskaia, who between them did as much to codify the ideals of feminine self-sacrifice and devotion to the cause as the Decembrist wives – proactively transnationalised not only Siberia's foreboding reputation, but their own mythologies and those of their comrades. Indeed, the fact that several of them managed to do this without actually having been exiled to Siberia themselves merely demonstrates the extent to which the region had become metonymous with the revolutionary struggle and the purported evils of the Russian autocracy in general by the late nineteenth century.

² Patyk, 'Remembering the Terrorism', p. 777.

By virtue of feats accomplished on Siberia's literary terrain, high-profile Russian revolutionaries were transformed into international celebrities, and the vaunted heroism of the radical intelligentsia became an object of international fascination. Yet by accepting the latter at face value, many in the West became familiar not with the revolutionary movement as it actually was – a disparate collection of parties and ideological tendencies with distinct and, from an Anglo-American liberal perspective, occasionally unpalatable aims – but rather with its idealised double. Marina Mogil'ner has argued that the defining feature of the revolutionary movement's mythmaking was its 'exaggerated literariness' (*utirovannaia literaturnost'*), symptomatic of an exercise in literary self-fashioning designed both to promote internal coherence and banish the superfluous demons of the early nineteenth century.³ The resultant plotline, once transnationalised, proved irresistible to Victorian moral sensibilities. Yet it also problematised, in the eyes of many, the identity and historical role of the radical intelligentsia, which – much like Siberia itself – was neither self-evidently part of Russia nor entirely separable from it. Despite the attempts of revolutionary émigrés to cast themselves as respectable cosmopolitan liberals for the benefit of their overseas admirers, the aura of remoteness and exoticism commanded by the 'Russian nihilist' endured. In this sense, the mystique of the revolutionary movement and the repeated invocation of Siberia as both the heart of darkness and a utopian projection of Russia's future were mutually reinforcing tropes. If many Westerners assumed Siberia to be inhabited almost entirely by exiled revolutionaries, as was often charged, one reason for this was surely that the former seemed to represent the latter's natural habitat.

Much of this, of course, is instructive for our own time. At the risk of perpetuating a cliché, little has changed for the Russian intelligentsia in the intervening century: still

³ Mogil'ner, *Mifologiiia podpol'nogo cheloveka*, pp. 6-7.

isolated from the state and people in equal measure, it continues to find solace in dreaming of its historical mission and in literary self-fashioning. It is unlikely to be coincidental that many of the nineteenth-century revolutionaries continue to provide inspiration for today's Russian oppositionists. The striking similarities between the public images cultivated by the women of *Narodnaia volia* and by modern-day Russian feminists have attracted scholarly attention, while one historian has recently opined that 'there is not a single person in Russia who, considering themselves an intellectual, has not heard of the Decembrists'.⁴ This heroic mythology likewise continues to resonate internationally, for the simple reason that courting Western opinion continues to provide many prominent Russian dissidents with a means of maintaining a public profile and securing material and financial support generally denied them at home. With the widespread penal atrocities of the Soviet era having ensured that the themes of prison, exile and political repression continue to loom large in Western imaginings about Russia, such figures as Mikhail Khodorkovskii and Pussy Riot continue to publicise stories of suffering and resistance in prisons and penal colonies on the international stage. Their overseas supporters, in turn, continue to respond accordingly, often in ways strikingly similar to those discussed in this thesis. Indeed, the extent to which Siberia in particular remains synonymous with political dissidence in Russia in the eyes of many Westerners was highlighted as recently as 2012 when various British and American newspapers reported that members of Pussy Riot, who in reality were imprisoned in Mordoviia and Nizhnii Novgorod, had been sent to the region's 'gulags'.⁵

⁴ O. I. Kiianskaia, 'Nos amis de quatorze, ili Dekabristovedenie i dekabristovedy XXI veka' in *Dekabristy: Aktual'nye problemy i novye podkhody*, ed. O. I. Kiianskaia (Moscow: RGGU, 2008), p. 9. See also Trigos, *The Decembrist Myth in Russian Culture*, pp. 161-186 and Jennifer L. Wilson, 'From Nigilistki to Pussy Riot: Locating the Personal in the History of Women's Activism in Russia', *Zhenshchiny v politike: novye podkhody k politicheskomu* 2 (2013), pp. 44-56.

⁵ Hartley, *Siberia*, xiii.

Just as both Russian dissidents and their Western allies continue to follow the script written by their nineteenth-century predecessors, so it can be legitimately questioned whether many outside Russia who today take an interest in the nation's affairs and champion the cause of its oppositionists really have any greater interest in bringing about political change there than the Britons and Americans who first rallied behind the SFRF, marched on Hyde Park in support of Siberia's exiles and attended Kennan's lectures. Now as then, Russia serves as a constitutive other for the West, the prism through which the discourses of freedom and democracy are refracted. This, in turn, continues to dictate the terms in which Russian dissidents are lionised overseas. Subordinated to and solely comprehensible within the binary of a liberal occident and an autocratic orient, they remain fated to bear not only their own burdens, but the nebulous hopes of the West for a 'free Russia'. The roots of this mutual incomprehension can be traced to the nineteenth century, when Russian socialists and Anglo-American progressives first competed to inscribe the contested figure of the Siberian martyr-hero with their own fantasies, anxieties and dreams.

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