

SIBERIA REVEALED THROUGH THE TRAVEL NARRATIVE:

A RUSSIAN, AMERICAN AND BRITISH PERSPECTIVE

by

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submitted in accordance with the requirements for

the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

In the subject

RUSSIAN

at the

University of South Africa

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October 2014

ABSTRACT

This study examines how travelogues by the Russian author Anton Chekhov, an American, George Kennan and a British citizen, Harry de Windt, contributed towards establishing the image of Siberia towards the end of the 19th century, juxtaposing their individual views against the commonly perceived view of the region at the time.

In examining the texts, a literary analysis is merged with elements of other approaches, through a strong thematic focus, centring on the cultural and ideological assumptions implied in the texts.

The findings reveal that both native inhabitants and foreigners are capable of expressing a justifiable opinion on a locality, resulting in different versions of what is observed, from divergent points of view. Although the three writers in this study appear to support a negative view of Siberia, closer investigation show evidence of optimism about the eventual destiny of a region in a stage of transition.

Key terms:

Siberia, Anton Chekhov, George Kennan, Harry de Windt, Travelogue, travel writing, Russian literature, Sakhalin, thematic analysis

*To my son, Gustav
and my husband, Paul*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My awareness of the existence of Russia was aroused around the age of four when I was introduced to the music of Tchaikovsky in a ballet class. This initial interest received a further boost about eight years later when I learnt about the existence of the Trans-Siberian Railroad. I recall memorising all the major stations along the route, imagining the train cutting through the frozen landscape on its way from Moscow to the Pacific Ocean and yearned to see that mysterious place for myself one day. Finally making it to Tomsk in the winter of 1993, I was not disappointed. Thus, in a way, this dissertation marks the culmination of a life-long fascination.

I am grateful to Professor Agata Krzychylkiewicz who was prepared to take on the task of guiding me, patiently and with great expertise, through the process of writing a dissertation 'across the miles,' turning it into an unforgettable learning experience.

Without the love and support of my husband, Paul, I would not have considered taking on this task.

DECLARATION

Student number: 03167402

I declare that

SIBERIA REVEALED THROUGH THE TRAVEL NARRATIVE: A RUSSIAN, AMERICAN
AND BRITISH PERSPECTIVE

is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and
acknowledged by means of complete references.


Mrs. E. van Zyl

20 October 2014

DATE

NOTES

Transliteration of Russian.

Though generally following the Library of Congress system, some adaptations have been made. English versions of names frequently encountered in Western sources are used (for example *Alexander* instead of *Aleksandr*). Similarly the English spelling of personal and geographic names which have become familiar in English is used, for example *y* instead of *ii* as in *Dostoevsky* instead of *Dostoyevskii* and the omission of the soft sign as in *Ob* instead of *Ob'*. French transliteration is changed to English (for example *Novikoff* to *Novikov*).

The spelling of geographical names is according to *Elizon Maps*: (<http://www.ezilon.com/maps/>).

American English language conventions in direct quotations from sources have been changed to British English spelling.

Outdated English spelling has been changed to contemporary spelling.

Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

America/American refers specifically to the United States of America.

The use of *he/his* in cases such as *the travel writer* refers to both genders.

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INTRODUCTION

The first university in Siberia was founded in Tomsk in 1878, yet it stood idle for a decade before it was finally inaugurated. There were several reasons for this delay. In the first place, the government of the day, seated in St Petersburg over 3000 km away, were concerned that all kinds of intellectually inspired evil might spring from a centre of learning so far away from their direct control. A more immediate, practical reason was that few men of learning could be found who were willing to give up the comfort of life in European Russia, in exchange for a life of hardship and sacrifice in what they regarded as a remote, inhospitable region. The first pioneering educators had to be coaxed across the Ural Mountains with higher salaries, among other perks. This practice was to continue for a long period of time, as not too many intellectuals were willing to settle in the east of the country voluntarily. Even potential students were in short supply and, once the first faculty, an ideologically 'safe' one namely that of medicine finally opened, admission requirements were lowered substantially compared to those of universities in European Russia to attract more students. The antagonism towards Siberia was not restricted only to academe and was also present in other strata of society. A region with tremendous potential had over time been branded with the labels of suspicion, fear and hostility and a negative image had become entrenched.

Lessner¹ believes that financial greed was the initial motivation for stirring up fear of entering the region. The Novgorodian rulers hoped to continue their monopoly of the lucrative fur supply emanating from the region by scaring off potential rivals with gruesome tales of conditions in Siberia. For instance Lessner (1955, 104) quotes a reference in a 15th century Novgorodian record to 'Unknown Peoples of the Eastern Regions: If the Samoyeds² have a visitor, they kill their children to treat him to their flesh, and if the visitor dies he too is eaten.'

From the late 16th century another factor that contributed to the antipathetic perception of Siberia was the Russian government's exile policy. The number of exiles started increasing from the mid-17th century and by 1896 exiles contributed about one sixth of the growth in the local population (Wood).³ While Russian authorities tried hard to attract potential 'willing' settlers to the region, mostly only those peasants who were driven by desperate conditions

¹ Lessner, E. *Siberia: Cradle of Conquerors*. New York 1955.

² A term formerly used to refer to the Nenets, an indigenous people in northern arctic Siberia.

³ Wood, A. *The History of Siberia: from Russian Conquest to Revolution*. London 1991.

in their present situation rose to the challenge. Russians remained, in general, frightened to relocate, both on account of the fact that Siberia was an unknown territory, and because it was, as Remnev states, seen as a land of penal servitude and exile.⁴ As a result even the 'willing' settlers, like the academics mentioned earlier, had to be offered all kinds of incentives to entice them to move east.

Another source of information on Siberia is found in written reports by visitors who had begun to criss-cross the region with increasing frequency. Since the first fleeting visits by Russians to the area, starting in the 11th century, Siberia had become the topic of numerous travel narratives, both by Russian and foreign visitors. Siberia was, and continued as time passed, to be alternately romanticized and vilified by travellers. To mention but one example, Charles Wenyon, a British medical missionary, referred to the 'widespread horror of Siberia among educated Russians'⁵ while an Irish-born adventurer, Peter Dobell, extolled the 'rich and interesting region.'⁶

But as Wenyon (ibid. 27) pointed out, the name Siberia was soon to become 'almost synonymous with wintry cold and desolation,' with both 'those who knew nothing of Siberia' and seasoned travellers intent on dissuading would-be travellers from taking on a journey. Siberia was seen as 'frontier' country as described by Gibson: a 'raw, remote wilderness or "wild field" on the edge of the Russian ecumene, an unstable and changing region.'⁷ Stolberg calls it a lawless, violent frontier on account of the high crime rate, resulting from an insufficient infrastructure and inadequate administrative machinery which prevented the effective maintenance of law and order.⁸

Voices defending the image of Siberia were heard less frequently. Those who tried to do so would point out easily observable evidence, such as Bridgett who had seen ladies 'shopping

⁴ Remnev: Ремнев, А. *Самодержавие и Сибирь: Административная политика в первой половине XIX в.* Омск, 1995.

⁵ Wenyon, C. *Four Thousand Miles across Siberia on the Great Post Road.* London 1909, 223.

⁶ Dobell, B. *Travels in Kamchatka and Siberia.* London, 1830, iii.

⁷ Gibson, J. The Significance of Siberia to Tsarist Russia. *Canadian Slavonic Papers / Revue Canadienne des Slavistes* 1972, 14(3): 445.

⁸ Stolberg, E. The Siberian Frontier and Russia's Position in World History: A Reply to Aust and Nolte Author(s) *German Perspectives* 2004, 27(3).

attired in the latest Paris fashions' in Siberian towns.⁹ Others referred to not so obvious, but inherently more significant evidence. Baikalov for example, defended dissenters who had been exiled to Siberia, calling them 'psychologically more advanced than those who stayed at home and meekly submitted to the conditions of slavery introduced into the Russian social order.'¹⁰ He also held peasant emigrants in high esteem as they –

were men of a type superior to that of an average Russian *muzhik*; they possessed initiative and courage, the qualities which are so essential for forming character. The primitive, hard conditions prevailing at that time in Siberia quickly weeded out the weak, and favoured the survival of the fittest. (ibid. 340)

But in the end, Ledonne concludes that over time Siberia had become known, 'perhaps unjustly so – as the land of runaways and convicts, of corruption and violence.'¹¹ Written records by travellers played a major part in reaching this conclusion and a study of the essence of the Siberian travelogue could contribute to understanding how it came about.

This introduction will expound the problem considered in the current research as well as its aim and scope. After briefly commenting on the methodology chosen for the research, the introduction ends with a short summary of the contents of the respective sections of the dissertation.

In formulating a research hypothesis for this study, two key factors were considered.

In the first place, at a time when virtually the only two ways of communicating information about a remote, relatively unknown place were either by means of word of mouth or through some form of written record, the listener, or the reader, was completely at the mercy of the interlocutor or writer. Short of visiting the place oneself, there was no way of estimating the accuracy of the information on offer. A reader had to rely on the judgment of the writer, trusting that the latter had remained an objective observer, not allowing preconceived notions to interfere with the work, and had given a balanced view of his observations. Comparing the work of different authors from different backgrounds is therefore more likely to render a credible, objective portrayal of a locality.

⁹ Bridgett, R. Eastern Siberia and the Amur. *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of London* 1868, 13(5): 370.

¹⁰ Baikalov, A. Siberia since 1894. *The Slavonic and East European Review* 1933, 11(32): 340.

¹¹ Ledonne, J. Building an Infrastructure of Empire in Russia's Eastern Theater, 1650s--1840s. *Cahiers du Monde russe* 2006, 47(3): 606.

The second aspect concerns the lack of recognition hitherto given to the genre of travel writing. Fragments of travel writing have been found dating back to the time of the invention of writing and seen from the perspective of its antiquity, the travelogue deserves to take a place among the more established literary genres. In addition, the following should also be considered. In common with other authors, travel writers observe and comment on their experiences but they also serve as 'translators', opening up new worlds, making the inaccessible accessible, serving as an important source of knowledge (Carrabetta).¹² By looking at the 'Other', travel writers contribute towards the creation of identity, not only that of the people and places they come across but also their own. Literature is powerful in establishing, perpetuating or destroying stereotypes and few genres potentially more so than that of travel writing, which bestows on it a particular responsibility. As such, the travelogue amounts to a genre deserving of ongoing research.

The prolific amount of travel literature readily available would suggest that travel writers have always had a keen readership. The genre has been represented by a number of major works over the centuries, starting with Homer's *Odyssey*, the second oldest extant work of Western literature, believed to date back to the late 8th century BCE. However, although one of the oldest genres, travel writing has been all but neglected by literary scholars over the years. As the genre has only relatively recently begun to achieve academic 'legitimacy,' limited research has been done on individual works in this specific field. This is in part due to its being held, according to Kowalewski, as a 'hybrid' genre of a 'dauntingly heterogeneous character,' fitting at times uncomfortably into diverse subject areas such as geography, history, sociology and anthropology, as opposed to belonging exclusively to the realm of literature.¹³

Moreover the genre is as a rule not represented in the standard literary canon and has as a result been marginalised, receiving scant critical attention. Even though this tendency has been changing over the past decade with a significant increase in interest in this field in both literary and cultural studies, particularly since the rise of interest in Europe's imperial past and its post-colonial legacy, there is still a vast field of unexplored literature waiting to receive scholarly attention.

¹² Carrabetta, A. Interpreting texts: travel writing. The 'Letter' of W.S. Maugham. *Rivista Geografica Italiana* 2008.

¹³ Kowalewski, M. ed. *Temperamental Journeys: Essays on the Modern Literature of Travel*. Athens 1992, 7.

Another reason put forward for the neglect of the genre is the hierarchical system imposed by the critical paradigm, one of the literary traditions dominant in Anglophone literary criticism, which relegates travel writing to the lowly status of 'popular literature' as opposed to 'high literature'. According to Sztachelska (in Moroz and Sztachelska), only the latter 'was deemed to be a proper subject of scholarly concern.'¹⁴

As previously mentioned, Siberia has been a popular topic for travel writing over a period of several centuries. However, limited scholarly work has been done to look at these works from a literary perspective. Primary travel writing sources abound, but published research material relevant to the topic selected for the current study is limited, which opens up the field for further exploration.

This study examines the work of the celebrated Russian author Anton Chekhov, George Kennan, an American and Harry de Windt, a British citizen, in order to determine how the travel narrative of each author contributes towards establishing the image and essence of a locality, in this instance Siberia. As each author's view of Siberia was closely related to his socio-political and cultural conditioning, their individual views are juxtaposed, comparing raw, uninterpreted observations against the background of what can be termed as the commonly perceived view of the region at the time.

In this research the focus remains on how reporting by means of the travel narrative, using immediate, direct observation, supported or challenged existing, preconceived views. In addition, it is shown that, notwithstanding the fact that the approach in the depiction of a country by a native inhabitant could be expected to differ from that of a foreigner, both are in a position to make a valid contribution and express a justifiable opinion. An attempt is also undertaken at investigating the way in which the authors fuse adventure travel, investigative journalism and political commentary and how this influences the overall artistic quality of the final product.

This study aims to contribute toward redressing the imbalance that has resulted from the neglect hitherto shown in the field of travel literature by examining central aspects of the genre from the perspective of diverse authors in mostly uncharted territory, while striving to shed additional light on what often appears to be a misrepresented region. Investigation of the topic from the point of view of an established Russian author, in parallel with that of two

¹⁴ Moroz, G., Sztachelska, J. (Eds.). *Metamorphoses of Travel Writing: Across Theories, Genres, Centuries and Literary Traditions*. Newcastle upon Tyne, 2010, ix.

non-Russian authors from a different socio-political and cultural background, has the potential of bringing this new perspective.

In the case of Anton Chekhov, whose literary output has been the subject of extensive ongoing study, literary research is as a rule centred on his short stories and dramas. His works on Siberia and Sakhalin do not fall in the mainstream research devoted to his oeuvre. In instances where the two volumes examined in the current study do receive attention, it deals mostly with the issue of classifying the work as belonging to literature or socio-scientific writing, or the influence the voyage had on his subsequent writing.

Secondary sources on the work of George Kennan focus mainly on political issues, such as the influence he had on the shaping of public opinion on Russia in his native country. As for Harry De Windt, there is virtually no critical commentary on hand. References concerning him are restricted mostly to biographical information. The reason for this is probably that, in spite of his extensive travels, his work did not receive universal recognition as an authoritative source on the topic. More importantly though, in the case of both Kennan and De Windt, the prevalent neglect of the genre of travel writing can be seen as a major contributing factor to the paucity of additional material devoted to their works.

Siberia has been a popular destination for the intrepid travel writer over many centuries. Shrouded in mystery, the promise of adventure in uncharted territory has attracted and continues to attract voyagers. Titles abound in various languages, often including evocative terms and expressions such as 'new frontier,' 'discovery,' 'beyond the mountains,' 'frozen frontier,' 'to the great ocean' and 'wilderness.' Taking into account the relative abundance of texts available on this topic, herewith my rationale for limiting the current study to the selection of the primary texts by the specific authors identified earlier.

My research is restricted to one period, namely the mid to late 1800's, when Siberia was an emerging region and the undertaking of journeys, especially by foreigners, to this remote location was not yet too common. Work originating from this period emanates a certain appeal, freshness and originality which was to change upon the completion of the Trans-Siberian Railway over the next decade. The authors I selected belong to the vanguard, a generation of pioneers who set the tone for what was to come.

The completion of the railway, which made the region more accessible to the less adventurous traveller, was closely followed by the Russo-Japanese war (1904–1905) and the Revolutions in 1905 and 1917. These momentous events saw a substantial increase in visitors to Siberia with a concurrent increase in literary output dealing with the region. Including these and subsequent periods would increase the work to be covered substantially

beyond the scope of the current study. However, notwithstanding these limitations, for reference purposes and in order to retain perspective, secondary sources include more recent texts as well as travel narratives by authors other than Russian and Anglophone writers.

Both Kennan and De Windt wrote extensively about their experiences in Siberia. Subsequently, in order to further demarcate the limitations of this study, the list of primary texts consists of only works set against the background of the Siberian exile system. In the case of Chekhov, primary research is restricted to the two volumes that deal uniquely with Siberia.

Travel writing is at times accepted to be exclusively works of non-fiction but this assumption is erroneous as a vast body of travel fiction exists. The travel fiction narrative is often spawned by a personal travel experience, with the writer making use of data collected *en route* but developing or embroidering it into a work of fiction. Bentley points out that 'travel accounts have been so popular with readers through the ages that many writers have adapted the genre of the travel account in presenting works of fiction.'¹⁵ Research for the current study is limited to three non-fiction texts by three different authors with the intention to concentrate on descriptions of what writers they observed and experienced as opposed to what they imagined.

As was mentioned when stating the problem, subjectivity and biased or prejudiced reporting are inherent problems in the genre of travel writing. To make the study of the Siberian travelogue more representative, the authors whose writing forms the subject of this study are from different nationalities and have different professional backgrounds.

The Anton Chekhov (1860–1904) initially qualified as a physician whereas George Kennan (1845–1924) was an explorer from the USA who also worked as newspaper correspondent while Harry de Windt (1856–1933) had served in the British armed forces, later becoming an explorer and travel writer. Although there was, as a result of their different origins and occupations, a divergent approach and focus in the journeys they undertook, the authors were motivated by the same goal: they intended to visit and report on penal colonies which formed part of the Siberian exile system. Their aim was to inform the general public of their respective countries about existing conditions. As such their primary objective was to

¹⁵ Bentley, J. Travel Narratives. *World History Sources. History and New Media*, George Mason University 2005, 9.

inform, not entertain, and the fact that their reporting took on the form of travel narratives was incidental to their main objective.

Another factor justifying the selection of these authors for the study is the fact that they undertook their journeys during roughly the same time period. Moreover they travelled along routes which took them past generally overlapping destinations, which makes comparison more meaningful. The final consideration was evidence that they were, to an extent, familiar with each other's work. For instance Kennan and De Windt comment reciprocally on each other's work, with various degrees of approval, while Chekhov refers to Kennan's 'well-known' book. Furthermore the editors of an authoritative edition of the collected works of Chekhov, published by the Russian Academy of Sciences (1987), refer to both Kennan and De Windt in connection with Chekhov's journey to Sakhalin.

The source texts of two of the authors selected for close examination, Chekhov and Kennan, have received scholarly recognition for valuable contributions in their fields. Ryfa singles out the uniqueness of Chekhov's Sakhalin texts in the Russian literary oeuvre despite their marginalisation.¹⁶ In addition Ryfa refers to the literary critic Angel Bogdanovich, who claims in a review that *Sakhalin Island* alone would have been enough to earn Chekhov a place in the annals of Russian literature.

Nicholas Danilov regards Kennan as America's first eminent authority on Russia. Danilov also reports that Dmitry K. Sivtsev, prominent Yakutian author and director of the Sottinzy open-air museum near Yakutsk¹⁷ at the time of his visit, described Kennan as a major explorer of the north (of Russia) whose aim was to promote democracy and freedom.

As Siberia is at the centre of the study in the role of the antagonist, background information on the region is of importance, as it impacts directly on the texts to be examined. Brisson foregrounds the influence of political dimensions, the historical and social order and even the infrastructure (dictated by the geography), on the way travellers plan their routes, the people

¹⁶ Ryfa, J. Literary, scientific and moral implications in the inquiry into the penal system: Anton Chekhov's journey to Sakhalin Island. PhD. Bloomington, 1997.

¹⁷ Danilov (George Kennan and the Challenge of Siberia. *Demokratizatsya* 1991, 7(4): 604 wrote *Sitinski* but it is referred to as *Sottinzy* on the *Sakha News* website (<http://1sn.ru/person287.html>) and *eYakutia Life News* blog (<http://eyakutia.com/tag/sottinzy/>). Following his expulsion on espionage charges from the USSR in 1986 where he was working as an American foreign correspondent, Danilov took up a post at the School of Journalism, Northeastern University, Boston.

they come across and, as a consequence, the end result of their travelogues.¹⁸ A brief overview of Siberia as it appeared at the end of the 19th century, based on relevant historical and geographical data, therefore serves as the backdrop for the study.

Owing to its unique 'hybrid' form, in essence, several distinct analytical approaches can be followed when examining travel writing. A strong case could be made for a biographical, narratological, (new) historical or social analytical approach. It is tempting to select a single approach but such a restrictive, rigid selection could exclude essential elements of the texts, resulting in an incomplete, inconclusive outcome. For that reason, in this study literary analysis merges with elements of the other possible approaches, through a strong thematic focus, centring on the cultural and ideological assumptions implied in the texts. Such an approach allows this research to cover a wider, if not exhaustive, range of relevant topics. The reason for granting prominence to a thematic approach is that most travel writers saw their primary task as consisting of passing on knowledge of the places they had visited, rather than, as Courtney indicates, 'deploying sophisticated narrative techniques or crafting fine descriptions.'¹⁹

The first close reading focused on the contents of the texts to set the historical/political context for, as Lamarque states, the historical context of a literary work, that is the circumstances surrounding its creation, is integral to achieving a fuller understanding of the work.²⁰ In addition, albeit not of primary importance, an attempt is made to assess certain stylistic and structural features of the volumes, pertaining specifically to the subdivision of chapters and relative importance given to specific topics. This overview is needed to elucidate the main focus of each author and illuminate areas of convergence and divergence.

A subsequent literary analysis concentrates on the language and style of writing, the point of view of the author, and themes related specifically to travel writing.

¹⁸ Brisson, U., Schweizer, B. *Not So Innocent Abroad: The Politics of Travel and Travel Writing*. Newcastle upon Tyne 2009.

¹⁹ Courtney, A. 2010. Indiana University Libraries. *Travel Literature*.

²⁰ Lamarque, P. Aesthetics and literature: a problematic relation? *Philosophical Studies* 2008, 135(1).

The texts are examined in the context of Realism as it is the literary style prevailing at the time of writing.²¹ The social conditions and environment, depicted through capturing everyday reality, are central topics in the works. In spite of recent scepticism about the bearing of aesthetics on criticism as mentioned by Lamarque (2008) there is still a place for it in literary analysis and it received due attention. Lamarque furthermore reminds literary analysts that the aesthetic elements identified in literature do not only refer to the use of language, but rather the pleasure that is derived from the work as a whole.

The primary texts on which this study is based are atypical in that a protagonist (the author) faces a geographic entity (Siberia in this instance) in the role of antagonist with the journey as the basis for the plot. This is one of the unique features of travel writing, distinguishing it unequivocally from other literary genres. Carrabetta (2008) points out that travel writing should be looked at from the point of view of the relationship between author and place. In addition, the analysis recognises the fact that the authors' experience and interpretation of a specific social and political construction of place would inevitably be subjective. This would subsequently be reflected in the way the travellers depict a given place in their writing.

It is also of critical importance to determine the author's point of view in order to establish whether the writer tries to grasp the country with a dominant point of view or whether he is prepared to learn from it. Moreover, Bennett and Royle believe that our understanding of a text is influenced by our sense of the character, trustworthiness and objectivity of the narrator as it affects the credibility of the narrator.²² The perceived objectivity of the narrator is furthermore affected by his decision to withhold judgment or be immediately, openly judgmental.

Furthermore, as Nehamas points out, a literary text is inextricable from historical context.²³ Few dichotomies have been and remain as ideologically loaded as that of 'Russia and the West' and it could hardly be ignored in research of this nature. As such, the political convictions of the author became an important factor which had to be taken into account.

²¹ The schools of Realism (roughly from 1820 to 1920) and Naturalism (roughly from the 1870s to 1940s) were predominant during the era under investigation.

²² Bennett, A., Royle, N. *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory*. Harlow, 2004.

²³ Nehamas, A. *Writer, Text, Work, Author*. In: A. Cascardi (Ed.). *Literature and the Question of Philosophy*. Baltimore, 1987.

Themes constituted another important part of this research. Owing to the pivotal role it played in the study, further clarification will be given to justify the selection of key focus areas from the vast number of themes hitherto identified in travel writing.

A salient theme in travel writing is *alterity*, or *Otherness*, and the interplay between 'Self' and 'Other'. In the travelogue the writer's 'Self' is generally central to the texts. Witt states that Otherness, which he views as the driving force in travel writing, can be 'played up or played down as convenient; the traveller both owns and does not own the anthropological landscape visited.'²⁴ Travel narratives tend to accentuate struggle, overcoming the world, and conquering the unknown, which Almeida Santos singles out as examples of our desire to master the world and the Other.²⁵ He regards all travel as inextricably linked with aspects of cultural awareness, and writing about travel as a product of the writer's unique experiences and own culturally specific interpretation of those experiences. As a result each narrative is provided with a cultural shape of its own and representing the Other fairly is not an easy process. According to Hulme even Herodotus had difficulty imagining or representing the Other.²⁶

All three writers examined in this study were travelling in a land that was strange and foreign to them. Notwithstanding Chekhov's Russian nationality, Siberia was at the time regarded as a 'foreign country' by those living to the west of the Ural Mountains. Therefore it is interesting to assess how Chekhov's, Kennan's and De Windt's respective notions of national, racial, or cultural differences impacted on their reception of Siberia and also what kind of political issues they raised and supported or opposed in the process.

Although travellers commonly set off with an intention to discover, they also unintentionally undertake a voyage of self-discovery. Hastings and Manning raise this issue, believing that self-identity is always being developed in relation to some *alter*.²⁷ Constructing the Other is,

²⁴ Witt, R. Byron, Kinglake's Eothen and the 'Self' of the Travel Writer. *University of Bucharest Review* 2008, 10(2: 166).

²⁵ Almeida Santos, C. Cultural Politics in Contemporary Travel Writing. *Annals of Tourism Research* 2006, 33(3).

²⁶ Hulme, P., Youngs, T. *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*. Cambridge, 2010. Herodotus, for example, found it hard to describe cityless nomadic Scythians who were so different from his own life world.

²⁷ Hastings, A., Manning, P. Introduction: Acts of Alterity. *Language and Communication* 2004, 24.

according to Brisson (2009), not a one-way affair.²⁸ The traveller's ideas about foreign countries and life in general become altered and rearranged upon encountering other cultures. When studying a travelogue it is important to note when this occurs and identify the consequences of such changes.

Another central theme at the heart of travel writing, despite its closer association with the theatre, is distancing or alienation. The traveller is constantly 'out of place', away from home, estranged and divided from those he comes across on the journey. Ashcroft refers to the alienation of vision and the crisis in self-image which displacement produces.²⁹ Noted sociologist M. Seeman identifies five alternative meanings of alienation namely powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation, and self-estrangement.³⁰ The intensity of the sense of estrangement, powerlessness and isolation experienced on the journey can have a profound effect on the author's work and has to be taken into consideration when examining travel writing.

Feelings of melancholy, nostalgia and disillusion follow directly on the abovementioned theme. A voyage of extended duration inevitably wears the traveller down, influencing the way experiences are recorded. Disappointment following on expectations not being met can have the same effect and will play a role in the final product of a travel writer, an important aspect to bear in mind when appraising a work.

Another closely related theme is that of survival issues. Danger, fatigue, and discomforts of all kinds frequently accompany the traveller. Overcoming nature and pushing the body beyond its limits of endurance invariably takes its toll and affects the author's portrayal of a region. Siberia presented a daunting challenge to any prospective traveller in the 19th century. However, Hulme (2010) warns of travelogues in which the hardships the author has to endure is described with relish and possibly embellishment. Both factors, of real and exaggerated struggles, have to be considered when studying travel literature.

Another feature to take into account is the fact that all travel writing is rooted in a specific historical context and tends as such to be political, reflecting, consciously or subconsciously,

²⁸ Heaps (2000) reminds us that *the 'other'* (minuscule) refers to 'other' meaning 'additional' as used in *other peoples, places, landscapes, and cultures*.

²⁹ Ashcroft, B. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures*. New York, 2002.

³⁰ Seeman, M. On The Meaning of Alienation. *American Sociological Review* 1959, 24(6).

the convictions, values and attitudes of the author. Noteworthy travel books, particularly from the period covered in this research, are seen by Brisson and Schweizer (2009, 17) as

vehicles of keen political and social analysis, mixed in with compelling narratives of travel, adventure, and discovery. [...authors] all had in common that politics was on their mind; they either followed or traversed ideological fault lines, they took sides on controversial issues (both during the journey and while writing their travelogues), and their political awareness deeply affected the experience of travel.

Furthermore, as Jarvis points out, travel writing from the eighteenth century onwards, indeed up to the quite recent past, is 'typically marked by attitudes, beliefs and values' often at odds with what is regarded as politically correct and acceptable today.³¹ Intercultural encounter is central to travelogues and the attitudes, beliefs and values displayed by writers of a certain epoch might offend a readership a decade or centuries later. Rigid historic contextualisation of the work researched for the purpose of this study was therefore imperative as a contemporary reader is keenly aware of the demands of political correctness.

In the conclusion of her paper on the complexities of academic interpretations of travel writing, Carrabetta (2008) urges that travel writing should be analysed from the point of view of what renders it distinctive compared to generic texts. According to her, the relationship between author and place is pivotal in setting travel literature apart from other genres. In order to do a convincing analysis, it is important to pay attention to the author's cultural background, as 'the author lives and interprets a specific social and political construction of place which forms the basis of how that place is constructed in their writing' (ibid. 28).

The 'hybrid' nature of travel writing mentioned earlier also impacts on secondary literature devoted to the genre. Research is devoted to topics dealing with diverse areas such as gender, colonialism, journalism, psychology, sociology, history and tourism, and as a result of its appeal to different fields of study across the Humanities, the genre is lacking in definitive reference texts.

While reiterating that criticism of travel literature is a relatively new development, Gulyas identifies a surge of scholarly activity in the late 1990s. He points out that whereas the main focus of former scholarship had been on political issues such as colonialism and gender, recent research includes the topics of mobility, economics, boundaries, translation, form,

³¹ Jarvis, R. Teaching Travel Literature. *English Subject Centre Online Newsletter* 2001, 3 (www.english.heacademy.ac.uk/explore/publications/newsletters/newsissue1/jarvis).

poetics, exile, cultural diversity, and migration.³² However, as mentioned when stating the problem examined in this study, even though Siberia has been a favoured destination for writers of travelogues for several centuries, academic research on the genre of travel writing featuring this region remains limited.

Of the three authors whose writing is central to this study only Chekhov enjoys wide acclaim as a literary master. However, this approbation does not extend to his travel writing which has remained outside immediate scholarly attention. As Tatiana Ivanova points out, literary scholars tend to concentrate on his fiction works and have not studied his books on Sakhalin in sufficient depth. She states that this is to a large extent related to the fact that the work itself has a documentary-journalistic basis, different to the general literary heritage of the author, and major parts of it remain on the periphery of research interests.³³

According to the Russian scholar, there was a slight surge of interest in *Sakhalin Island* during the Soviet period, particularly in 1960, coinciding with the centenary of Chekhov's birth. Publications over the next two decades centred predominantly on discussions regarding the identification of the genre of the book. That was followed in the 1980s by polemical discussions on the influence the book had had on Chekhov's subsequent work. In the 1990s attention turned to a more detailed literary analysis and study of accuracy of the contents regarding descriptions of the penal system. Notwithstanding the research done so far, Ivanova believes that the problems of continuity (in relation to the work of other authors who have written on the topic) and innovation in Chekhov's books have not received sufficient scholarly attention yet.

Equally disappointing is secondary literature devoted to Kennan. The majority of the secondary sources on this writer are of a biographical nature, while articles and reviews of his books concentrate mostly on contents. Academic papers are basically written from the perspective of the field of Political Science and deal with the establishment of Kennan as an expert on Russia. Hundley refers to Charles Marvin, a noted English authority on Russia,

³² Gulyas, L. Course Outline. *ENG 337T. Travel Writing In Rwanda*. Bellingham, 2012.

³³ Ivanova: Иванова, Т. Книга А. П. Чехова 'Остров Сахалин': проблематика и значение. Dissertation. 2004.

who praised Kennan for the reliability of his work and opinions³⁴ while a reference to Kennan's style of writing appears in an article on Chekhov by Popkin.³⁵

Even less secondary sources can be found that comment on Harry De Windt. The few that could be found, all deal with the contents of his books or furnish biographical information. The lack of commentary on his work could in part be due to the fact that he is openly, unabashedly supportive of the Russian government at the time and his work may be seen as too subjective. He does criticise certain aspects of the Siberian exile system but it is not difficult to see that his sympathies lie with the tsarist establishment. As he was known to have changed his profession from time to time, and not to have completed his formal (tertiary) education, scholars may also not have taken De Windt sufficiently seriously to warrant comment on his work. Nevertheless, being in many ways the antithesis of Kennan, who ended up being completely, openly opposed to the Russian government, De Windt serves as an effective foil to enable the formulation of a balanced view.

This study consists of an introduction, four chapters, a conclusion, a bibliography and an appendix containing brief biographies of the authors. An overview of the genre of travel writing is given in Chapter 1, covering the history and development of the genre. A part of the chapter is devoted to the conventions of the travelogue which set the parameters against which the primary texts are examined.

Chapter 2 provides a brief geographical and historical overview of Siberia, concentrating on the conditions prevalent in the region at the end of the 19th century. Constituting the background against which the primary texts were written, this information is central to the rest of the research presented in this study.

In Chapter 3 the primary texts, the travelogues of Anton Chekhov, George Kennan and Harry de Windt, are examined. A subchapter in which the contents, structure, language and style and selected themes are analysed, is devoted to each author separately.

Chapter 4 comprises a comparison of the portrayal of Siberia through the lens of the respective authors with what can be seen as the general view held in Russia at the time these works were written. In addition to juxtaposing the features analysed in Chapter 3, Chapter 4 also contains a comparison of relevant biographical features of the authors, their

³⁴ Hundley, H. George Kennan and the Russian Empire: How America's Conscience Became an Enemy of Tsarism. *Kennan Institute Occasional Papers*. 277. Washington DC, 2000.

³⁵ Popkin, C. Chekhov as Ethnographer: Epistemological Crisis on Sakhalin Island. *Slavic Review* 1992, 51(1).

political views, and motivation for undertaking the journey into Siberia, all of which might have had an influence on the way they perceived the region.

CHAPTER 1

OVERVIEW OF THE GENRE OF TRAVEL WRITING

1. Introduction

Travel writing is one of the oldest genres, dating back to antiquity. Even though many of the early accounts contain a mixture of fact and fiction, they describe people moving from one geographic location to another. The original works by authors such as the Ancient Greek historians, geographers and travellers Herodotus, Strabo and Pausanias contain countless observations but, according to Fussel, packed with information and directions, they are more similar to today's guide books than travelogues.³⁶ Nevertheless, they are valued as interesting, although not always reliable or verifiable, sources of information on the ancient peoples.

It is only from the Renaissance onwards that a development of depth and increasing sense of reliability can be observed in the genre. Previously travel writers had been motivated to go on pilgrimages, to go sight-seeing, to attend health cures at spas, to consult oracles or to worship at temples and shrines, but now they became eager to travel with the purpose to discover new worlds.

However, according to Waliszewski, the main impetus for the travelogue as a genre came in the 18th century with the rise in popularity of scientific, rational thought over colonialist discourse and a subsequent upsurge in travel expeditions by scientists.³⁷ Although potential travel writers were warned to be prepared to face bad roads and indifferent inns, and, in addition to 'brigands and highwaymen' the 'vilest part of mankind ... inn-keepers, post-masters and custom house officers' (ibid. 172), the number of books published continued to increase. Hulme identifies a typical pattern that had emerged by 1800: proceeding from his

³⁶ Fussel, P. *The Norton Book of Travel*. New York 1987.

³⁷ Waliszewski, M. *The Role of Travel Writing in Reconstructing the History of Latin America*, 2002.

base in civilisation to an unknown region, the traveller would describe experiences and observations in a daily log or journal and then develop it further upon returning home.³⁸ By the 19th and early 20th centuries, intellectual and religious scepticism, a rapidly advancing technology, industrialism, a heightened sense of egalitarianism, a yearning for a broader education and the ascendancy of an ambitious middle class saw a proliferation of new titles in the genre.

Over time, the focus of the travel writer had shifted. Giltrow points out a diminishing informational 'pretext' in travel writing from the 1600s to the present.³⁹ What had previously been a documentary form, started to become progressively more autobiographical because, by the end of the 18th century, so many sites had already been seen. The travel writer had to bring something unique to a predictable route. Heaps notes an increase in subjectivity concurrent with the increase in autobiographical travel writing over the years, stating that critics such as M. Campbell and J. Giltrow claim that the informational component of travel writing has lost ground to the autobiographical as a result.⁴⁰

2. The essence of travel writing

Narrative traces its origins back to the first stone-age paintings in caves and the first stories told around tribal fires. It was meant, according to Tomashchikova, to provide tribe members with tools for learning and teaching others about the world.⁴¹ As such, it served as a natural precursor to travel writing.

But travel writing is not only about instructing others, because by exploring the world, as Lisle points out, one begins to learn about oneself.⁴² As travelogues focus on the thoughts,

³⁸ Hulme, P., Youngs, T. *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*. Cambridge, 2010.

³⁹ Giltrow, J. *North American Travel Writing*. PhD. Burnaby, 1979.

⁴⁰ Heaps, D. *Gendered Discourse and Subjectivity in Travel Writing by Canadian Women*. PhD. Toronto, 2000. Travel observations are usually written in the first person singular, which can add to the strain of trying to remain objective when reporting them.

⁴¹ Tomashchikova, S. Narrative Theories and Narrative Discourse. *Bulletin of the Transilvania University of Brasov* 2009, 2(51).

⁴² Lisle, D. *The Global Politics of Contemporary Travel Writing*. Cambridge, 2006.

observations and memories of the travel writer the travel writer's skills of observation are of prime importance, states Hooper.⁴³ Voysey describes the travel writer's 'self' as a lens moving between the observer, the observed and self-observer.⁴⁴

Hulme (2010) identifies complex rhetorical strategies in travel writing. Authors have to balance the known and the unknown, give practical guidance yet entertain, consider the interests of their employers and/or publishers, describe what happened and suggest what could have happened, all of which result in issues affecting authenticity and credibility. Real and imagined voyages have been used to criticise foreign habits and domestic conditions with writers being expected to draw parallels and show differences between their own nation's current position and what they encounter along the way.

Despite the obstacles mentioned, travel writing remains a popular genre maintained by a constant supply of new titles and supported by a loyal readership. Blanton describes the genre's enduring popularity as stemming

from human curiosity for the other as well as the travel narrative's ability to fuse the inner world of the mind of the traveller and the outer, observable world: The travel narrative is a compelling and seductive form of storytelling. Its reader is swept along on the surface of the text by the pure forward motion of the journey while being initiated into strange and often dangerous new territory. The traveller/narrator's well-being and eventual safe homecoming become the primary tensions of the tale, and the traveller's encounter with the Other its chief attraction.⁴⁵

The elements mentioned in this description encapsulate the essential components of the travelogue.

3. Conventions of travel writing

When dealing with a genre where the field of literary analysis is still in its infancy, judgments concerning what is regarded as acceptable, quality writing as opposed to what should be

⁴³ Hooper, G., Youngs, T. (Eds.). *Perspectives on Travel Writing*. Aldershot, 2004.

⁴⁴ Voysey, P. The Role of the Travel Writer. *International Institute for Peace through Tourism*. Stowe, 2007.

⁴⁵ Blanton, C. *Travel Writing: The Self and the World*. New York, 1997, 2.

rejected as inferior, tend to be problematic. Whilst explaining his method of selecting modules and specific texts for university literature courses in travel writing, Jarvis foregrounds the difficulties of defining or theorising about travel writing, particularly when probing the boundaries between the discourse of travel and other kinds of writing.⁴⁶ Witt admits being reluctant to use the term 'theory' when considering travel writing, claiming that it has no rules⁴⁷ while Stowe refers to the 'loose conventions' of the genre which allow the writer considerable freedom.⁴⁸ Leed also describes travel writing as a genre that allows authors a tremendous amount of freedom in both subject matter and style.⁴⁹

In addition, as Voysey (2006) points out, the concept of 'best quality' is highly subjective and virtually impossible to define. Nevertheless, he does suggest specific criteria to distinguish what he regards as 'exemplary' travelogues. In the first place, every society should be shown as subject to the influence of others. In order to go beyond merely entertaining readers, the writing should be well researched, placing people and events within a cultural, political and historical context. He believes that travel writers should participate as well as observe, become emotionally engaged while maintaining intellectual detachment. By forming relationships with individuals, writers should attempt to go beyond dehumanising stereotypes, even if they are unable to experience the world in the same way as locals do or are incapable of feeling genuine empathy towards them. The aim should be to convey how the world looks through the eyes of the local inhabitants.

⁴⁶ Jarvis, R. Teaching Travel Literature. *English Subject Centre Online Newsletter* 2001 (www.english.heacademy.ac.uk/explore/publications/newsletters/newsissue1/jarvis).

⁴⁷ Witt, R. Byron, Kinglake's Eothen and the 'Self' of the Travel Writer. *University of Bucharest Review* 2008, 10(2).

⁴⁸ Stowe, W. Conventions and Voices in Margaret Fuller's Travel Writing. *American Literature* 1991, 63(2).

⁴⁹ Leed, E. *The Mind of the Traveller: From Gilgamesh to Global Tourism*. New York, 1991. At the time that early modern travel writing was taking shape, from the 16th to 18th centuries, Hulme (2010) gradually detects a tendency towards unity in the structure of the works. The writer would start with an obligatory tribute to a patron. This is followed by an address to the reader, justifying the reasons both for undertaking the journey and penning a travelogue. The most prominent format is that of the 'report or 'relation,' which combines a chronological narrative of events with geographic and ethnographic observations. Either first or third person narrative is used and maps become essential supplements.

The British travel writer Norman Douglas, cited in Fussel (1987) states that the author of a good travel book should not restrict his writing only to an exterior voyage consisting of descriptions of scenery, events and people but also offer the reader insight into the mind of the author. A travel writer must possess acute senses, a powerful curiosity, physical and intellectual stamina, a lively historical, political and social imagination, a commitment to language and literary artifice and have a proportionate desire to write and to travel. In addition, he must be keen to teach.

There is extensive agreement on the expectation that quality travel writing should constitute a valid source of knowledge, be grounded in verifiable fact, and extend our knowledge of reality (Carrabetta 2008, Heaps 2000, Moroz and Sztachelska).⁵⁰ This view is also supported by Keighren who, in addition, refers to the need to demonstrate credibility.⁵¹ Williams points out the necessity for the travel writer to show the reader what is hidden beneath the surface.⁵²

According to Brisson the travel writer should meet people from all walks of life and then report back through his writing.⁵³ These informed accounts are, of necessity, delivered against a political backdrop as she believes that, much as some authors will deny it, travel writing is never quite apolitical. The writer purposely or inadvertently, supports or opposes specific ideologies, taking sides on controversial issues, both at the time of the journey and afterwards, while writing the travelogues. If political awareness profoundly affects the experience of travel, it delivers a more interesting end product. However, the need for the travel writer to ensure that his political awareness transcends national and cultural boundaries is stressed.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Carrabetta, A. Interpreting texts: travel writing. The 'Letter' of W.S. Maugham. *Rivista Geografica Italiana* 2008; Moroz and Sztachelska, J. (Eds.). *Metamorphoses of Travel Writing: Across Theories, Genres, Centuries and Literary Traditions*. Newcastle upon Tyne, 2010.

⁵¹ Keighren, I. and Withers, C. The spectacular and the sacred: narrating landscape in works of travel. *Cultural Geographies* 2012, 19(1).

⁵² Williams, J. Peter Whitfield Talks about the History of Travel Literature. New York, 2012.

⁵³ Brisson, U. and Schweizer, B. *Not So Innocent Abroad: The Politics of Travel and Travel Writing*. Newcastle upon Tyne, 2009.

⁵⁴ Sara Dickinson (2006, 16) terms this 'The trumpeting of one's national identity' while on a journey.

Almeida Santos shares the point of view that travel writing can be approached as a reflection of dominant ideologies.⁵⁵ In addition, Voysey (2006) emphasises the travel writer's potential to transform readers' perceptions of other cultures and to liberate them from paternalistic ways of observing, which carries significant responsibility. Travel writing is not only about physical things but also about the larger theme of what it is about. He sees all the minute details as elements of a much larger meaning. This meaning can be metaphysical, political, psychological, artistic or religious, but should always be ethical in the end.

Brisson (2009) warns against 'dishonest' travel writers who see what they want to see as they want to see it and then send it into the world as fact. Travel writers should guard against an ethnocentric, imperialist approach with its resultant sense of own cultural superiority. Brisson concludes that the serious travel writer is not on a hedonistic journey but takes personal responsibility and responsibility for other cultures. Instructors of would-be travel writers also caution their students against perpetuating ethnocentrically superior attitudes.⁵⁶

As Brisson (ibid.) states, travelogues tend to be hybrid works containing political and social analysis, mixed in with narratives of travel, adventure, and discovery. The result, according to Hulme (2010), is that the numerous academic disciplines which share an interest in travel literature provide an inconveniently large number of subtopics and key themes for consideration. Alterity (or Otherness) is a central theme as the author is typically in a place where he is a stranger. Abdoh identifies the following as classic themes of travel narrative: danger, boredom, fatigue, melancholy, discomfort, strangeness, nostalgia, the itch for travel, disillusion, dislike, absurdity, amazement, confusion, first impressions, observation, discovery, self-discovery and wisdom.⁵⁷

Scholarly writing on travelogues tend to concentrate on the topics mentioned so far in this section, while stinting on issues dealing directly with the literary merit of the style of writing itself. Voysey (2006) points out that questions of literary excellence hardly arise when discussing the requirements of travel writing. He only mentions the writer's tone, which he expects to be generally warm and confidential, but not indiscreet. Gulyas disagrees,

⁵⁵ Almeida Santos, C. Cultural Politics in Contemporary Travel Writing. *Annals of Tourism Research* 2006, 33(3).

⁵⁶ Anon. *Contemporary Travel Narratives*. Gale Cengage Learning – Contemporary Literary Criticism 2005.

⁵⁷ Abdoh, S. Travel Writing. Unpublished seminar outline, 2008.

stressing that not only should the information used in literary travel writing be well researched, documented, and accurate, but that literary elements such as narrative structure, syntax, rhythm, and language are not to be neglected either.⁵⁸

Detailed, clear descriptions are essential to make the journey real for the reader but to avoid monotony, dialogue becomes an important element of travel writing and it should be used where possible to help the story 'happen' for the reader.⁵⁹ A basic presumption, according to Bal, is that there will be a succession in time or a chronology.⁶⁰

Also referring to literary devices, Brisson (2009) expects a successful travel writer to be deft at using vignettes, i.e. short, impressionistic scenes that focus on a specific theme or topic, when digressing from the main topic. She warns, however, against the overexploitation of the first person narrative 'I', a device which foregrounds the old suspicion of travel writing as a form of lying. But as Keighren (2012) points out, as a mode of narration the rhetorical and discursive construction of a travelogue is similar to that of a novel, with the traveller as protagonist and the itinerary as plot. It is therefore almost inevitable that the author will assume a central role, notwithstanding conscious efforts to remain in the background.

In summarising the requirements for well-rounded travel writing, Brisson (2009) calls for an efficacious fusion of adventure (and exploration) travel, investigative journalism, and political commentary which, by sharing aspects of the socio-cultural life of the people at the centre of the travelogue, leaves the reader well informed as to the principal issues they are faced with. As a final outcome, she believes that successful travel writing should reinforce a deeper understanding of what connects cultures rather than what divides them. Voysey (2006) adds that a travel writer has a responsibility to entertain and inform his readers, inspiring them with a spirit of inquiry and adventure. However, a good travel writer should, in addition, aim to promote an understanding of the deeper political, historical and cultural realities of a country and its people.

⁵⁸ Gulyas, L. Course Outline. *ENG 337T. Travel Writing In Rwanda*. Bellingham, 2012.

⁵⁹ *Elements of Good Travel Writing*. Read, Write & Think – International Reading Association 2007.

⁶⁰ Bal, M. *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*. Toronto, 1994.

4. Towards a definition

The concept of 'travel' itself, Steadman points out, is a sweeping, all-embracing term which essentially indicates the movement from one geographical location to another, including virtually anything from the mandatory European tour of the wealthy socialite to the desperate escape attempt of the fugitive slave.⁶¹ A journey can be voluntary or forced in nature. Heaps (2000, 6) defines travel as 'a circuitous movement across geographies [...] the movement of a body across geographical, cultural, political, and/or linguistic spaces.' The nature of travel can vary from enjoyment and excitement to suffering and hardship. As Fussel (1987) reminds us, the word is derived from *travail*, which implies unpleasant, even painful work or toil.⁶² Homesickness, loneliness, fear of getting lost, fear of strangers, concern for personal safety and the feeling of embarrassment resulting from ignorance are some of the potential unpleasant consequences of travel.

Leed (1991) adds the reporting of factual information on the geography, inhabitants, agriculture, natural resources and government of a place or places the writer is travelling through to the list of objectives of 'travel writing'. It may also include technological information on means of transportation. However, what makes travelogues different from ordinary fact-oriented reporting, is that it is interspersed with personal observations and reflections in respect of the areas visited. Anecdotes from or about fellow travellers, local residents and their culture can also be included. Subsequently the final result is a blend of genres, notably autobiography, journalism, short fiction and essay.

The conventional source of travel writing is to be found in notes recorded by the traveller during a journey, which are expanded into a personal narrative account upon the completion of the journey. Sometimes the notes are embellished and expanded beyond the writer's real experiences and readers are not sure whether they are being offered truth or fiction. Owing to this, according to Hulme (2010) attempts have been made to restrict the genre to only true accounts of actual journeys.

The travelogue differs from travel stories in that the former refers to works written in the style of a journal, following an itinerary, containing actual reports about a person's voyage, while the latter consists of realistic narrations about a journey, aimed at a wider audience.

⁶¹ Steadman, J. *Traveling Economies: American Women's Travel Writing*. Columbus. 2007.

⁶² Middle English. The Latin origins of the word, *tres palus*, translate as *three stakes*, which is the equivalent of *trepalium*, that is *instrument of torture*, in Mediaeval Latin.

5. Conclusion

Several of the issues mentioned in this chapter are pertinent to the current study. The kind of travel undertaken by the three authors, their aims and the extent to which they followed the conventions of the travelogue were examined. An important point is the degree of credibility they achieved in their work through attempting to remain objective and avoiding a tendency towards stereotyping or assuming cultural superiority. The three authors' emotional involvement with the local population, attempts to promote understanding and willingness to learn are other important factors that were considered. In addition, their skills as observers and ability to put their message across in an acceptable style formed an integral part of the study. Most of the 'classic' themes mentioned by Abdoh were likewise included in the research.

CHAPTER 2

SIBERIA AT THE END OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

1. Brief geographical background of the region

1.1 Etymology of the name Siberia

In spite of having been a constant focal point of on-going study and exploration, Siberia, a region so vast that it has been described as the eighth continent⁶³ appears in many ways just as elusive today as it was to the first Europeans who ventured into it a millennium ago. Just the sheer size of the territory makes it almost impossible to pin down.

Even the origin of the toponym, Siberia, remains a mystery and a topic of speculation. Several sources refer to an origin closely related to words in the languages spoken by the original inhabitants of various parts of the region, including those of ancient Ugric, Tatar or Mongolian tribes according to Guzarov,⁶⁴ while Chinese chroniclers claim the word to be of Chinese origin, dating back to 1206 CE.⁶⁵ In fact, Stolberg attributes the oldest reference found so far mentioning the Siberian 'forest people' to a Chinese source, based on an older Mongol chronicle that gives a description of 'their life, their customs, and their economy.'⁶⁶ She also points out that until the 18th century, Western maps originally showed the northern part of Asia not as 'Siberia', (in Russian 'Сибирь' *Sibir*) but as 'Great Tatar,' an earlier Russian geographical term.

⁶³ Ziegler, G. *Der achte Kontinent : die Eroberung Sibiriens*. Berlin, 2005.

⁶⁴ Guzarov: Гузаров, В. Н. *История Сибири*. Томск, 2012.

⁶⁵ Baikalov, A. Notes on the Origin of the Name 'Siberia'. *The Slavonic and East European Review* 1950, 29(72).

⁶⁶ Stolberg, E. The Siberian Frontier and Russia's Position in World History: A Reply to Aust and Nolte Author(s). *German Perspectives* 2004, 27(3): 245.

In the 13th century Arab travellers and merchants referred to the area around the upper valley of the Irtysh River as 'Ibis-Shibir' whereas a hundred years later, the first West-European reference to the region appears under the name of 'Sebur' in the Catalan World Atlas of 1357. A claim has also been made for a Russian origin of the word, 'север' meaning *north*, though, as Lessner points out the obvious, 'Siberia is east of ancient Russia, not north.'⁶⁷

Baikalov (1950) finally opts, with a well substantiated argument, for a word of Turkic origin, 'Su-Berr,' which refers to a wilderness with plenty of water. This is exactly what the nomadic tribes came across upon migrating north from the arid steppes of Central Asia. His hypothesis is supported by the tendency among tribal people to choose descriptive names for geographical features that are consistent with their appearance. Likewise the Yenisei River, Amur River and Lake Baikal, which have an exotic ring to a foreign ear, are derived from the rather prosaic Turkic and Mongol words for 'clear water', 'black river' and 'big lake'. According to Baikalov (1950, 289) the 'early foreign travellers, chroniclers and geographers mistook the native general designation of these lands for a geographical name and passed it on, distorting it in accordance with the phonetic peculiarities and alphabetical conventions of their own language.'

1.2 Demarcation of the region

The area officially designated as 'Siberia', which covers around 10% of the land surface of the earth and about 77% of the surface of the present Russian Federation, has changed over time and has been defined and redefined by different government administrations. Originally, in historical terms, the entire area east of the Ural Mountains up to the Pacific Ocean, including Sakhalin Island, was regarded as Siberia. It was demarcated as the region in the northern part of Asia, confined to the west by the Ural Mountains and to the east and north by oceans (The Pacific and Northern Ice Sea respectively).⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Lessner, E. *Siberia: Cradle of Conquerors*. New York 1955, 3.

⁶⁸ Sibirinfo. Сибиринфо, сайт о Сибири (<http://www.sibir.info>) 2013.

Müller defines Siberia as the wide tract of country 'which stretches from the confines of Europe to the Eastern Ocean, and from the Frozen Sea to the present frontiers of China.'⁶⁹

Since the Soviet era, Siberia proper, in the sense of an administrative region, has included the area east of the Ural Mountains only up to the watershed between the Pacific and Arctic drainage basins, with the areas further to the east being treated as a separate geographic entity.

For the purposes of this study, Siberia is regarded according to the pre-Soviet era definition, as the primary source texts to be studied describe locations situated along routes running the entire length of the region, from the Ural Mountains up to and including Sakhalin Island.

1.3 Geography of the region

The extreme climatic conditions of Siberia, ranging from short, warm, on occasion hot, summers to notoriously severe, freezing, seemingly never-ending winters, quickly became legendary as pioneering adventurers started to trickle into the area from European Russia. In correspondence with the hugeness of the region, natural conditions too were found to vary considerably. Siberia, the eastern part of which according to Baikalov is claimed by geologists to be among the most ancient lands on the surface of our planet,⁷⁰ was found to consist of varying major zones: the tundra in the arctic north, where the land is covered in snow and ice for about ten months of the year, while the taiga stretches to the south, its great forest belt gradually giving way to the woodlands and grass fields of the forest-steppe, which in turn runs into the vast plains of the steppe itself.

⁶⁹ Müller, G. *The Conquest of Siberia*. London, 1842, 29. This work is held as a standard early reference on the history of Siberia and one of the first scholarly accounts of the region. Gerhard Müller (1705–1783) was born in the Duchy of Westphalia, He was invited in 1725 to teach at the recently founded Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg. He was a member of the Second Kamchatka Expedition to eastern Siberia in 1735 after which the remainder of his life was dedicated to publishing works on the history of Siberia, earning him the position as the first historian to specialise in the history and culture of the region.

⁷⁰ Baikalov, A. The Conquest and Colonisation of Siberia. *The Slavonic and East European Review* 1932, 10(30).

Mountains, being mostly confined to one or two regions, did not present too daunting a prospect for explorers and travellers. Ledonne sketched mountains which 'created an insurmountable obstacle' between the Altay region and Lake Baikal,⁷¹ but fortuitously, in this instance, the mountains served as a border with a neighbouring country and did not present a hindrance to travellers confining their voyages to Siberia. However, the relative scarcity of insurmountable peaks were more than amply compensated for by numerous enormous, swift flowing rivers, regularly confronting and challenging the voyager.

2. Brief historical background of the region

Europe only took serious notice of Siberia when the invading hordes of Genghis Khan started to threaten its very survival in the 13th century CE.⁷² Suddenly there was a keen interest in the Mongols' country of origin and the places they had conquered along the way.

Siberia had been inhabited for thousands of years before the Mongolian invaders set off on their conquests. Guzarov (2012, 5) dates the first known appearance of *homo erectus* in the far eastern Altay territory back to about 800 000 years BCE, while *homo sapiens* started populating virtually the entire southern part of Siberia 500 000 years later. Settlement of the northern regions began around 50 000 years BCE. Very little traces remain of the earliest, ancient inhabitants and most of what had been discovered has disappeared completely since the Russian conquests. According to Lozinski, burial sites were uncovered and raided and 'the result of this feverish activity over a period of three hundred years was disastrous for the monuments of antiquity.'⁷³ Once the ruins had been left uncovered, they were completely pulverised by the harsh winters, leaving no trace of the riches they had originally

⁷¹ Ledonne, J. Building an Infrastructure of Empire in Russia's Eastern Theater, 1650s--1840s. *Cahiers du Monde russe* 2006, 47(3): 588.

⁷² Fortunately, as Gibson (1972, 442) says, over the years 'Siberia was sufficiently important and/or interesting to have its past fairly well recorded; at least the motivations, methods, and results of the Russian occupation of Siberia (surely one of the most striking if not consequential processes in the growth of the Russian Empire) are adequately known.'

⁷³ Lozinski, P. La Sibérie au premier millénaire après Jésus-Christ. *Études Slaves et Est-Européennes* 1962, 7(3/4): 231.

held.⁷⁴ Local civilisations continued to flourish in succession but were unable to do so interminably as the area soon became an important place for empire building among Huns, Tatars, and Mongols (Stolberg 2004).

At the time that Russia started making serious inroads into Siberia the Huns, who had ruled the area between the second century BCE and the 5th century CE, had been replaced by Turkic tribes, who in turn gave way to the Mongols in the 10th century CE (Guzarov 2012). The Mongol empire expanded rapidly and local dynasties and peoples such as the Kirghiz and Tuva all but vanished, never to regain their former glory once their overlords had finally gone. Internecine strife in the 14th century between western and eastern Mongols precipitated the end of their reign. By the 15th century Siberia somewhat resembled a patchwork quilt of diffuse Tatar principalities (*khanates*).

According to Stolberg (2004, 245), Western maps at the time designated the northern part of Asia ‘the “Great Tatar”, a term borrowed from Russian geographical terminology and used until the eighteenth century.’ Even though the name ‘Siberia’ is only mentioned for the first time in Russian chronicles in 1407, (Baikalov 1932) the first recorded Russian forays into the region were undertaken by inhabitants of Novgorod, the principality which had started thriving in the 9th century with trade as a principal activity.⁷⁵ The Novgorod Chronicles first mention the region in 1032, calling it *Yugorskaya Zemlitsa*, or Yugra, according to an earlier name for the Ural Mountains.⁷⁶ Furs represented the dominant item of the trade, which the Republic of Novgorod conducted with the Hanseatic League (Baikalov 1932), and it soon dawned on the Novgorodians that the land to the east of the Ural Mountains could provide an unlimited supply of the finest specimens to continue and expand their existing trade. But as they prioritised the expansion of trade in preference to the expansion of territorial acquisitions (Lessner 1955), they ventured into the region in search of lucrative deals, not with the aim to settle.

⁷⁴ In the early days of the Crimean War, Russia was vehemently accused by its enemies of destroying ‘the very landmarks and signs of civilisation’ (Macdonald, 1854).

⁷⁵ Norris, S., Sunderland, W., eds. *Russia's People of Empire: Life Stories from Eurasia, 1500 to the Present*. Bloomington, 2012.

⁷⁶ Vladimir. *Russia on the Pacific*. London, 1899.

They were not always welcomed by the native inhabitants and according to Baikalov (1932) an unsuccessful raid in 1032 is, in fact, the first recorded reference to Siberia in the Novgorod Chronicles. The Novgorodians attempted to establish relations with the Siberian inhabitants, going so far as to refer to the area as the 'Yugor Province'⁷⁷ but it was an empty claim as they did not hold dominion over the territory. Nevertheless, the stories of the wonders these first adventurers had come across on their expeditions made an impression that would eventually be acted upon by a future generation of rulers (Lessner 1955).⁷⁸

The rulers of the Grand Duchy of Moscow (also referred to as Muscovy), who were to succeed Novgorod as the leading Russian principality in 1478, had different ideas, constantly seeking to expand the territory under their command. The time was ripe for a bold move. As the Soviet-Russian historian Skrynnikov points out: 'Rus, having done with the foreign yoke, had started to clear the land of the fragments of the crumbling empire of the conquerors, the Golden Horde.'⁷⁹

Expeditionary forces were sent across the Ural Mountains by Prince Ivan III towards the end of the 15th century to collect tribute in the form of furs from tribes as far as the Ob River. However, further forays into the region, also referred to as the 'Yugor Province' by the would-be conquerors, were not pursued. It would be left to the grandson of Ivan III, Tsar Ivan IV,⁸⁰ to bring Siberia into the Russian fold. Ivan IV had suffered defeat in the Livonian war, failing in his attempt to conquer the Baltic, upon which he redirected his attention to the east, where he hoped to be more successful (Guzarov 2012).

The prospects of untold wealth to be found in a mythical place called Mangansee and vast tracts of unoccupied land were two obvious incentives to cross the Ural Mountains. However, there was yet another reason of equal importance. In the second half of the 16th century, English and Dutch merchants were looking for a way to open a 'northern

⁷⁷ Naumov, V. *The History of Siberia*. New York, 2006.

⁷⁸ Müller (1842, 5) dismisses these initial expeditionary visits as insignificant, stating simply that 'Siberia was scarcely known to the Russians before the middle of the sixteenth century.'

⁷⁹ Skrynnikov: Скрынников, Р. *Ермак*. Москва, 2008, 1.

⁸⁰ Tsar Ivan IV, has come down through the ages as Ivan the Terrible, a misnomer prompted by Western historical sources, as his Russian sobriquet of Иван Грозный would be more accurately rendered as Ivan the Formidable or Ivan the Threatening.

route to India' (Guzarov 2012) which would put them in a position to establish a permanent English or Dutch presence in northern Asia. Ivan IV fairly balked at such a prospect. In addition, he soon had other, more pressing reasons to cross the Ural Mountains.

After the fall and complete destruction of Kazan, which Ivan IV had conquered in 1552, Khan Yediger, ruler of the realm, or khanate, known as 'Sibir', which was in fact one of the successor states of the Golden Horde (Norris and Sunderland 2012), wisely decided to pre-empt a similar fate by accepting Russian supremacy over his territory, promising to pay annual tribute, upon which Ivan IV proudly added 'Tsar of all Siberia' to his existing titles (Baikalov 1932). But the situation was to change less than two decades later when Yediger was murdered by one of his vassals and his successor, intent on introducing Islam to the region, took a defiant stance, breaking off all contact with Russia (Naumov 2006). A hostile response was inevitable and the stage was set for a major conflict. Russia decided to make a move but its first military incursion into the territory was a complete disaster: the entire punitive force was killed and it seemed that Siberia would be lost.

Fortunately for the Tsar, who was preoccupied with conflicts on the western borders of the country, the self-interest of some of his subjects, which happened to coincide with his own territorial ambitions, came to the rescue. Mindful of his defeat in the west, Ivan IV was careful not to lose more face which could have resulted from an unsuccessful campaign in the east against an adversary whose strength he was not too sure of. So he opted for a symbiotic solution which would benefit both his own ambitions and those of a fabulously wealthy merchant family, the Stroganovs. Guzarov (2012, 8) describes the situation thus: 'The tsar acted through private individuals, thereby emphasizing his own alleged lack of involvement in expansion.'

The Stroganovs, of Mongolian descent, had played an important role in the rise of Muscovy and their advice to and financing of the Grand Duchy were in continual demand. The noted 19th century French historian/politician Alfred Rambaud describes the Stroganovs as 'as audacious as the Spaniards' and not without reason.⁸¹ Lessner (1955, 258) states that 'their counsel achieved the downfall of Novgorod, they were expert diplomats, uncompromising rivals, and they had an Asiatic faculty of waiting.'

⁸¹ Rambaud, A. *Russia. Volume 1*. New York, 1887, 206.

Waiting, in fact, for the eventual opportunity of capturing what was perceived to potentially be the jewel in the Russian crown: Siberia. Most of the Stroganov wealth was invested in land, but they were also involved in banking, industry and mining which supplied plenty of funds for immediate use in a variety of other ventures.

By 1558 Ivan IV had captured Kazan, Astrakhan and Perm but his armed forces, which he never fully trusted, were weakened by the loss of officers following purges conducted at his command. As a result he was in no position to cross the Ural Mountains. In the same year the Stroganovs managed to convince the Tsar to sign a charter granting them unprecedented powers, including a monopoly of trade and exclusive mining privileges in Siberia (Lessner 1955). The Stroganovs had achieved their aim: Siberia was finally within their grasp, while the Tsar willingly managed to distance himself from potential failure.

It would be another decade, and only after signing an additional, even more generous charter, before the real onslaught on Siberian territory was to begin. After the failures of their own attempts to send an army into the territory, the Stroganovs engaged a Cossack leader, Yermak,⁸² to head an expedition into the interior of Siberia in 1581. Sources vary on the strength of the initial expedition, but it is estimated to have been around 500 to 540 men (Guzarov 2012, Lessner 1955, Norris and Sunderland 2012).

Enormous distances had to be covered and there were constant hardships and challenges to be faced along the way, resulting not only from the terrain and climate they had to contend with but also from a potentially hostile population they would indubitably have to defend themselves against. Yermak's first significant conquest was Isker, the capital of the Sibir Khanate on the Irtysh River. Isker (also called Kashlyk) fell in October 1582, despite the Cossacks being grossly outnumbered by the 10 000 strong Tatar forces. The Cossack victory was mainly due to the fact that their adversaries for the first

⁸² The parentage of Yermak has not been established but he is referred to in original manuscripts as, Yermak Timofeev Povol'skiy, (Ермак Тимофеев Поволский) a 'Cossack pirate from the Volga' (Guzarov 2012, Lessner 1955). Müller (1842, 9) refers to Yermak in a dismissive tone as the 'chief of a troop of banditti who infested the shores of the Caspian Sea' while Rambaud (1878) puts him on a par with Pizarro and Cortés, the Spanish conquistadors who were conquering another 'New World', roughly at the same time, on the opposite side of the globe. Yermak is, perhaps, best summarised by Norris and Sunderland (2012, 18) simply as 'a product of the frontier, a creation of the limits of Muscovite society.'

time faced an enemy bearing firearms as many of the Tatars simply fled in panic (Naumov 2006).

Isker, located near the present-day city of Tobolsk, was to serve as Siberian capital until the early decades of the 19th century when the seat of power was moved to its rival city, Omsk. At a distance of 2 367 km from the capital of the Tsardom of Russia, Ivan IV was now assured of a foothold in western Siberia, if by courtesy of the Stroganovs and their Cossack mercenaries.

Following the death of Yermak, new Russian forces entered the territory (Naumov 2006). Internecine struggles weakened Tatar opposition and soon the Tyumen fort was built. This was the beginning of a new Russian policy to strengthen its position in Siberia by erecting strongholds at strategic points on the route deeper into the region.

Instead of uniting and resisting the intruders, the local tribes accepted the gradual intrusion of their new overlords. Lessner (1955, 322) wrote how, 'One by one, clans and tribes were faced with demands for tribute; one by one, they paid up, satisfied to surrender to foreign oppressors rather than forgo their domestic arguments.' According to Ledonne (2006, 606), 'Two central agencies and a network of local agents (*voevods*)⁸³ created a basic administrative grid to implant a minimal Russian presence among native groups, who had paid the *iasak* (fur tax) to their nomad overlords and who now had to pay it to the Russians.'

Still looking for the *El Dorado* of Manganese, the estuary of the Ob River in the Arctic north had been reached by 1595. Even the so called 'Time of Troubles' (Смутное время)⁸⁴ did not stem the tide of ongoing colonisation of the region. Tomsk, the first of a number of cities to follow in the 17th century, was founded in 1604, about 1 500 km east of Tobolsk.

Expansion purely for the sake of adding new territory to the Tsardom of Russia was not the only incentive to keep on pushing eastward. The country had come to rely heavily on the income provided by furs of Siberian origin. Lessner (1955, 561) states that

⁸³ A *voevod* was a government appointed local agent. They were granted powers roughly similar to those of governors. In some sources *voevods* are referred to as commandants.

⁸⁴ The period of interregnum between the death of Tsar Fyodor I in 1598 and the start of the Romanov Dynasty in 1613.

It must be noted that foreign trade in the old Muscovy [and the new Tsardom of Russia] was a State monopoly, and that furs were eagerly sought by European merchants, who paid for them in gold.

Naumov's (2006, 60) succinct, somewhat laconic and undramatic conclusion on the history of the opening up of the rest of Siberia is as follows: 'The exploration of east Siberia and the Far East was carried out by parties of explorers who were primarily looking for new sources of furs. The chief result of their efforts was the annexation of Siberia to Russia.' Gibson agrees: 'It was this unrelenting hunt for ever depleting sources of furs to satisfy a seemingly ungluttable (sic) market that took Russians so rapidly across northern Asia, and eventually as far as California.'⁸⁵ Foust summarises Russian expansion in Siberia in the 17th century as follows: 'The state attempted to dominate this expansion, and succeeded to a large degree. It set the tone, laid down the ground rules, and enforced them as rigorously as circumstance permitted.'⁸⁶

Progress was swift, though it would not be an easy walk to the Pacific. Tribes to the south were to put up serious resistance which the long chains of new forts that the Russians had to build bore witness to. So, for instance, Krasnoyarsk, founded in 1628, was besieged by Kirgiz nomads year after year (Guzarov 2012). The Kirgiz were finally subdued by 1707 and their defeat discouraged other tribes from further attacks on Russian settlements in Siberia (ibid.).

The fort of Yakutsk was built in 1632 and seven years later the Sea of Okhotsk was reached. Areas around Lake Baikal and the remote peninsula of Kamchatka were explored intensively in the last half of the 17th century. Irkutsk, near Lake Baikal, was founded in 1661 and Petropavlovsk⁸⁷ in Kamchatka, almost a century later, although a fort had been built on the peninsula as early as 1698.⁸⁸ Vladivostok was founded only in 1860, well after the Pacific coast had been reached (Guzarov 2012). Resistance by the

⁸⁵ Gibson, J. The Significance of Siberia to Tsarist Russia. *Canadian Slavonic Papers / Revue Canadienne des Slavistes* 1972, 14(3): 443.

⁸⁶ Foust, C., Russian Expansion to the East through the Eighteenth Century. *The Journal of Economic History* 1961, 482.

⁸⁷ Present-day Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy.

⁸⁸ Krashennikov: Крашениников, С. Описание Земли Камчатки – *History of Kamchatka and the Kuril Islands*, 1776.

indigenous population in these areas was limited, mostly owing to their small numbers, inability to put up a united front and absence of modern armaments with which to confront a technologically superior adversary (Naumov 2006).

Moving in a more south-easterly direction towards the Pacific Ocean, the Russians encountered a different adversary. Stolberg (2004, 246) points out how 'China's powerful state machinery and its thousand-year-old culture created an effective eastern limit to Russia's expansion.' The Chinese were, in fact, busy expanding their territory in a north-easterly direction. After having incorporated Mongolia into their domain, they had set their sights on Manchuria and the vast, open territories further north.

The town of Khabarovsk was founded by the Russians on the Amur River in 1652 and the two powers came to blows for the first time near the river the very next year. Russia's diplomatic overtures to try to solve the issues arising from the conflict of interests were countered with demands they were not prepared to meet, forcing them to prepare for an imminent conflict (Naumov 2006).

Following on-going battles, a peace treaty was eventually signed at Nerchinsk in 1689. Although concessions had to be made, the treaty was a vitally important document for the future development of Siberia because, as Naumov (2006, 68) states, it 'signified international recognition of Siberia becoming part of Russia and that China had relinquished all claims to Siberia.' Russia was prepared to adopt a pragmatic view in order to obtain what they had long sought after: regular and permanent trade with the Chinese which was to be highly profitable for the country (Müller 1842).

Russian dominion of Sakhalin Island, mistaken in 1805 for a peninsula by the Russian explorer Adam Johann von Krusenstern,⁸⁹ would not be settled until 1875, upon the signing of the Treaty of St Petersburg which was to put an end to Japan's competing claims on the territory.⁹⁰ Ledonne (2006, 603) claims that 'Eastern Siberia would remain

⁸⁹ Born into a Baltic German family descended from Swedish aristocracy, Adam Johann von Krusenstern (also spelt Kruzenstern) joined the Russian Imperial Navy in 1787 and led the first Russian circumnavigation of the world early in the 19th century.

⁹⁰ Gentes, A. Sakhalin as Cause Célèbre: The Re-signification of Tsarist Russia's Penal Colony. *Acta Slavica Iaponica* 2012(32); Magdinovich: Магдинович, В. Иван Федорович Крузенштерн – биография, 2013.

a forlorn region until the opening of China by the British in the 1840s revolutionized the geopolitical situation in the Far East.’

By the time the Russian Empire was fully established by Tsar Peter I (the Great) in 1721, it encompassed a substantial part of Eurasia, and was third in size only to the Mongol and later British Empires, with Siberia making up by far most of the territory. Some Siberian tribes voluntarily became part of the Empire, while others continued to fight, only accepting Russian rule as late as 1864 (Guzarov 2012).

Guzarov (2012,12) points out the different views historiographers maintain about the nature of the acquisition of the new territory. Historians from the 18th and 19th century, including Gerhard Müller, J. Fischer, P. Nebol’sin and S. Bakhrushin⁹¹ describe it as the subjugation and conquest of Siberia’ ([...] покорении, завоевании Сибири’), while Soviet historiographers (V. Shunkov, Z. Boyarshinova and V. Aleksandrov) maintain it was a peaceful penetration of Russia into Siberia by means of a mass colonisation by peasants ([...] мирного проникновения русских в Сибирь через массовую крестьянскую колонизацию’).

Also, acquisition of territory and consolidation of rule were two different issues: Ledonne (2006, 605) draws attention to the fact that ‘huge distances, sparse population, and the slow progress of the settler into territory that had been dominated by the nomads for centuries created enormous obstacles to the construction of an infrastructure of empire.’ Yet towns gradually developed around the original forts, turning them into administrative and military centres. In the 16th century Siberian matters were handled in Moscow by the Ambassadorial Department and then transferred to the Department of Kazan Affairs. By 1637, under the reign of Tsar Mikhail Fyodorovich, a special department was started to run Siberia, namely the Siberia Office (Сибирский приказ) (Naumov 2006) with Tobolsk, Tomsk, Yeniseisk and Lensk as four sub-departments. At the beginning of the 18th century, once it had become too cumbersome to direct all the vast territory’s affairs from Moscow, Tobolsk became the administrative centre of Siberia, overseen by a governor.

Right from its inception there were problems with the administrative system, mainly related to abuse of powers by government employees (the levy of taxes, storage and sale of furs fell within the ambit of their duties). Indeed, Gibson (1972, 445) reminds us

⁹¹ S. Bakhrushin (1882–1950) is regarded as a Russian-Soviet historian.

that: 'Not only were Siberian postings far from the surveillance of Moscow or St Petersburg but the post holders were not infrequently corrupt men who were demoted to godforsaken Siberia, where they promptly repeated rather than repented their misdeeds, in addition to collecting their double salary.' Peter I did not waste time in publicly punishing the culprits, when caught, in Moscow (Guzarov 2012). But cases such as these were the exception rather than the rule and the problem remained: how was the enormous territory to be managed effectively?

The 18th century saw several reforms in the administrative system including the assignment of powers and duties and the re-delineation of the area into administrative entities, which set the pattern for the centuries to follow. Ledonne (2006, 591) states that, by the beginning of the reign of the Empress Elizabeth in 1741, 'the Senate had already concluded that the remoteness of Siberia was a cause of "confusion and disorder," and that corruption was so widespread that it threatened the interests of the treasury.' Empress Catherine II (the Great) went so far as to sign a decree proclaiming the 'Siberian Kingdom' (Сибирское царство) in 1764, in an attempt to enforce stricter control under a governor permanently stationed at the heart of the region.

The political subjugation of the indigenous people was followed fairly swiftly by massive efforts to convert them, if need be forcibly, to Christianity. Guzarov (2012,18) refers in this regard to the decree of 1704: 'On the destruction of the idols and their worship by the Voguls, Ostiaks, Tatars and Yakuts, and on the baptism of these peoples into the Christian faith.'

While special efforts were made to harvest new souls for Christianity, it became clear, quite soon, that the 'new' Siberians of Russian stock had already started distancing themselves from European Russia, tasting and expressing a novel kind of freedom, resulting from choice or induced by need, on the other side of the Ural Mountains. Guzarov (2012 19) quotes an observation made by the Cyprian Patriarch, Metropolitan Filaret: 'In Siberia they don't wear crosses, don't observe fast days, live with unbaptised wives.'

The constant presence of trade caravans in the south of Siberia brought cities such as Tomsk into regular contact with followers of Islam. The Russian authorities decided to incorporate them into the mainstream of the administration of the region and convened a meeting of Muslims in Ufa in 1788 with the aim to elect a *mufti* (Guzarov 2012).

A great impetus for the development of Siberia followed on the arrival of the former Privy Councillor, Mikhail Speransky, described as the father of Russian liberalism, in the region. Guzarov (2012, 30) writes how, on the eve of the war with Napoleon, 'Alexander I had rejected M. Speransky's liberal reforms project, sending him into exile.'

Speransky was appointed as governor-general of Siberia, with, according to Ledonne (2007, 602), the mission to reorganise the administration of Siberia from top to bottom, in response to the 'many complaints emanating from Siberia against abuses committed by provincial officials.' Rieber describes the duties, and immense power, of the governors-general as follows: they had to, or could 'apply, modify, or reject laws passed for the empire as a whole within their own jurisdiction.'⁹² The rationale for awarding such powers was to 'cope with the particular legal, cultural, and even economic needs which historically distinguished their territories from the Great Russian centre.'

In 1819 Speransky duly set off on a three-year journey through Siberia which served as impetus for a document of great importance concerning the protection of the indigenous population, the Regulations on the Government of Foreigners (Устав об управлении инородцев).⁹³ Subsequently, Siberia was divided into a Western and Eastern region with Tobolsk and Irkutsk as the administrative capitals.

Just over a decade later, the discovery of gold in Siberia is seen by Sabin and Savelyeva as the moment 'when the real value of Northern Asia was first understood.'⁹⁴ It became clear that a great number of people were going to be needed to unlock the treasures of the hitherto slumbering land.

⁹² Rieber, A. Bureaucratic Politics in Imperial Russia. *Social Science History* 1978, 2(4): 406.

⁹³ The term 'foreigners' in this context referred specifically to persons of non-Russian origin living in the extreme eastern regions of the country.

⁹⁴ Sablin, I., Savelyeva, M. Mapping Indigenous Siberia: Spatial Changes and Ethnic Realities, 1900–2010. *Settler Colonial Studies* 2011, 1(1): 83.

3. Settling the region

Over the years Siberia had continued to be seen and treated more as a colony than a region on equal footing with the rest of the Russian empire. The striking difference between the low level of development and relative backwardness of Siberia, compared to that of the colonies founded at roughly the same time by other European powers, soon became apparent. The following explanation is offered by Guzarov (2012, 38): 'The answer stems from the effect of the negative impact resulting from exile colonisation and the tyranny of local officials.'

Right from the beginning, the Russian conquest of Siberia had been swift, but occupance was slow (Gibson 1972). In the 16th and 17th centuries Siberia was still thinly populated by only a small number of Russian inhabitants. New settlements and towns were springing up but the task of colonising the vast tract of land was by no means easy. It was to take a tremendous amount of effort from the powers ruling the country to finally populate the area.

The first settlers were, as Baikalov states (1932, 564), 'naturally those Cossacks and soldiers who conquered the country.' Their main task was to establish Russian rule in the territory. They were to be maintained and provided for by the next wave of settlers: the peasant farmers, whose first task was obvious: to solve the food question. The indigenous population was not familiar with European farming practices and showed no interest in acquiring them, so peasants were brought in from the Perm region who, according to Guzarov (2012, 14) 'would supply the inhabitants of Siberia with bread over the course of almost a century.'

Farming peasants were continually being encouraged to settle in the region and they started trickling in from the 1590's onwards, being offered incentives such as travel assistance and tax concessions to start up their farms. They were joined by all kinds of fugitives who were keen on putting as much distance between themselves and European Russia as possible. Baikalov (1932, 565) reminds us that 'the conquest of Siberia coincided with the tying up of the hitherto free Russian peasants to the land on which they lived, or, in other words, with the introduction of the social system known as

"serfdom", but while some of the fugitives were runaway serfs, others were criminals, with refugees from religious persecution soon also swelling the ranks.

Siberia was officially designated as a destination for exiles in 1649, though the first exiles had been condemned to be sent there as early as 1593, following the upheavals in the town of Uglich after the death of Tsarevich Dimitri, the young son of Ivan IV (Baikalov 1932). Guzarov (2012, 59) points out that, from the beginning, not only criminals were deported to the region: 'Notable people were sent to Siberia as *voevods*, objectionable Cossacks and guardsmen were sent to Siberia as servitors.'

Initially only political prisoners were exiled to the remote region, conveniently cut off (from the point of view of the authorities) from contact with the 'outside world'. But soon more crimes were added to the list of those punishable by exile, with even religious sectarians beginning to find themselves living in Siberia.

The first census of the region, taken in 1719, put the male population at 241 000, which was to more than double over the next 70 years.⁹⁵ Newcomers were mostly voluntary settlers but there was forced settlement in certain regions where factory workers were required, with estate owners sending off surplus serfs in return for monetary compensation (Gusarov 2012).

While the peasant farmers were tilling the soil, constantly increasing the annual yield, they also started adding animal husbandry and fishing to their activities. But for a long time fur was to remain the main export of Siberia. Exploitation of the mineral resources of the region, which only started during the reign of Peter I, demanded an ever increasing labour force. The first major industry was the Tobolsk Arms Factory, commissioned to support the 'Great Northern War' against Sweden in the early 1700s. It coincided with the first foray into mining at what was later to become the infamous state owned Nerchinsk silver mines.⁹⁶ Both the mining and manufacturing industries, soon needed more workers than Siberia could supply and Guzarov (2012) describes how forced settlement reared its head when owners were allowed to forcibly assign peasants

⁹⁵ The reliability of this census is subject to question, with the 1897 census seen as more accurate.

⁹⁶ Private mining activities were only allowed from 1812 onwards (Guzarov 2012).

to their plants.⁹⁷ Additional manpower was supplied by prisoners sentenced to forced labour (*katorga*),⁹⁸ many of whom ended up attached to State owned mines (Baikalov 1932).

The 18th century saw members of the highest echelon of power, who had been involved in palace revolts, arriving in Siberia. Once the death sentence was abolished and substituted with lifelong exile in 1754 by Empress Elizabeth, daughter of Peter I, another ready source of potential settlers was found. A decree empowering landowners to banish unwanted serfs to Siberia, issued about six years later, also increased the population of the area (Baikalov 1932).

Among the exiles of the 18th century were participants in the Pugachev Rebellion (1773-75) which had rallied Cossacks, Old Believers, Polish exiles and Bashkirs in the Ural area under the leadership of Emelian Pugachev (Ledonne 2006). As previously mentioned, the remote location of Siberia and its isolation from the rest of Europe turned the region into a convenient place to get rid of troublesome intellectuals, such as the writer and social critic Alexander Radishchev (exiled in 1790). Famous exiles of the 19th century include the Decembrists, sent to Siberia after the unsuccessful uprising against Tsar Nicholas I in 1825.

The exile system first became formally regulated three years prior to this event with the establishment of a directorate of exile which would oversee the whole process, dividing the exiles into different categories and establishing the conditions and places of exile for each (Guzarov 2012). Thus, for example, political exiles started being sent to Sakhalin Island from 1861 onwards. Gentes (2006, 337) contends that 'Sakhalin's very existence as an island in the freezing north Pacific rendered it a natural carceral in the eyes of

⁹⁷ The same was to happen a century later on Sakhalin. A. Gentes reports how, following the discovery of coal deposits on the island, 'the military delivered the first group of exiles' in 1861 (No Kind of Liberal: Alexander II and the Sakhalin Penal Colony. *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas, Neue Folge* 2006, 382.)

⁹⁸ Gentes describes *katorga* as a system that, in imperial Russia, 'signified a discrete penologico-administrative regime ostensibly designed to punish criminals.' Convicts could be assigned to mines, industries, construction projects, or fortresses (labour battalions within a military environment). The system was designed to capitalise upon the labour of the most serious criminals. (Katorga: Penal Labour and Tsarist Siberia. *Slavic Review: Interdisciplinary Quarterly of Russian, Eurasian, and East European Studies* 2004, 18(1-2): 41.)

many officials.’ In spite of the island’s unsuitability for farming, (ibid. 343) ‘a desire to rid the mainland of exiles and other internal enemies led to envisioning [it as] a penological utopia.’ The coal deposits on the island needed to be exploited and, according to Lessner (1955, 586), as ‘Russians considered mining to be convict labour’ deportee miners were imported to do the job.

By January 1898 there were more than 309 000 exiles living in Siberia. In most cases, family members (spouses and children) were allowed and even encouraged to accompany the exiles so that many previously thinly populated areas were provided with ‘readymade’ families. But settling an area does not depend on numbers alone. There was resistance among the original, voluntary settlers of the region, to Siberia being used as a dumping ground for the non-desirables of European Russia. Guzarov (2012) explains the situation by saying that exile was seen to have a negative impact on the formation of the moral character of Siberians as criminal elements contributed to a decline in morality.

However, among the exiles were many educated men and women who made a positive contribution to their places of settlement. Fyodor Dostoyevsky turned his own experience as a political exile in the mid-19th century into a book *Notes from the House of the Dead* (*Записки из мертвого дома*), faithfully reflecting exile conditions at the time. The work would serve as an authoritative source of information on the system in the future. Siberia was also the destination of non-Russians, such as Swedish prisoners of war sent there by Piotr I and contingents of Poles who took part in the uprisings of 1830 and 1863–1864.

Swelling the number of inhabitants in the region by no means meant that Siberia was being settled successfully. Exiles were not the best kind of settlers. They found themselves in remote parts of the country against their will, most often with no inclination towards the tasks they were compelled to perform (Baikalov 1932). Many of them absconded from their places of exile and spent their lives roaming about the countryside, soon resuming the criminal activities that had landed them there in the first place.

The development of Siberia was also hampered by the sheer size of the region and lack of infrastructure. Guzarov (2012) mentions examples to explain the scale of operations involved, stating that until the construction of the railroad between Tomsk and Irkutsk, around 16 000 coachmen and 80 000 horses were employed to transport tea to the piers of Western Siberia.

Properly constructed, well maintained roads were practically non-existent in Siberia and the main road running through the territory, the famous, or infamous, 'Great Siberian Post Road' all but disappeared in places, being almost impassable for long periods owing to adverse weather and climatic conditions (Baikalov 1933). Fleming shows that, historically, conditions have always hampered road development in Russia: 'Climatic conditions, the disintegrating effects of summer heat and winter frost, of spring and autumn floods, have added to the difficulty.'⁹⁹ Transport consisted of a combination of uncomfortable road and river conveyances (by 1894, 105 steamers were serving the route), fraught with dangers. Only in 1864 was Irkutsk finally connected by telegraph to St Petersburg.

The idea to build a Trans-Siberian railway line was first mooted in 1857 but it would take more than half a century before the first train steamed into Vladivostok. The construction was tackled in stages, with the Yekaterinburg – Chelyabinsk stretch completed by 1885 while Krasnoyarsk was reached in 1899 (Guzarov 2012). The expansion of the rail network opened up the region, making possible the export of the seemingly limitless Siberian resources and the importation of greater numbers of settlers from European Russia.

4. Demographics of the region

Present day Siberia is home to 31 indigenous tribes (Hammer and Karafet),¹⁰⁰ descendants of the native peoples the first Russian explorers encountered, only a small number of which still practise their traditional nomadic or semi-nomadic professions. Disturbing though is the fact that, at the beginning of the period of conquest, Russians had come across tribes speaking a total of 120 languages with many more dialects, indicating that over 85 ethnic groups have disappeared without leaving a trace (Sabin and Savelyeva 2011). Part of the decrease has been due to a natural process of assimilation among members of different tribes. As Baikalov points out: 'Native tribes in

⁹⁹ Fleming, R. Backgrounds of Russian Life. *Geography* 1931, 16(2): 97.

¹⁰⁰ Hammer, M., Karafet T. DNA and the Peopling of Siberia.

some districts of Siberia, under the influence of the Russian settlers, rapidly lost their nationality and adopted the Russian language, religion and culture.¹⁰¹

It is difficult to estimate the original numbers of the native peoples or to calculate rates of growth and decline as once censuses started to be taken, most figures concentrated on the population of European (Russian) origins. As Forsyth points out, this neglect and absence of information is due to the willingness of historians to ‘dismiss pre-conquest Siberia as an “empty land” inhabited by only “thinly scattered natives”.’¹⁰² Sabin and Savelyeva agree (2011, 80): ‘Only on rare occasions has established colonial and postcolonial scholarship devoted its attention to Siberia, as it is rarely considered a colony in the conventional sense of the term.’ Ethnographical maps produced before 1897 are regarded as unreliable ‘as they are not verifiable through census records or findings of properly held ethnographical expeditions.’ The 1897 census set the indigenous population at 600 000.

As far as the Russian inhabitants of Siberia are concerned, figures often have to be adjusted, as usually only male members of the population were included in statistics. Forsyth (1992, 115) estimates an increase of around 600 000 in the 18th century (from 300 000 to 900 000) with a native to Russian ratio of 1:3, whereas by the mid-1800s the Russian population ‘had soared to about 2, 7 million,’ while the indigenous peoples had dropped to 21.5% of the total population of the region.

Only one census, which was to become known as The First Russian National Census of 1897 (Первая Всеобщая Перепись Населения Российской Империи 1897 г), is recorded to have been taken during the era of the Russian Empire. It was ordered partly as a result of shifts that had taken place in the population following the abolition of serfdom in 1861.¹⁰³ The census showed the total population of Siberia as 5.8 million.

¹⁰¹ Baikalov, A. Siberia since 1894. *The Slavonic and East European Review* 1933, 11(32): 331.

¹⁰² Forsyth, J. *A History of the Peoples of Siberia: Russia's North Asian Colony 1581–1990*. Cambridge, 1992, xviii.

¹⁰³ Eglund (2000, 31) terms the census an ambitious undertaking ‘to document the entire population of the Empire and describe its associated characteristics on a single day. This one-day census (однодневная перепись) would collect data on age, gender, literacy, nationality, place of birth, etc., for all residents irrespective of their social estate or tax status.’

As far as the number of exiles included in this total is concerned, only sketchy records were kept of deportations between the 17th and 18th centuries. Lessner (1955) reports that in 1622 around 15% of the total Russian population of Siberia consisted of exiles, dropping to 5.2% over the next 250 years. This fits in with Guzarov's (2012, 62) estimate, showing a decrease towards the end of the 18th century, when the proportion of exiles did not exceed 10% of the total population of the region.

Immigration accounted for around one third of the total population increase between 1861 and 1896, including 535 000 exiles, according to figures of the Main Prison Administration.¹⁰⁴ Baikalov (1932) estimates the total number of exiles for almost the entire 19th century at 864000.

5. Siberia in the last half of the 19th century

Although the system of manorial serfdom did not exist in Siberia, the 1861 reforms of Tsar Alexander II did affect the region as it liberated those peasants forcibly conscripted to mines and industries at the time. Siberia also became a chosen destination for many who wanted to start a new life far away from the estates they had hitherto been tied down to. So, for example, between 1865 and 1883 100 000 people settled in the Altay region (Guzarov 2012). The government tried to stop this wave of emigration as it would lead to a loss of labourers in the areas the newly liberated serfs had deserted. However, settlers continued to cross the Urals without assistance in search of a better life than the frugal existence they would have had to squeeze out on an inadequate patch of land legally allotted to them (Baikalov 1932). New legislation adopted in 1881 made it easier for peasants to obtain official permission to move to Siberia and by the time the construction of the Trans-Siberian Railroad had become a reality, settlement in the region was given another impetus.

The heady days of the reform era of the 1860's also witnessed a flirtation with the idea of separatism, of establishing an independent state of Siberia. However, Guzarov (2012) states that it turned out to be short lived. Researchers tend to agree that the question of regional separatism has been vastly exaggerated.

¹⁰⁴ Wood, A. *The History of Siberia: from Russian Conquest to Revolution*. London, 1991.

6. Perception of Siberia at the time of Chekhov, Kennan and De Windt

At the close of the 19th century, Siberia was by no means a fully settled region. Only the surface of the vast territory had been scratched, mostly along the road joining the bigger centres, running from Yekaterinburg in the Urals to Vladivostok on the Pacific Ocean. Yet several distinct attitudes among society towards the region could already be discerned.

For the government of the day, Siberia served several purposes and was finally seen as a worthwhile, if costly, investment. Formerly used merely as a place to collect fur tax and dump the undesired, Siberia was now recognized to hold potential for serious future development. Lessner (1955, 553) quotes a memorandum on Siberia, which can be termed a passionate wake-up call on behalf of the region, signed by Posset, the Russian Minister of the Interior:

This grandiose territory, 2 ½ times the size of European Russia, a land whose riches are hardly tapped, is doomed to be the domicile of the refuse of a population of 70 million. Such a colonization made sense when Siberia was a wasteland, bound by the wild Pacific, and sparsely inhabited by savage nomads. But now that the Pacific has become a link between civilized countries, it is high time to purge Siberia from the stigma of 'land of criminals'. We are being faced with a serious shortage of trustworthy and useful elements. Siberia is falling behind its neighbour states in the East. The progress, nay, the very existence of Siberia was neglected for the sake of deportation.

In 1882 the status of the Tobolsk and Tomsk provinces was elevated to the same level as that of provinces in European Russia. With this recognition, the government showed that Siberia was finally no longer regarded as 'just' a backward colony on the other side of the Urals.

The permanent inhabitants of Siberia saw their place of domicile from three prevailing perspectives. To the indigenous peoples, what was happening to their hitherto virtually 'untouched' land could only spell disaster. Forsyth (1992) points out how Soviet-Marxist historians from the 1920's through to the 1980's insisted that the native peoples benefited from the Russian invaders who had brought them in contact with a 'higher culture', while ignoring the way they suffered during enforced processes of collectivisation, denomadisation and the destruction of their traditional cultures.

As far as the volunteer settlers who had crossed the Urals in order to start a new life were concerned, the picture was quite the opposite. Sablin and Savelyeva (2011) describe the motivation of the peasant farmers as a quest for personal freedom and free fertile land, something that they found plenty of in what was to become their new home. There was only a slight presence of gentry in the territory and serfdom was virtually unknown. The free settlers had no intention of going back to European Russia and were happy to put all their efforts into contributing towards building a prosperous new society.

Gentes (2004, 503) quotes an extract from an editorial appearing in the Irkutsk newspaper *Sibir* in 1878:

Siberia, suppressed in its moral, economic, civilian, and even political development by the exiling here of all Russia's societal excrement, should unceasingly announce its protest until that time when the issue of exile has passed through its final phase of development.

But the plea was to go unanswered.

Those who had been deported forcibly across the Urals failed to share the positive outlook of the volunteer settlers. To them, Siberia was a 'prison' (Gibson 1972). Their hearts were not in their new forced places of residence and they dreamt of the day they would go back 'home', meaning to European Russia, even if they knew it would never happen.

A principally negative attitude also prevailed among those who had been transferred to Siberia temporarily on government service. Lessner (1955) talks, for example, of a general who saw Siberia as the most extensive waste-land in the world, tailor-made for deportation. European Russians, in general, excluding intrepid, adventurous entrepreneurs and freedom seeking peasants, were not convinced of the potential virtues of Siberia either. A statesman was reported to have said that the Nevsky Prospekt alone was worth at least five times as much as all of Siberia. And much as Siberia was, in the drawing rooms to the west of the Ural Mountains, referred to as an exotic destination, as the 'Peru' or 'East India' of Russia, the upper classes were by no means queuing to go and savour the exoticism for themselves (Stolberg 2004).

Besides, there was something constantly, *naggingly* menacing about the place, as Lessner (1955, 540) writes: 'In European Russia deportation was a shadow that loomed over the powerless and darkened the shine of prominence.' Hardly anyone felt completely 'safe' or immune from possible deportation and the mere mention of the word 'Siberia' would continue to fill the nation with a sense of uneasiness, and even dread, for decades to come.

Siberia was, and continued to be, a territory in flux requiring constant change and adaptation by both those living in the territory and those responsible for its government. With its immense tracts of land waiting to be explored, the tremendous potential offered by the vast region was obvious. All the same, considering the challenges all new arrivals inevitably had to face, the jury was still out as to the possible virtues of trying to make a living there. Gradually, based to a considerable extent on first-hand reports of travellers, an overriding negative image of the vast, in many ways unfathomable region had developed.

CHAPTER 3

THE TRAVELOGUES OF ANTON CHEKHOV, GEORGE KENNAN AND HARRY DE WINDT

1. Anton Chekhov: From Siberia (Из Сибири) and Sakhalin Island (Остров Сахалин)

1.1 Contents

The supposed primary objective of Anton Chekhov's journey, which he undertook in 1890, was to get first-hand information on the exile system operated by the Russian government on Sakhalin Island. He only had a passing interest in mainland Siberia and did not spend more time there than was absolutely necessary. Only on occasions when his journey was interrupted, usually due to problems with travel arrangements, would he write in more detail about the place where he happened to be held up.

The first volume, *From Siberia*,¹⁰⁵ deals primarily with the journey through mainland Siberia. Most of the initial part of the journey is by river steamer, first through Yaroslavl and Nizhniy Novgorod on the Volga River and then on the Kama River to Perm and finally by rail to Tyumen, via Yekaterinburg. Although Chekhov does not include this part of the journey in his book, he sends regular reports back home to his family and friends.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Chekhov: Чехов, Антон. *Из Сибири*. Москва, 1987.

¹⁰⁶ Chekhov was an inveterate correspondent. His copious letters, collected in several volumes, constitute essential complementary reading for scholarly work on his oeuvre. In a letter to his friend (at the time) and influential publisher of the conservative *New Times* (*Новое время*) newspaper, Aleksey Suvorin, Chekhov (1976) writes 'the road between Tyumen and Tomsk has already been long described and exploited a thousand times.' Thus he indicates that this part of the journey is not particularly significant either. It is unfortunate that Chekhov decided to dismiss the first leg of his journey as unworthy of inclusion in his book. The letters written

The first date noted down in the book is 8 May 1890,¹⁰⁷ at the end of chapter two, in which Chekhov remarks woefully that it is not spring in Siberia yet. He mentions the absence of small settlements along the way, and selectively describes some of the bigger villages he passes through. Flooding slows down his progress and he only reaches Tomsk a week later. An entire chapter is devoted to describing challenges awaiting anyone who attempts to take on The Great Siberian Post Route, which appears to Chekhov (1987a, 28) as ‘the longest and ugliest road in the whole world’ (самая большая и, кажется, самая безобразная дорога во всем мире). However, like all travellers venturing into Siberia at the time, he has no choice but to put up with both the road and inevitable delays at post stations where fresh horses have to be harnessed.

Upon reaching Krasnoyarsk, which he describes as the fairest Siberian city, far preferring it to Tomsk, Chekhov states that it is a pity that the University of Siberia is located in the latter and not in the former. Chekhov (1987a, 35) dismisses much of what he has seen of Siberia so far: ‘If the countryside is significant to you while travelling, then travelling from Russia to Siberia you might as well omit the part from the Urals to the Yenisei’. However, from this point on Chekhov (1987a, 37) falls under the spell of the taiga, waxing lyrical about its immensity and grandeur: ‘The power and enchantment of the taiga lie not in the gigantic trees and not in the deathly silence, but in the fact that only birds of passage know where it ends.’

His last entry in this volume is dated 20 June 1890.

The second volume, *Sakhalin Island*,¹⁰⁸ takes up the journey on 5 July of the same year at the Amur River.¹⁰⁹ Three days later Chekhov is on a steamer bound for Sakhalin. Almost as

along the way are filled with vivid, vibrant descriptions which would have enhanced the first volume and contributed to setting the tone for what was to come.

¹⁰⁷ He had set off from Moscow on 21 April.

¹⁰⁸ Chekhov: Чехов, Антон. *Остров Сахалин*. Москва, 1987.

¹⁰⁹ Apart from mentioning that the steamer on which he crosses Lake Baikal is ‘below standard’, Chekhov does not describe the route between Krasnoyarsk and the Amur in detail, a curious omission as most travellers tend to write extensively about this part of their Siberian journeys. He does, however, describe the area in detail in his letters, comparing the scenery along the Angara River to Switzerland, the major promontories of the lake to the Crimea and the station of Listvenitchnaya as ‘strikingly like Yalta: if the houses were white it would be exactly like Yalta’ (Chekhov 2013, 183). Later he also writes that ‘Transbaikalia is splendid, [being] a

if reminiscing while on board, he talks about the explorers who had preceded him and gives a short summary of the history of Sakhalin. Chekhov finally sets foot on the Island where he is to spend the next three months, at the Aleksandrovsk Post, on the north-western coast of the island. At this point he gives a brief description of the geography of the island, before travelling to Aleksandrovsk where he arrives in time to witness an official visit by the Governor General of the Amur River Territory, a momentous occasion for the local inhabitants.

Chekhov devotes the next chapter to explaining his rationale for and method of taking a census on the island. He is eager to get going and starts with this arduous, self-imposed task almost immediately.¹¹⁰ Chekhov is usually accompanied by an official of some kind, ostensibly assigned to him for his own protection, but the person in question could obviously simultaneously be serving as a guard to make sure the he does not contact any political exiles, as had been previously agreed. By fulfilling this condition, Chekhov is allowed a 'free hand' on the island.¹¹¹ Detailed descriptions of the people and the places he visits follow, set against the backdrop of the ever present natural beauty of the island. Trudging from hamlet to hamlet in all weathers, he tries to take in as much as possible of the island, including the coal mines, ordinary and hard labour prisons.

On occasion Chekhov reverts to his first career of medicine, or other scientific fields, to report his observations.¹¹² He also tries his hand at ethnology, writing about the indigenous populations and attempts at their Russification by the authorities.

Once he has exhausted, from his point of view, all the sources in the north, Chekhov sails to the southern part of the island where he repeats the census taking exercise just completed in the north. Here, in addition to writing about the indigenous communities, he also has an

mixture of Switzerland, the Don, and Finland' (Chekhov, A. *Sakhalin Island*. Richmond 2013, 190).

¹¹⁰ Chekhov's haste to get started could also have been aimed at impressing on the local authorities (or rather to create the impression of) the seriousness of his intentions of taking a census, the avowed reason for his presence on the island.

¹¹¹ In a letter, sent in reply to a query, Chekhov stated that he only had limited contact with political prisoners and, on the rare occasions that it occurred, it was always in the presence of official observers (Ryfa 1997).

¹¹² He makes a point, for example of visiting meteorological stations and the occasional lighthouse.

opportunity to get acquainted with the Japanese still living on the island. Chekhov includes a detailed description of the Japanese Consul, who impresses him favourably, and also writes about the Japanese history associated with the island.

The remainder of the book is devoted to extensive summaries of Chekhov's research findings with subsequent chapters focusing on convict households, the female population of the island, the children on Sakhalin, occupations performed by the exiles, their diet, spiritual life and morality. Since virtually all the exiles dream of returning to the mainland, escape attempts and fugitives are two additional topics treated separately. A chapter is also devoted to the free population, military overseers and educated classes. Being a physician himself, Chekhov elaborates in detail on issues of morbidity, mortality and the medical services on the island in the final chapter.

Chekhov sets off from Sakhalin on 13 October 1890, for a scenic voyage that takes him to Vladivostok, Hong Kong, Singapore, Ceylon, and through the Suez Canal to Odessa.¹¹³ He finally arrives in Moscow in December 1890, eight months after setting off, with a profusion of notes and census cards compiled along the way, which now have to be transformed into a viable manuscript.

1.2 Structure

The first volume, *From Siberia*, is so short compared to the second, *Sakhalin Island*, that it hardly merits being called a 'volume' on its own. Containing a mere 31 pages, it is divided into nine short, untitled chapters, serving more as an introduction or preface to the second volume which contains the main body of the work. The first volume ends abruptly, without a clear transition to the second one. Ryfa cursorily refers to the first volume as sketches reflecting Chekhov's travel impressions of this part of the journey.¹¹⁴ However, *From Siberia* should not be ignored or dismissed as insignificant, as it contains first impressions and initial observations that are developed further in the main body of the work.

¹¹³ This final part of the journey is only recorded in his correspondence.

¹¹⁴ Ryfa, J. Literary, scientific and moral implications in the inquiry into the penal system: Anton Chekhov's journey to Sakhalin Island. PhD Bloomington, 1997.

The greater importance Chekhov gives to the second volume is clear in the way peritexts are deployed right from the start. He feels that the title, *Sakhalin Island* merits a subtitle: From travel notes (*Из путевых записок*).¹¹⁵ The 331 pages of this volume are divided into 23 chapters, each titled with a detailed heading, summarising the contents. In this volume, Chekhov makes extensive use of lengthy, explanatory footnotes, some of which could well-nigh serve as sub-chapters in their own right.¹¹⁶

There is a distinct break at the end of chapter 14 which Chekhov (1987b, 227) clearly indicates with the words: 'Having concluded the survey of the inhabited parts of Sakhalin, I am now continuing with the peculiarities, significant and insignificant, which make up contemporary life in the colony.'

Chekhov thereby prepares the reader for a change in tone and content.¹¹⁷ In the same way as the first, the second volume too ends abruptly, without a conclusion, summary or final thought from or comment by the author. As Popkin remarks: 'He just stops.'¹¹⁸

The structure of the work is unconventional, conforming to neither the stringent requirements of an academic thesis nor the less rigid norms expected in a non-fiction travel description.

1.3 Language and style

Chekhov does not drift gently into Siberia. His opening sentences are stark, direct and to the point. He (Chekhov 1987a, 7) asks the coachman 'Why is it so cold here in your Siberia?' and receives the curt reply: 'It is God's will!' (Отчего у вас в Сибири так холодно? Богу так угодно!)

¹¹⁵ Neither volume, though, contains a dedication or epigraph.

¹¹⁶ In a letter to Suvorin, Chekhov (1976) apologises for his extensive use of footnotes.

¹¹⁷ In contrast with the noted literary critic M. L. Semanova, who acknowledges the abrupt break in her article 'Chehov's Sakhalin Travels' (*Сахалинское путешествие Чехова. Ученые записки Ленингр. пединститута им. Герцена* 1948, 67), Ryfa (1997, 72) regards the claim of its presence as 'very general and arbitrary.'

¹¹⁸ Popkin, C. Chekhov as Ethnographer: Epistemological Crisis on Sakhalin Island. *Slavic Review* 1992, 51(1): 46.

In the second paragraph we learn that it is already May, but instead of enjoying spring, as one would be by now in European Russia, Siberia is still wrapped in its winter cloak. The very next paragraph, however, indicates that there is another side to Siberia when Chekhov remarks on the surrounding landscape: 'I had never before in my life seen such a vast number of wildfowl' (Зато никогда в жизни не видел такого множества дичи) (ibid. 7).

The journey continues in silence, with the melodious sound of a pair of cranes as the only intrusion. For some unknown reason this sound fills Chekhov with a sense of melancholy. He continues to describe the wild geese, a row of beautiful snow white swans, woodcocks and seagulls accompanying him, evoking a scene from paradise which is rudely interrupted by the appearance of a group of settlers, laboriously making their way into the unknown. He immediately asks them where they are from and refers to them again in great detail soon afterwards.

Chekhov's attention is riveted by one particular member of the party who is different to the others. This person, incongruous in his present setting, forthwith becomes a potential character of a yet to be written short story, as Chekhov lapses into speculative musings about his past, present and future.

These initial pages of the first volume unequivocally sets the tone for what is to come, simultaneously encapsulating the essence of the journey and the place, Siberia, itself. By referring to European Russia ('Россия') as if it were another country, Chekhov makes it clear that Siberia is not regarded as part of Russia proper. The reference to 'your Siberia' stresses the fact that Chekhov feels himself a 'foreigner' in the region. He is an outsider confronted by Siberia and its inhabitants in the role of the Other. A sense of melancholy and loneliness will accompany him all the way. The eternal cold becomes a constant refrain, reminding the reader that this is inhospitable terrain where battles of survival are constantly being fought. The fact that Chekhov is travelling by coach in freezing weather suggests discomfort and physical suffering that form an indivisible part of journeys in Siberia. The stoicism of the local inhabitants, accepting their fate uncomplainingly and with fortitude, expressed as 'God's will', will be repeated constantly. But not the entire picture is painted in dark colours; there is also Siberia the potential paradise, with its abundant fauna and flora.

The first two pages contain many indicators complying with the conventions of travel writing. Chekhov tries to form close relationships with local people from different walks of life, in order to get more than just a glimpse of their life world. Using his strong sense of curiosity and acute sense of awareness he produces minute descriptions of his observations, resulting in an end product which will enlighten the reader. Simply by undertaking the journey Chekhov displays a sense of political awareness and eagerness to take on

controversial issues. Moreover, he does not shy away from sharing his own inner feelings with the reader. By reporting his observations without expressing condescending opinions, he guards against cultural superiority by trying to give Siberia a fair opportunity to show what it has to offer.

These pages also contain most of the literary devices Chekhov applies in this work. Detailed, vivid descriptions alternate with dialogues, stark criticism is contrasted with optimistic views. Vignettes, used to foreground central incidents and key personalities, help the reader to gain a comprehensive understanding of the essence of the work.¹¹⁹ It is clear that, contrary to his original intentions, the artist in Chekhov will not be suppressed.¹²⁰ Even when writing non-fiction, the story teller is never far from the surface.

The first two pages also show that Chekhov intends to tackle Siberia head-on. He realises that if he were to hesitate here, he would be lost. The dimensions of the Herculean task he sets himself take on a compelling perspective from Vysokov's point of view:

When reading the book '*Sakhalin Island*' it is necessary to remember that the author was born and raised in the south of the Russian Empire and that everything he saw on Sakhalin was consciously, but more often instinctively, compared with what he knew and remembered best, with the tiny Sea of Azov, with his native Taganrog.¹²¹

A close reading of the text challenges Chekhov's established reputation as an 'impressionist' writer.¹²² Commenting on his concern with the fate of the exiles, and the way the work eventually serves as a wake-up call to review aspects of the penal system, Ivanova states that Chekhov wrote it in the tradition of the 'natural school', i.e. showing reality in a social context.¹²³ Borny rejects the idea of applying this label to Chekhov, as its precepts are only

¹¹⁹ Ryfa (1997) refers to these vignettes as 'anecdotes' or 'microplots.'

¹²⁰ In a letter to I. L. Shcheglov, before setting off, Chekhov (2013, 130) states firmly: 'Please don't build any literary hopes on my Sakhalin trip. I am not going for the sake of impressions or observations, but simply for the sake of living for six months differently from how I have lived hitherto.'

¹²¹ Vysokov: Высоков, М. *Комментарий к книге А. П. Чехова 'Остров Сахалин'*. Владивосток, 2010, 12.

¹²² T. Eekman terms Chekhov's depiction as an impressionist writer as 'almost commonplace' (see: Chekhov an Impressionist? *Russian Literature* 1984, 15: 203).

¹²³ Ivanova: Иванова, Т. Книга А. П. Чехова 'Остров Сахалин': проблематика и значение. Thesis. 2004.

partially adhered to.¹²⁴ According to him Chekhov goes further, developing 'his own modified version of that literary movement's platform.' He believes that Chekhov's first artistic objective is to present 'life as it is' in as realistic a way as possible.

Moss supports this argument. He points out how, while the writing of an objective, scientific study remains Chekhov's main aim, 'there are indeed portions of the work that reflect the humanism, compassion, and descriptive characterizations' of some of his best fiction.¹²⁵ Chekhov's meticulous, painstaking way of reporting on his voyage is in stark contrast to that of an impressionist approach. Eekman (1984, 205) stresses that neither impressionism nor symbolism is 'typical of Chekhov, who saw and depicted the surrounding world as real, material, palpable, concrete, without any vagueness, and ... [with] a definite social awareness (without, of course, ever being a political or social fighter)'.¹²⁶

Chekhov's love of nature is well documented and, as is to be expected, he is in complete awe of Siberia's natural beauty.¹²⁷ Much in the same way as his story 'The Steppe' (Степь) had made readers aware of the wealth and beauty that lay untouched and unappreciated in central Russia, his new work had the potential of raising a similar awareness of Siberia.

Gilpin,¹²⁸ however, does not necessarily see this adulation of nature as a positive feature of Chekhov's work. He describes Chekhov's portrayal of nature as 'vast, incomprehensible and indifferent to man. It can make man's life appear absurd and so, easily intimidates him.'¹²⁹ In a similar vein Ivanova (2004) says that the landscape in the '*Island of Sakhalin*'

¹²⁴ Borny, G. *Interpreting Chekhov*. Canberra, 2006, 47.

¹²⁵ Moss, W. The Wisdom of Anton Chekhov. *The Wisdom Page*, 2010 (www.wisdompage.com/ChekhovEssay).

¹²⁶ Eekman (1984, 205) summarises impressionism in prose as 'a tendency to obliterate the details (except sometimes certain characteristic details which are singled out), – to give a personal account of events and situations, based on primary impressions, a more or less arbitrary, subjective, swift and incomplete delineation of characters, a detached and purely visual attitude towards reality.'

¹²⁷ Existing scholarly works deal extensively with the influence of Chekhov's love of nature on his life and work. Vorobeva (2013), Goryacheva (1994), and Izmailov (2008) are but a few examples.

¹²⁸ Gilpin, C. *Nature in the Short Stories of Anton Chekhov*. MA. Hamilton. 1971, 45.

¹²⁹ Gilpin (1971, 94) refers specifically to the portrayal of nature in the 1897 (post Sakhalin) story of 'Muzhiks' (Мужики) where, 'While thrilling man with its beauty, it also cruelly reminds him of

fulfils a specific representational function, performing an evaluative role. The landscape appears as an expression of the author's ideas about the tragedy of life on Sakhalin.

Although Chekhov fluctuates between writing a scientific work and a description of a journey, he manages to create a clear, vivid image of the region he is travelling through. The reader can sense the locality, see it, feel it, hear it and even take in the fragrance of the never-ending forests. Harnessing all his literary skills, Chekhov turns Siberia into a real place, inhabited by real people whom he introduces meticulously, one at a time.

1.4 Point of view

Chekhov had a particularly close bond with *From Siberia and Sakhalin Island*. In a 1891 letter to Suvorin, who had at that time been waiting for the manuscript for about a year already, Chekhov (2013, 310) defends the delay as follows: 'You write that I have given up Sakhalin. I cannot abandon that child of mine. When I am oppressed by the boredom of *belles lettres* I am glad to turn to something else.'

Chekhov was well aware of the dangers of subjectivity that could result from such an attachment. In another letter to Suvorin, the one finally accompanying the much awaited first fruits of his labour, Chekhov (2013, 164) writes:

I divided all my impressions into chapters. I am sending you six chapters. They are written for you personally. I wrote for you only, and so have not been afraid of being too subjective, and have not been afraid of there being more of Chekhov's feelings and thoughts than of Siberia in them. If you find some lines interesting and worth printing, give them a profitable publicity, signing them with my name in separate chapters, a tablespoonful once an hour. The general title can be *From Siberia*.¹³⁰

Chekhov was possibly hoping or expecting to be contradicted by his publisher, as, by distancing himself through avoiding or at least reducing the use of the first person, he was trying to focus the reader's attention on the objects and places he described.

how wonderful life could be were it not for the devastating realities of poverty, illness, and ignorance.'

¹³⁰ By the time it was published, *From Siberia*, totalled nine chapters.

Ryfa (1997, 38) points out that at the time of Chekhov's journey to Siberia, a new aesthetic credo, based on the principle of complete objectivity to the detriment of the so-called personal subjective element, started showing itself in his work: 'This narrative manner is characterized by a "non-authorial" narrative i.e. he [Chekhov] starts writing in a more "objective" manner.'¹³¹

Another obstacle to objectivity was the preconceived notions Chekhov had of his destination at the time of his departure for Sakhalin. Once his mind had been made up to undertake the journey, Chekhov poured himself into the project, voraciously reading all the material he could lay his hands on. As a result he could hardly have arrived in Siberia with a completely open mind, given all the negative publicity which had been showered and continued to be showered on what was at the time seen as a much maligned region, an issue commented on in the Introduction to this dissertation.

Pinning Chekhov down to a single point of view is an intricate process because he writes from several angles: at times he is 'just' a traveller, observing the country he is travelling through. Next he becomes the serious investigator and social observer who wants to get to the bottom of one of the products of a notorious penal system, only to turn physician/scientist when a suitable opportunity presents itself. Popkin (1992, 37) identifies two of his guises, one where he 'adopts the role of ethnographer' and the other where he shows himself as 'a composer of travelogues.' The latter role she attributes to Chekhov for titling his work 'Travel notes'.

One of Chekhov's main objectives was to examine, for himself as he maintained, the penal system in Siberia. He knew that mere personal observations would not suffice to take it all in and therefore aimed to talk to as many exiles as possible. In doing so he showed clearly that he did not wish to take a dominant point of view, but hoped to learn instead from as many local people as possible. Knowing that he would not get permission to simply roam freely about the territory, Chekhov used the taking of a census as pretext for gaining reasonably unimpeded access to as many exiles as he could fit in during his journey.

By reporting the words of the exiles, often directly in short dialogues, Chekhov serves as intermediary, sharing their point of view, rather than relying solely on his own observations. He makes a point of talking to representatives from all walks of life, including exiles, free settlers and government officials, to deliver an end product that is as balanced and complete

¹³¹ Chekhov's early stories were principally written in the first-person, from the point of view of the narrator.

as possible. Clearly, this is an author who is eager to learn, more keen to listen and observe than to being listened to or observed. Only on rare occasions is he recognised and welcomed as a well-known writer from Moscow. As a rule he manages to keep his ‘celebrity’ persona in the background and is happy to do so.

1.5 Discourse

Keeping in mind Chekhov’s aim on this journey, a reader would expect the result to be a scientific thesis written in a formal register. Yet, as Borny (2006, 34) points out, the work ‘displays several recognisably Chekhovian elements and much of the work is enlivened by anecdotes and descriptions that remind one of scenes in his short stories.’ Chekhov does not treat science and literature as mutually exclusive. According to Corrigan, at times Chekhov deviates from his main task, namely that of examining the exile system, as if to come up for a breath of fresh air.¹³² The resultant vignettes are not restricted only to the main body of the text but appear in the footnotes as well.

Klapuri also sees a blending of scientific and literary discourses in the narration,¹³³ while Ryfa (1997) identifies three complementary discourses in the work: travel, scientific and literary. In scientific passages the narration is non-expressive, impersonal, objective, third person singular. The travel discourse is more poetic, personal and expressive, written in the first person, while the literary discourse is written in the first person or from the point of view of another character. Ryfa (ibid. 239) feels that ‘the interplay among objective data and subjective elements constitutes a subtle stylistic balance’ and that Chekhov’s constant shift of perspective does not violate the structural unity of the text.

Chekhov always sets the context to prepare the reader for what is to follow, be it scientific commentary, an anecdote or an observation of nature. Then he assumes the role of either investigative reporter, describing his impressions in an impersonal way, or he renders his observations in a poetic, stylised language, becoming more personally involved in the narrative.

¹³² Corrigan, Y. Chekhov and the Foundations of Symbolism. *Russian Literature* 2009, 46(2): 103.

¹³³ Klapuri, T. Time and Genre in Anton Chekhov’s Documentary Travelogue Sakhalin Island. Conference Report. *Genre and Interpretation* 2009.

1.6 Thematic analysis

Chekhov is confronted with the Other at the very beginning of his journey. Coming across a party of voluntary migrants, which he observes with undisguised curiosity as they trudge through the mud on their weary way, putting more and more distance between themselves and their places of origin, Chekhov (1987a, 8) reaches the following conclusion:

to break away for ever from a life which seems to have gone to seed, and to sacrifice for this your own place of birth, your own dear home, can only be done by an exceptional human being, a hero ...

(порвать на всегда с жизнью, которая кажется ненормальной, пожертвовать для этого родным краем и родным гнездом может только необыкновенный человек, герой ...)

It is left to the reader to complete the ellipsis, possibly with words such as ‘...but I am not such a person, I could not do what he is doing. We are worlds apart.’

The initial feeling of being unlike his fellow travellers escalates dramatically shortly afterwards when jingling shackles announce that the narrator is about to overtake a party of convicts and their guards, also making their way east. They have no strength left to carry on but, contrary to him, they do not have the luxury of choice, and have to push on regardless. Their night will be spent in utter misery while he will be put up in the relative comfort of a post station, with at least the semblance of a decent meal.

Sometime later, when boarding a ferry in the dark for the last part of this day’s journey, Chekhov encounters yet another class of Siberian inhabitant, exiles who were banished from their village owing to depraved behaviour and who are now working as boatmen. Over time they have become even more debased. In this world, Chekhov says (1987a, 10), ‘they are already no longer human beings but animals.’ He finds that the ordinary peasants, already settled in the region for a generation or more, have also been shaped by the land, mostly by the unforgiving forces of nature and the year-round struggle for survival, to be different from their European Russian counterparts. They have no time or energy for superfluous interests such as art or music.

Though it is when facing his ‘intellectual equals’, educated, cultured exiles, that Chekhov possibly perceives the sense of Otherness most palpably. While exchanging banter, he cannot miss the expression in his interlocutor’s eyes: ‘You are going back home, but I am not’ (Ты вернешься домой, а я нет) (Chekhov 1987a, 24). There is irony in the way the

second person singular form of address is used, indicating a certain intimacy and familiarity, while the chasm between the two persons is in fact unfathomable.

Chekhov depicts a vast array of humankind which crosses his path along the way, but never with a sense of superiority. The reader becomes aware, instead, of the writer's deep feelings of empathy with his fellow human beings. Referring to the occasion mentioned in the previous paragraph, Chekhov expresses a sensation of awkwardness and infinite pity for the person facing him.

In contrast to the Russian Other stands the more 'exotic' indigenous Other that Chekhov starts to encounter as he travels further east. The Gilyak¹³⁴ and Aino¹³⁵ communities are described in great detail in the second volume and further expanded on in extensive footnotes. Chekhov (1978b, 42) states that to the native of the Amur, 'those of us who arrive from European Russia seem like foreigners.'

The tenor of Russian life is 'alien' to them and they abide by a different moral code. Chekhov writes at a time when the demands of political correctness do not restrict writers' desires to express their views, hence his tone becomes more harsh, condescending and judgmental. Although his initial notes refer to the Gilyaks as a fine and cheerful race, Chekhov (2013, 164) goes on to say that a 'Gilyak's facial expression does not betray the savage in him.' In many ways they keep to their old ways, eschewing the roads in favour of trudging through the taiga (often within sight of the road!), refusing to till the soil, regarding this activity to be a great sin. However when it suits them, they eat bread, which they have become acquainted with through the Russians, enjoying it 'as a delicacy' (как лакомство) (Chekhov 1987b, 173).

The Otherness of the indigenous people is driven home by detailed descriptions of the stark contrast between their customs, conjugal and filial relationships and those of the Russian settlers. Chekhov, however, gives the Gilyaks credit for not being 'a warlike race', and for treating visitors cordially, despite regarding them with suspicion.

¹³⁴ Also known as Nivkhs, at the time of Chekhov's journey the Gilyaks were a semi-nomadic indigenous people, inhabiting parts of Sakhalin Island and the region along the estuary of the Amur River.

¹³⁵ The origins of the Aino are unknown. The word *Aino* simply means *person* in their language. Chekhov (2013, 203) likens their appearance to Gypsies, even 'very similar to European Russian peasants.'

The Aino, another native population described in detail, had their original Japanese masters replaced by Russians. A lengthy footnote, devoted solely to the women, whom Chekhov refers to as 'repulsive' in many respects, indicates a vast rift between himself and this Other. Yet Chekhov (2013, 206) manages to find redeeming qualities in the tribe's gentle character, quoting Krusenstern who refers to them as the 'best of all others that have hitherto been known to me.'

Nevertheless, in spite of an attitude that can be described as condescending at times, Chekhov (2013, 170) accepts the Gilyaks (and by implication the other indigenous tribes) as an intrinsic part of the Siberian landscape and frowns on attempts by the authorities to Russify them:

I don't know why this should be necessary. [...] If Russification is unavoidable and can't be done without, then I would think that, in choosing the means to accomplish this, not our needs, but theirs, should primarily be taken into account.

This shows that he embraces, rather than rejects their Otherness, seeing no need for them to be forced to accept a foreign way of life.

Even though Chekhov writes about the Japanese presence on Sakhalin mostly from a historical point of view, he does have contact with them on a few occasions. The Japanese consul and his secretary pay Chekhov a visit during his sojourn on Sakhalin and he returns the courtesy several times, being impressed with their European style education which includes a knowledge of both Russian and French. In fact, the Japanese consulate transpires to be serving as a kind of refuge for members of the local Russian officialdom, who Chekhov states (1987b, 226) find it 'a pleasant, cosy corner' where they can relax and escape from their everyday toil.

The Other constitutes a core theme in travel writing as a travel writer is, by virtue of being away from home, usually confronted by unfamiliar people. What makes the Other in the current study unique is that, in the case of Chekhov, the author and the primary Other share the same nationality. However, this does not warrant mutual understanding or instant acceptance. On the contrary, from Chekhov's point of view, the Japanese consul and his secretary are among the people who fit less into the guise of the Other than many of his own countrymen.

More than two years before setting off on his journey to Siberia, Chekhov remarks in a letter that there is so much space in Russia that a mere man does not have the strength to orient himself in the country. This sense of being lost, of drifting along somewhere in a vast, limitless space, is intensified once he tackles the land beyond the Ural Mountains. Gilpin

(1971, 56) says that Chekhov 'implies a sense of disorientation in the realization that man's brief life and all that he holds dear and of value are insignificant against the background of nature. Nature, because of its constancy, indifference, and silence, frustrates man when he tries to grasp its significance.' Chekhov (1987a, 37) reiterates this sentiment at the end of *From Siberia*: 'The customary human yardstick is simply not appropriate for the taiga.'

Shortly after setting off on his journey, he is involved in a coach accident in the middle of the night and while the two coachmen are squabbling, blaming one another for the mishap, Chekhov (1987a, 12) admits to feeling 'a kind of loneliness that is difficult to describe.' The feeling of isolation and exclusion is heightened when he briefly drifts off to sleep, dreaming about being back home in his own bed, only to be rudely awakened for the next stage of the journey. As dawn breaks, some forlorn birch trees by the side of the road make it seem as if nature is sharing his sense of loneliness.

Chekhov does not try to hide this sense of being all at sea at times. Upon travelling between Tyumen and Tomsk, he is immediately struck by the absence of people, with telegraph wires serving as the sole reminders of human presence along the way. Reaching the Pacific coast, Chekhov remarks how it would be possible for a bird to fly from the sea across the mountains without encountering a single sign of human habitation, for a distance of over 500 *versts*.¹³⁶ His sense of desolation and isolation is thus complete.

'How remote life is here from Russia' (Как далека здешняя жизнь от России!) Chekhov (1978b, 42) exclaims as he sails up the Amur River. He senses something peculiar and non-Russian about the region, confessing to feeling as if he is not in Russia, but somewhere in Patagonia or Texas. Upon finally catching his first glimpse of Sakhalin a few days later, his musings turn to despair (*ibid.* 45): 'It seems as if this is the end of the world, and it is impossible to sail any further.' Once on land, his thoughts are echoed by his first landlady (*ibid.* 57): 'So you've come to this wretched hole!' (Заехали в эту пропасть!)

While the traveller continues to be filled with wonderment at the marvels offered by nature, it conversely conjures up feelings of isolation and loneliness as well. More than two months later into the journey, Chekhov describes how, in winter and summer, stunted, sickly trees fight their cruel battle against nature in isolation, with nobody around to witness their struggle. This description serves as an obvious metaphor personifying the pitiful existence of so many of the people he has met by that time. When the weather is fine, changing his mood for the better, he does not celebrate it as a Siberian phenomenon, immediately

¹³⁶ An obsolete Russian unit of length, one *verst* equals 1.0668 km.

recalling instead the clear skies and sultry air reminiscent of autumn days in European Russia.

Once, on Sakhalin, Chekhov comes across a spot which resembles European Russia. The terrain is completely level, like ordinary Russian land in appearance, with tilled fields, hay meadows, pastures and green groves. He pities the exiles who must find the place 'charming and moving' but are unlikely to ever see European Russia again. However, his spirits are lifted by the sight. On the very same day, while travelling on a country road he describes as 'excellent', they go past groves and fields which are overwhelmingly reminiscent of European Russia, but he admits that his impression could have been positively affected by the fine weather. Chekhov (1987b, 203) also refers to the landscape of northern Sakhalin as similar to that of European Russia: '... nature there is mournful and severe, but it is severe in a Russian manner.'

Ryfa (1997) points out, in addition, that Chekhov is aware not only of the physical alienation created by geographic distance, but also the cultural distance between himself and the people he encounters along the way. Chekhov remains aware of this distance, even when writing to his own family. In a letter from Irkutsk he mockingly addresses his brother Alexander as 'My European brother' and signs himself 'Your Asiatic brother'.

The constant reference to 'European Russia' emphasises Chekhov's consciousness of distance and detachment which turn Siberia into foreign territory. Siberians remind him of this difference time and again. So, for example, Chekhov recounts how someone he meets while waiting for a change of horses still on his way to Tomsk, cannot believe that the people in European Russia, whom he regards as superior to the 'dim, untalented' locals, still do not understand their purpose in life.

The coachmen too, generally have a negative opinion of the region when comparing it with the western side of the Ural Mountains: 'It's boring here, Your Excellency. It's better back home in Russia' (Chekhov 1987b, 66). In fact, Chekhov finds it hard to locate anyone who has come to terms with their new life in the territory. Almost everybody is dreaming of going 'back home'. So, for example, in one of the settlements on Sakhalin, Chekhov (1987b, 164) meets the Governor of the local prison, an intelligent and very fine young man from St Petersburg, who is 'obviously yearning painfully for Russia.' Describing a typical local family, Chekhov (2013, 71) comes to the following conclusion: 'The household lacks a past, lacks tradition ... it's as if the family is living, not in its own home, but in quarters ... and the main thing, it is not their home country.'

New arrivals in Siberia, volunteer settlers and exiles alike, have undertaken an arduous journey. Some are moved from one location to another with many months lapsing before they are settled in their final destination. Chekhov (2013, 201) describes how many who acquire 'in their long wanderings through Siberia a taste for the nomadic life,' are destined or doomed to be forever alien in the places where they settle for a while.

Right from the outset of his journey, Chekhov is enchanted and overwhelmed by the sheer beauty of nature surrounding him. But once he crosses the Yenisei River and enters the taiga region, another dimension is added, man's insignificance: 'The taiga is powerful and invincible, and the phrase "Man is the ruler of nature" nowhere sounds as timid and false as here' (Сильна и непобедима тайга, и фраза 'Человек есть царь природы' нигде звучит так робко и фальшиво, как здесь) (Chekhov 1987a, 36).

On one occasion, looking into a silent, starry night, Chekhov (1987b, 163) gives vent to a feeling of futility: 'It seemed to me like a kind of miracle that I was 10 000 *versts* from home ... at this end of the earth, where they do not remember what day of the week it is, and there is no need to remember it, as it makes absolutely no difference.'¹³⁷

Although Chekhov puts in an effort to talk to as many people as possible in order to learn what their daily existence is like, he does not succeed in becoming part of their lives. He remains a visitor, an observer passing through a strange land, an alien in an unknown territory.

On the very first page of *From Siberia*, Chekhov admits to being overcome by a feeling of melancholy, for no apparent reason. This lugubrious undertone remains close to the surface throughout both volumes. Even upon approaching Sakhalin Island in uncommonly good weather, with whales putting on a display in a perfectly smooth sea, he admits that his state of mind is melancholic. Sometime later, while taking in a spectacular view across the sparkling sea from the vantage point of a lighthouse-keeper's cottage, there is a moment when everything 'grows sad and dull' (Chekhov 1987b, 107).

Even when there is a cause for celebration, the mood remains sombre and cheerfulness is, at best, short lived. When Chekhov has an opportunity to attend a wedding in a labour settlement, he cannot bring himself to share the feeling of joy expressed by those present.

¹³⁷ Corrigan (2009) points out another perspective Chekhov has on alienation. In the play *The Three Sisters*, (written ten years after returning from Sakhalin) the brother, Andrey, says (referring to the provincial town where he is living with his sisters): 'But here you know everyone and everyone knows you, and yet you are alien, alien ... Alien and alone.'

Observing the faces of the congregation, it appears to him that they seem to have forgotten that they are 'far, far from the home country' (Chekhov 1987b, 304). Once the church has emptied out, everything once more becomes melancholy.

The same happens during the highly anticipated visit of the Governor General to the island. Despite outward attempts to create a festive occasion, it turns into a grim event. The streets are lit up, there are special lamps and flares, yet everything remains cheerless. No music is heard, there is not even a single drunk in sight, just people roaming about like silent ghosts. Continuing to talk about the lack of music, Chekhov explains that, given the circumstances of many of the inhabitants on the island, music would only evoke a yearning that could not be satisfied. Even the soldier stationed locally rarely sings and when he does, the sound of his voice likewise makes the listener yearn for the unattainable homeland.

In the dwellings he visits, Chekhov rarely comes across a picture of cosy domesticity, finding instead lonely, bored old landlords. But as a rule, the predominant sense of boredom works in his favour as 'out of boredom everybody is ready to talk and listen unceasingly' which provides him with more material in the end (Chekhov 1987b, 76). The same sentiment of boredom and apathy is echoed by the intellectual exiles in Siberia. Banned from practising their professions, there is no means available to divert their intellect and to give meaning to their lives.

The less educated exiles also struggle with an omnipresent sense of boredom and monotony. Many of them spend their time in complete inactivity with no worthwhile occupation. Chekhov repeatedly comes across entire households sitting around doing nothing, even in mid-summer, a time when they should be hard at work. 'Boredom and tedium' are words which gradually develop into a refrain in the texts. Chekhov even dismisses the first 2 000 km of his journey, from the Ural Mountains to the Yenisei River, as 'boring'. Similarly he dismisses many local inhabitants, particularly members of the officialdom, with equanimity as 'boring and bored' (Chekhov 1987b, 52). Upon arriving on Sakhalin Island, Chekhov (ibid. 60) is immediately, unceremoniously told: '[...] living here is gloomy and tedious.' A settlement on the southern part of the island is described as a very boring place to look at, inhabited by people who are boring and reply to his questions with boredom.

While waiting for a boat early on in the journey, with rain pouring down unremittingly, Chekhov's (ibid. 20) landlord asks: 'Isn't it dull for you?' Chekhov does not reply and when it grows dark, his thoughts become even more morose. He is overwhelmed by the boredom of his current situation, a reminder that life is dull, grey and useless.

While visiting the site of a former Japanese village now completely abandoned, looking out over the Pacific Ocean Chekhov (2013, 197) once again dwells on the topic of uselessness and futility:

all around there is not a single living soul, not a bird, not a fly, and it is beyond comprehension who the waves are roaring for, who listens to them at nights here, what they want, and, finally, who they would roar for when I was gone.

Chekhov had left Moscow, preparing himself to take on the physical challenges of the voyage. He was probably unaware that a major part of the challenge would be mental, with him having to deal with boredom and a feeling of futility which would make him wonder, at times, why he had even bothered to undertake the journey in the first place.

In a letter to Suvorin, before setting off, Chekhov (ibid. 126) shares the following relatively optimistic expectations of his journey:

My expedition may be nonsense, obstinacy, a craze, but think a moment and tell me what I am losing if I go. Time? Money? Shall I suffer hardships? My time is worth nothing; money I never have anyway; as for hardships, I shall travel with horses, twenty-five to thirty days, not more, all the rest of the time I shall be sitting on the deck of a steamer or in a room, and shall be continually bombarding you with letters.

But once reality sets in, during the early days of his voyage, Chekhov admits in another letter, sent to the same addressee from Tomsk, that it was completely impossible to write on the road. The only record he could keep was a brief diary in pencil. This is the first of scores of passages dealing with trials and tribulations on the way.

Travelling 'with horses' soon turns out to be a vexation in itself. As early as the third chapter, barely into the journey, Chekhov already complains about his fatiguing journey while towards the end he admits to having grown either tired or lazy and no longer applying himself to his work with the same intensity as before.

Nourishment too is an issue from the beginning. Chekhov praises the delicious bread that is available the entire length of the Great Siberian Post Road but, as he reminds us that 'one cannot live of bread alone' (Chekhov 1987a, 17), and upon asking for something else, inedible soup is served. Yet he states later that, in comparison with explorers who have on occasion been forced to eat rotten pieces of wood, their dogs or even each other, he was never faced with starvation.

As for the road itself, Chekhov soon realises that avoiding becoming stuck is the first priority. The entire second last chapter *From Siberia* is devoted to this vital link between points of 'civilization':

It is heavy going, very heavy, but it grows still heavier when you consider that this hideous, pock-marked strip of land, this foul smallpox of a road, is almost the sole artery linking Europe and Siberia! And we are told that along an artery like this civilization is flowing into Siberia! (Chekhov 2013, 31).

To add to the hardship, this is not a seasonal phenomenon as the road remains a challenge throughout the year with mud in spring, pits in summer and pot-holes in winter. Eventually transferring to a steamer, Chekhov finds his new mode of travel comparatively tolerable but there are still the dangers of capricious weather systems or running into sandbanks, a threat made worse by the lack of dependable charts.

Possibly the greatest challenge on the journey is nature. For all the beauty of the changing landscapes, there are the weather conditions to contend with, mostly the cold and constant rain. Early in the journey, waiting to cross a river, Chekhov remarks how the dampness of the river first freezes your feet, then your legs, and finally your entire body. On 14 May he (1987, 23) writes: 'In the morning it is snowing, covering the ground one and a half *vershoks* deep.'¹³⁸ It gets worse when he finally reaches Sakhalin. While the rain continues to pour down, Chekhov reports that the Mayor of Vladivostok told him there was no climate along the whole of the eastern seaboard, but basically just bad weather.

Once the worst of the cold weather is over and the sun finally shows itself, nature presents another challenge. Climbing up a hill, Chekhov is suddenly besieged by clouds of mosquitoes, with no way of defending himself. Insects are a problem in living quarters as well, and when he arrives in the southern part of Sakhalin, Chekhov (1987b, 186) rejoices at the higher standard of living he encounters, praising above all the fact that 'there is not such an outrageous number of bedbugs and cockroaches here as in the north.'

Chekhov realises from the outset that the journey is going to be tougher than anticipated. Some of the hazards encountered are unforeseen and affect elementary survival issues. However, he tackles the hurdles one at a time and does not shirk from achieving his goal.

¹³⁸ A *vershok* equals 4.4 cm.

1.7 Conclusion

Chekhov set himself a monumental task when he took off on his journey. Notwithstanding the fact that he 'confessed' to having become lazy or, in contemporary jargon, demotivated towards the end, he was not on a leisure trip and collected a prodigious amount of material along the way. Arriving home he faced, on another level, an even more daunting task: to turn it all into a coherent publication. Views on the degree of success to which Chekhov managed to achieve his goal vary considerably, from scholars like (Ryfa, 1997) who praises it as a truly innovative artistic work, to those like Popkin who calls it one of the strangest documents in any genre.

Ryfa (1997, 4) claims that the work 'broadens the scope of travel literature by incorporating heterogeneous elements, first and foremost scientific and literary elements.' He sees it as a work of literature in which the writer combines the analysis of scientific material with artistic observation, without imposing personal conceptions. To Ryfa, the text constitutes more than traveller's notes, scientific research or a medical dissertation, as he distinguishes a distinct literary plan.

Popkin (1992, 47), on the other hand, although admitting that 'Critical consensus seems to be that Chekhov has effected a harmonious balance between fact and impression, between the "scientific" and the "poetic" travelogue,' states that the work ends with an extreme sense of dislocation, leaving the reader disoriented. She (ibid. 45) also takes the structure of the books to task, describing the footnotes as 'swelled beyond belief ... often six times as long as the text.' She furthermore questions the relevance of the contents of some of the footnotes in relation to the text that it refers to.

Conversely, in the conclusion of her thesis, Ivanova (2004) states that using the genre of the essay enables Chekhov to connect scientific and documentary imagery with artistic ways of reflecting reality. She describes *Sakhalin Island* as a series of disparate essays dealing with travel, 'historical-critical' and problematical issues. In addition she identifies clear indications of a cyclic unity: the presence of a common conceptual title, a strict composition corresponding to the author's intentions expressed in the text as the product of his position and also the publication of the book as a single unit.

However, Chekhov emphasised that he did not regard this project as a work of literature. Although his main objective had been to write a work of scientific merit which would gain academic recognition, he ended up with an eclectic work straddling several genres. But

primarily, if unintentionally, he is telling the story of an epic voyage. The reader is left with vivid impressions, painstakingly put together by an author whose gift for observation, evident in his complete oeuvre, is equally perceptible in this work.

If the overall impression of Chekhov's view on Siberia appears to be negative, he maintains a strong belief in the great potential of the region. Throughout the work he mentions possible ways to move the region forward. In contrast to the indolent, disinterested exiles or transferred officials, the free settlers are working hard to improve their lives. An example is the house of a coachman in an unspecified village, where everybody is cheerfully going about their chores, 'in a condition of which our peasants from the Kursk or Moscow Regions can only dream. The cleanliness is amazing' (Chekhov 1987a, p. 14). Chekhov is surprised, in the same household, to hear that it is in order to leave his belongings in the sleigh out in the courtyard as theft is uncommon in the area. He later discovers that this is not an isolated occurrence, which leaves him impressed with local morality.

Chekhov finds that the prosperous settlements on Sakhalin are likewise overwhelmingly inhabited by free settlers, including a high percentage of literate ones. In some places conditions are so favourable that even the exiles have taken root and are not in a hurry to return to European Russia, which helps to improve the prosperity of the settlement. Crossing the Irtysh, Chekhov is impressed by the ferrymen and he is not surprised to find that they belong to a trade guild of peasant proprietors, with not a single exile among them.

Describing the rich fishing grounds of the Tym River on Sakhalin, Chekhov expresses another strong personal conviction. He believes that appropriate exploitation of local resources will result in progress, even if only in the distant future. On Sakhalin, in particular, the traditional view of the island as a source of fur-bearing animals should be altered to concentrate instead on the seasonal fish run. In this regard Chekhov points out the vast profits that would result from exploiting the proximity of the Japanese and Chinese markets.

On the steamer sailing up the Amur River, Chekhov (1987b, 44) is astounded to find among his fellow travellers 'an abundance of educated people here in the wilds.' He adds that the intelligentsia forms a substantial per capita percentage of the Amur and *Primorskaya* (Pacific Coastal) Region, relatively larger than that of any province in European Russia. He describes Sakhalin society as congenial and kind, no different from the societies of European Russian rural administrative districts. He maintains that the conditions described by Dostoyevsky in *The House of the Dead* no longer exist.

Among the educated classes he meets a fair number of intelligent, good-natured and worthy individuals. In fact, his hopes for the future of the region are focused on the educated

classes, because he believes that where they are numerous, their influence has a positive effect that benefits the entire region.

2. George Kennan: *Siberia and the Exile System* (Volumes 1 and 2)

2.1 *Contents*

Kennan's work is not the result solely of his own observations and conclusions. As Ryfa (1997) points out, Kennan based both volumes of *Siberia and the Exile System*¹³⁹ on statistical data, obtained from official sources, around which he arranged his own travel impressions which he embellished with biographies of individual exiles, historical digressions, ethnographic reports on the indigenous populations and references to nature and geographical features.

The first volume covers the journey from St Petersburg to Tomsk. Setting off from New York on 2 May 1885 with an artist, George Frost as travel companion, Kennan begins the book with a quick reference to the trip from New York to St Petersburg. The sojourn in St Petersburg, where he has to procure the all-important paperwork for the rest of the journey, is described in detail. Leaving St Petersburg on 31 May, Kennan fleetingly mentions his visit to Moscow, as he and Frost proceed almost immediately to Nizhniy Novgorod. Passing through Kazan and Perm (where they have their first run-in with the police), they finally cross the Ural Mountains, interrupting the journey only briefly in Yekaterinburg. Upon reaching the pillar demarcating the Siberian border he says 'Goodbye' to Europe, as 'hundreds of thousands had said goodbye before us', (Kennan 1891a, 54) and rides off into Siberia.

Travelling on to Tobolsk, Kennan gives a detailed description of the geography of the entire Siberia. He continues with an account of the countryside and depicts a typical Siberian village they are passing through at the time, as well as their first encounter with the challenges unique to the Great Siberian Post Road. In Tyumen he visits the Forwarding Prison to start with the investigations which constitute the main purpose of the journey. Kennan gives a brief history of the Russian exile system and the *status quo* at the time of writing. He pays a couple of courtesy visits but is unimpressed with the appearance of the town.

¹³⁹ Kennan, G. *Siberia and the Exile System Volumes 1 and 2*. New York 1891.

From Tyumen Kennan decides to follow the southern route, which will take them through areas fairly heavily populated with political exiles. He hopes that by choosing the less travelled road, it will be possible to continue the journey in relative obscurity as by this time he strongly suspects that his arrival in the previous towns has been anticipated by the local officials, probably as the result of advance warnings by the authorities in St Petersburg. Detailed descriptions of the Russian post horse system, which Kennan considers as possibly the most extensive and excellently organized of its kind in the world, as well as a religious procession, which makes him feel transported back to the 11th century, follow.

After a long ride across the steppe Kennan pays a fleeting visit to Omsk, a town which also leaves him unimpressed. He tries in vain to find the prison where Dostoyevsky had been confined then sets off on 8 July for another long ride, this time across the Great Kirghiz steppe. Along the way Kennan gives a favourable description of the Cossacks who have settled in this formerly hostile frontier region. As soon as the steppe becomes arid, reminding Kennan of a Central Asiatic desert, he encounters Kirghiz nomads, who are not used to receiving foreign visitors but soon shower their unexpected guests with hospitality. An overriding memory of the last part of the journey to Semipalatinsk,¹⁴⁰ where he arrives at night, is the almost intolerable summer heat. Kennan gives a detailed description of the city which he visits the next day. Still unable to acclimatize, he agrees with the nickname of 'The Devil's Sand-box' that has been bestowed on the barren, grey, dreary city.

A few days later, after a tentative conversation with a government official who is sympathetic to the plight of 'young men and women of high attainments -- men with a university training and women of remarkable character' (Kennan 1891a,169) who have been sent to Siberia against their will, Kennan is introduced to political exiles for the first time. Conversations with them set in motion his conversion to an anti-Russian government stance.

In mid-July Kennan and Frost set off for the Altay Mountains where he arrives a few days later, having experienced, once again, intense heat and sand storms, this time along the upper reaches of the Irtysh River. While staying in the village of Altay Station, Kennan undertakes several excursions, most notably 'the most pleasant and successful picnic' he (1891a, 205) has ever enjoyed, in full view of one of the great glaciers. They continue their journey with a trek through the mountains on horseback along spectacular but precarious trails.

¹⁴⁰ Renamed Semey in 2007.

Early in August Kennan sets off for Tomsk. Travelling through Barnaul, he is once again highly impressed with the political exiles he encounters. The visits are reported in detail, followed by a further extended description of the exile system and comprehensive accounts of individual exile cases.

By mid-August, Kennan arrives in Tomsk, a city that impresses him favourably. Once again he visits officials as well as political exiles and describes the local Forwarding Prison and the prison barge transport system in detail. Kennan also explains his way of deceiving the local officials by pretending to maintain his hitherto positive view of the Russian government, while secretly trying to get incriminating information against the system from the political exiles themselves.

Kennan and Frost set off for Krasnoyarsk at the end of August. Upon crossing into Eastern Siberia, Kennan gives a detailed description of the miserable condition of the Great Siberian Post Road in this part of the region, which is wilder and more mountainous than Western Siberia. Their sojourn at the home of a wealthy gold mining proprietor turns into one of the highlights of their Siberian journey. Apart from a picnic in a scenic spot near a monastery, no close description is given of the town itself.

The next destination, Irkutsk, which appears to Kennan more attractive and exotic from a distance than from close up, is reached by mid-September. The first volume ends with another detailed description of the exile system, including recollections of Kennan's personal experience spending time with a party of exiles making their way eastward from Tomsk.

The second volume starts with the arrival of the travellers in Irkutsk, the largest city in Siberia at the time of Kennan's visit. Only scant attention is paid to the city itself with the author concentrating on descriptions of the prison, the exile system, exiles themselves (particularly political ones) and the local authorities instead.

Kennan sets off in the last week of September for the convict mines scattered throughout the Trans-Baikal area. On his way, having grown tired of prisons and all aspects of the exile system, having had 'misery enough for a while', (Kennan 1891b, 77) he allows himself and Frost a short respite of simply travelling for pleasure, with the Goose Lake lamasery as their first destination. A detailed description of their journey up the Angara River and Lake Baikal itself follows. Upon arriving at the lamasery they learn that they are the first foreign visitors since the current Grand Lama took over the leadership. A short thanksgiving service and a sacred dance (reminding Kennan of a religious pantomime or mystery play) are performed to celebrate the occasion.

The frontier town of Kiakhta on the Russo-Mongol border is the next destination. While staying in the neighbouring town of Troitskosavsk, Kennan becomes seriously ill and has to break the journey for a fortnight, only setting off again in mid-October. He calls on a few political exiles along the way to Verkhniy Udinsk, where he also reports on the prison conditions. A week later, after crossing a tributary of the Amur River, Kennan arrives in Chita, capital of the Trans-Baikal region. After having visited what remains of the houses where the banished Decembrists had spent their lives as exiles, Kennan and Frost leave for the Kara gold mines.

Winter starts setting in in earnest and the journey becomes more hazardous as the travellers try to navigate rivers not yet completely frozen, having to make perilous detours along treacherous trails instead. They arrive in Kara only to discover that the town lacks any form of accommodation for visitors and have to accept the offer by the local prison governor to be quartered in his home, an arrangement Kennan fears would restrict his access to political exiles. But he succeeds 'in blinding and misleading one of the most adroit and unscrupulous gendarme officers in all Eastern Siberia' and in the end manages to visit the local mines and prisons and become acquainted with a fair number of political exiles (Kennan 1891b, 182).

In mid-November Kennan and Frost start their homeward journey from Kara, passing through the Nerchinsk mining district. The area is plagued by a smallpox epidemic, which makes stop-overs in post-houses even more perilous than before. Eventually they reach Alexandrovskiy Zavod on the way to their main objective, the notorious mine of Akatui, formerly the most dreaded place of banishment of exiles but now abandoned. After visiting this site and a couple more mines in the district, they are finally able to transfer to a sleigh which renders their voyage more comfortable. At the beginning of December they arrive back in Chita where Kennan (1891b, 336) spends 'a large part of every day with "trustworthy" citizens and officials in order to avert suspicion,' and then devotes the greater part of every night to conversations with political convicts.

A fortnight later Kennan and Frost arrive in Irkutsk where they have to wait for the Angara River to freeze over completely to make crossing by sleigh possible. After waiting for three weeks, they decide to travel downstream to find a possible alternative crossing point. On the way, their sleigh crashes through the ice, fortunately without fatal consequences, and they finally reach the village of Pashka where it is possible to cross the river. Nine days later, after a hazardous journey in freezing conditions, following 43 changes of horses, they arrive in Krasnoyarsk. This time Kennan manages to meet political exiles living in the town with the help of two exiles on their way back to European Russia having served their terms.

Kennan becomes increasingly suspicious of being under police observation, particularly on account of his involvement with the two former exiles.

The travellers' next destination is the less frequented town of Minusinsk. To Kennan the town is of particular interest, partly because it contains the largest and most important archaeological and natural historical museum in Siberia, and partly because it is the place of exile of a number of prominent Russian liberals and revolutionists. The founder of the museum is thrilled to receive Kennan, having followed occasional references to his movements in the Tomsk and Irkutsk newspapers.

Continuing on the way to Tomsk, the coachman loses the way and they end up stranded in the middle of nowhere in a winter storm. They finally arrive in the city towards the middle of February. Wanting to make the most of the relatively favourable road conditions for sleighs, they pick up their pace, passing through the towns of Omsk and Tobolsk with only short stop-overs. However, Kennan decides to stay in Tyumen for a week in order to give Frost, who is beginning to break under the strain of the arduous journey, an opportunity to rest properly and recover. The last part of the journey is by rail and they arrive in St Petersburg on 19 March 1886.

Kennan decides to forward his travel notes to London by 'special messenger' to prevent possible discovery, should his baggage be searched upon leaving the country. There is a bureaucratic hold-up when they apply for permission to leave Russia which is only settled after intervention by an official of the American consulate. Three days later Kennan and Frost are safely in London. After a month Kennan returns to Russia, accompanied by his wife, to visit friends, liberals, revolutionists and officials in St Petersburg, Tver, Moscow, Nizhniy Novgorod and Kazan. He finally returns to New York in August 1886, 16 months after setting off.

Kennan devotes the rest of *Siberia and the Exile System* to descriptions of opponents of the current Russian government (concentrating on the revolutionaries) and intended reforms of the exile system. He concludes with a paragraph expressing hope that the system will be abolished, but doubting that that is likely to happen any time soon.

2.2 Structure

Upon returning to the United States, Kennan wrote a series of articles titled *Siberia and the Exile System*, in the format of a chronological travelogue, for *Century* magazine. It appeared from May 1888 until the autumn of 1891 and the book of the same name was published in two volumes in December of that year. The reason the book is divided into two volumes is solely because a 900 page single volume would have rendered it too unwieldy and impractical to handle.

The first volume contains a preface in which Kennan explains his motivation for writing the book. He also responds to criticism on his articles published prior to the appearance of the book. In addition he expresses gratitude to his friends, acquaintances, and well-wishers in European Russia and Siberia who assisted him with his research by providing the most valuable part of his material and encouraged him to complete the work. He also furnishes notes on the transliteration system used in the book

The chapters have concise headings, basically indicating the route the travellers are following, e.g. 'From St Petersburg to Perm,' 'Across the Siberian frontier' and 'The province and the city of Tomsk.' Occasionally a heading is more descriptive, such as 'The flowery plains of Tobolsk' or 'Bridle paths of the Altay.' Chapters of social, cultural and geographic content roughly alternate with others dealing with the exile question, e.g. 'A Siberian convict barge,' 'Our first meeting with political exiles' and 'The Tomsk Forwarding Prison.'

There is no break between the two volumes, the journey simply continues in the second from where it left off in the first. Kennan follows the same approach in the second volume as in the first when naming chapters, at times simply indicating the route (e.g. 'A visit to the Selenginsk Lamasery') while on occasion being more descriptive (e.g. 'Adventures in Eastern Siberia'). A greater number of chapters are devoted to the exile question (e.g. State Criminals at Kara') with less evidence of the tendency to alternate the subject matter in consecutive chapters than in the first volume.

An extensive number of appendices as well as an index, referring to both volumes, conclude the second volume. The books are richly illustrated and explanatory maps help to orient the reader. Kennan makes frequent use of footnotes. Some succinctly explain concepts such as *kremlin* and *traktir* to readers not familiar with the terms while others are long and detailed as on p. 31 where Kennan illustrates, with concrete examples, the tendency for almost every foreign traveller who has made a serious attempt to study Russian life to have been

arrested at least once. Another example of an extended footnote is a discussion of the censorship of Russian newspapers (p.36).

2.3 Language and style

Recording his 'Russian travels', Kennan does not rush headlong into Siberia. He guides the reader step by step, tracing in detail the first leg of his trip from New York to St Petersburg, before setting off on the journey proper. He wants to make sure that the reader knows exactly what a complicated mission he is about to embark on. A map of Siberia appears early on in the first chapter of the first volume, as if to whet the reader's appetite; in case the protracted descriptions of travel arrangements and bureaucratic intricacies should have become drab and uninteresting. Frost's illuminating, frequently exquisitely detailed illustrations serve the same purpose at regular intervals throughout both volumes.

From the outset it is clear that Kennan is not only describing a region but also telling an adventure story. A nagging, discomforting undertone and a slight feeling of unease that indicates that something is 'not quite right', is never far from the surface. Initially Kennan plays the feeling down, by carefully alternating descriptive chapters of the landscape and people he encounters with others hitting harder at political issues in general and the exile problem in particular. The tension bursts to the surface when they reach Tomsk and Kennan's point of view changes, as described in the next section.

Yet the work does not become purely a political treatise. As Popkin (1992) states, it makes enjoyable reading, with facts embedded in the suspenseful tale. Ryfa (1997) agrees: although the core of Kennan's work is the study of the penal system, he approaches Siberia from a variety of angles. Detailed geographic and ethnographic sketches as well as revealing social observations are interwoven in the narrative.

Unfortunately Kennan makes infrequent use of paragraph breaks and a paragraph sometimes runs on for two pages without interruption. As a result the text becomes too compressed and dense to absorb easily, particularly when the topic is related to politics and the exile system. In such instances occasional dialogues and illustrations serve as welcome changes in the pace of the text.

Lengthy paragraphs do not present a problem when Kennan describes geographical features and nature itself. On these occasions his style is vivid and even lyrical at times. So, for example near Tobolsk, he (1891a, 64) tells how

Flowers met the eye everywhere in great variety and in almost incredible profusion. Never had we seen the earth so carpeted with them The roadside was bright with wild roses, violets, buttercups, primroses, marsh-marigolds, yellow peas, iris, and Tatar honeysuckles; the woods were whitened here and there by soft clouds of wild-cherry blossoms, and the meadows were literally great floral seas of colour.

Trekking on horseback through the Altay Mountains Kennan (1891a, 220) extols:

I had already caught glimpses of these peaks two or three times, at distances varying from twenty five to eighty miles; but the near view, from the heights above the Katun, so far surpassed all my anticipations that I was simply overawed. I hardly know how to describe it without using language that will seem exaggerated. The word that oftenest rises to my lips when I think of it is 'tremendous'.

Later, shortly after entering the Trans-Baikal area, Kennan (1891b, 71) paints an early autumn landscape as follows:

The bold bluff on the right was a solid mass of canary-coloured birches, with here and there a dull-red poplar; the higher and more remote mountains on the left, although not softened by foliage, were

*. . . bathed in the tenderest purple of distance,
And tinted and shadowed by pencils of air;¹⁴¹*

while in the foreground, between the bluff and the mountains, lay the broad, tranquil river, like a Highland lake, reflecting in its clear depths the clumps of coloured trees on its banks and the soft rounded outlines of its wooded islands.

On the way back, between Kuskunskaya and Krasnoyarsk at -45°C , Kennan (1891b, 365) has an opportunity to observe the phenomenon of extreme cold:

Clouds of vapour rose all the time from the bodies of our horses; the freight-wagon caravans were constantly enshrouded in mist, and frequently, after passing one of them, we would find the road foggy with frozen moisture for a distance of a quarter of a mile.

¹⁴¹ Kennan does not include a reference to the origin of these lines, assuming the reader will recognise the then popular quotation from the poem *Kilimanjaro* by the American poet and travel author, Bayard Taylor (1825–1878).

Accommodation, more often than not of a poor quality, is always described in detail. So, on his way home, Kennan (1891b, 320) devotes an entire page to the hotel in Nerchinsk:

It was, in fact, the very worst hotel that we had seen in Siberia ... the uncovered plank floor was not only dirty, but had sunk unevenly in places and was full of rat-holes; cockroaches were running briskly over the tea-stained, crumb besprinkled cotton cloth that covered the only table in the room; there was no bed upon which the tired wayfarer might repose, nor mirror in which he might have the melancholy satisfaction of surveying his frost-bitten countenance.

The reader becomes part of the traveller's world through these meticulous, evocative descriptions. The candid observations invite the reader to share all aspects, both good and bad, of his journey in an almost intimate way.

Kennan frequently uses sarcastic, ironic humour, such as in the preceding description, to show how he surmounts difficulties along the way. On the road to Semipalatinsk, for example, villagers come streaming out of their houses to gawk at the newly arrived strangers and end up arguing about the supremacy of Russia over America. One of the old inhabitants contends that Russian navigators had also penetrated the Icy Sea, and that although they might not be as 'wise' as the Americans, they are quite as good sailors in icy waters.

A while later, ridiculing the Russian obsession with officialdom, Kennan (1891a, 140) describes Omsk as a city

in which the largest building is a military academy and the most picturesque building a police station; in which there is neither a newspaper nor a public library, and in which one-half of the population wears the Tsar's uniform and makes a business of governing the other half.

On the way back to European Russia, travelling through the Nerchinsk mining district, he stops in a village whose name, Kavvikuchigazamurskaya, seems to contain more letters than the place itself has inhabitants.

A humorous situation also develops when a Kirghiz host is aggrieved at Kennan's refusal to imbibe a second serving of *kumis* and he appeases his host by singing and playing, appropriately, *There is a Tavern in the Town* on the banjo. Cross-cultural humour reaches its peak with the visit to the Goose Lake Lamasery when the tipsy Buriat chief of police constantly calls for more 'insanity drops', his way of referring to vodka. Kennan and Frost are fêted as two foreign dignitaries but Kennan describes the service conducted in their honour as an orchestral charivari which would have levelled the walls of Jericho without any

supernatural intervention. He claims never before to have heard such an infernal tumult of sound.

Finally homeward bound, though at the end of his tether, Kennan (1891b, 320) retains his sense of the comic:

When we reached Nerchinsk, late that forenoon, we found that there was no snow in the streets, and as our underfed and feeble horses could not drag us over bare ground, we alighted from our sledge and waddled ingloriously behind it into the city, like stiff-jointed arctic mummies marching after the hearse in a funeral procession.

On occasion even the retelling of an exile's epic journey to his final place of settlement, such as that of the 'poor apothecary Schiller,' or the injustices suffered by the young student named Egor Lazarev is done in such a way that it amuses rather than depresses the reader. The absurdity of the system is brought home more forcefully this way.

Kennan's writing is well researched and he tries to place the people and events he describes in a context which makes his work accessible to the reader. However, he remains an observer, only rarely fully participating in the events he describes. Even on occasions when he does become emotionally involved, particularly with the political exiles, a sense of aloofness remains. He is the central figure in his work, using first person (singular or plural) in the narrative passages of the texts. He rarely manages to convey the point of view of the local inhabitants, who are predominantly in the role of the observed, except when they express opinions which support his own point of view or opinions that he can ridicule. Once he changes his mind about the culpability of the Russian authorities in perpetuating an unjust system, Kennan becomes pedantic and critical to the extent that no room is left for an alternative opinion. He shows his own culture as superior to that of the land he is travelling through and does not attempt to find redeeming factors in the country he is visiting.

2.4 Point of view

Kennan arrives in Russia keen and ready to defend the government against what he has seen up to that time as unfair criticism of its Siberian exile system. In an interview with the assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs in St Petersburg, which plays a crucial part in the process to procure the necessary documents to undertake the journey, Kennan states that Siberia and the exile system have been greatly misrepresented by prejudiced writers and that a factual description of the region would serve the interests of the Russian Government.

He points out that, as he has already defended the Russian Government publicly, it is hardly likely that he would undermine his own position now by reporting negatively on the region.

At this stage Kennan does not intend to give only his own view of the status quo. To avoid a one-sided, subjective point of view, he hopes to communicate with as many role players in the exile system as he can. As Hundley points out, Kennan succeeds in speaking to a variety of people including government officials, prominent citizens, exiles, former exiles, and families of exiles.¹⁴²

However, not all the details reported in the book are acquired first hand. Kennan also makes extensive use of material supplied by third parties. Ruttum¹⁴³ refers to biographical and autobiographical sketches on Siberian exiles which were used as primary research for the book while Bernbaum adds correspondence, written testimonies, illustrations and plans of prison cells, descriptions of trial proceedings, newspaper clippings and selected official documents that were also used in the book.¹⁴⁴ Not all these accounts were sent from Siberia, as a number were written by former exiles who had in due course settled in France and are included in an appendix in the extensive list of secondary literature at the end of the second volume.

Upon completion of Kennan's first two visits to Russia, (in 1865 mainly to Kamchatka and Siberia and in 1870 mainly to the Caucasus) he was convinced that the Russian government had an important role to play in bringing Western civilization to the far-flung regions of its empire. When he set off again (in 1885 on the third journey, which is the topic of the current study) it was to challenge the negative opinion of Russia prevailing at the time under a large number of his countrymen. But by now, according to Danilov, a 'more mature Kennan would reverse his views about Russia's ability to shoulder the white man's burden.'¹⁴⁵

Kennan (1891a, 4) defends his change of heart as follows: 'If the opinions that I now hold differ from those that I expressed [...] in 1885, it is not because I was then insincere, but

¹⁴² Hundley, H. George Kennan and the Russian Empire: How America's Conscience Became an Enemy of Tsarism. *Kennan Institute Occasional Papers* 277. Washington DC, 2000.

¹⁴³ Ruttum, L. *The George Kennan Papers 1856 – 1987*. New York, 2008.

¹⁴⁴ Bernbaum, J. America's First Expert on Russia. *JB's Reflections on Russia* (blog) 2012 (<http://jbrussianreflections.blogspot.com/2012/04/explorer-discovers-russia-george-kennan.html>).

¹⁴⁵ Danilov, N. George Kennan and the Challenge of Siberia. *Demokratizatsya* 1991, 7(4): 607.

because my views have since been changed by an overwhelming mass of evidence.’ The first indication of the impending change follows Kennan’s introduction (in Semipalatinsk) to political exiles, whom he (1891a, 171) had previously regarded as ‘wrong-headed fanatics and wild social theorists, who would be likely to make trouble in any state.’ Kennan (1891b, 378) concludes that the Government is out of touch with the spirit of the time and holds the Russian Government responsible for making

young Russians of ardent nature and imperfect acquaintance with the history of man’s social and political experiments [...act...] upon erroneous conceptions of duty or mistaken ideas of moral justification.

Upon arriving in Tomsk, Kennan adopts a superior attitude, stating that if the Tomsk region had been in the hands of Americans, it would have become similar to a densely populated, prosperous north-western state in his home country.¹⁴⁶ Kennan and Frost begin to suffer nervous strain which Kennan claims is caused by the frequent sight of what he terms to be irremediable human misery. By the time they leave Tomsk, Kennan admits that his hitherto held opinion of the exile system has been completely overthrown.

After returning from Russia, Kennan was repeatedly accused of having already made up his mind negatively about Siberia prior to this journey, an accusation he persistently and vehemently denied. Hundley (2000) sees Kennan’s admission of his prior misjudgement as admirable, stressing that Kennan’s argument was with the authorities and not with the Russian people, whom he continued to admire.

There is thus a clear volte-face from Kennan’s initial point of view which he openly admits and defends in his subsequent writing. Supporters of his point of view are portrayed sympathetically while those who oppose it are usually shown in the role of the villain.

2.5 Discourse

Kennan (1891b, 102) describes the approach to the Mongolian border as follows:

¹⁴⁶ A superior attitude is also evidenced in the preface to Kennan’s 1877 book *Tent Life in Siberia* (New York) where he refers to nomadic inhabitants who have rarely been visited by *civilized man* (emphasis added).

Troitskosavsk, Kiakhta, and Maimachin are situated in a shallow and rather desolate valley, beside a small stream that falls into the Selenga River. The nearly parallel and generally bare ridges that form this valley limit the vision in every direction except to the southward, where, over the housetops and grey wooden walls of Maimachin, one may catch a glimpse of blue, hazy mountains far away in Mongolia. Kiakhta, which stands on the border-line between Mongolia and Siberia, does not appear at first sight to be anything more than a large, prosperous village. It contains a greater number of comfortable-looking two-storey log dwelling-houses than are to be found in most East-Siberian villages, and it has one or two noticeable churches of the Russo-Greek type with white walls and belfries surmounted by coloured or gilded domes; but one would never suppose it to be the most important commercial point in Eastern Siberia. Through Kiakhta, nevertheless, pass into or out of Mongolia every year Russian and Chinese products to the value of from twenty to thirty million rubles (\$10,000,000 to \$15,000,000). Nearly all of the famous 'overland' tea consumed in Russia is brought across Mongolia in caravans from northern China.

This lengthy extract shows how Kennan addresses different issues in his writing, with a single paragraph sometimes containing three different types of discourse. When introducing a major town or new district, Kennan usually starts as the writer of a travelogue, first giving the exact geographic location of a place and then describing the location in a more expressive, literary style. Finally he turns to straightforward factual reporting, concentrating on commerce and industry, supporting his observations with figures and statistics.

Another example of the abovementioned approach is Kennan's depiction of the town of Barnaul, which he describes as containing an unusual number of pretentious dwelling-houses and residences with columns and imposing facades, most of which have fallen into decay. It has 17,000 inhabitants and constitutes the centre of the rich and important mining district of the Altay region. He continues in the next paragraph with a summary of the gold, silver, copper and lead production of the Altay mines over the preceding decade, mentioning that a large part of the gold and silver ore is smelted in Barnaul.

The three different types of discourse are typical of Kennan's writing throughout this work. On the one hand he entertains the reader with detailed descriptions of exotic destinations, at times using a lyrical style. But by complementing this with the style of an investigative journalist, he also makes provision for the reader who is interested in the essence of the topic. The text is compiled in such a way that a reader can either go through the entire contents in detail or simply skim through passages, concentrating on one's own core interests.

2.6 Thematic analysis

Kennan arrives in Siberia brimming with confidence: both he and his travelling companion have been to Russia before and they speak Russian. It is likely that they expect to get along fairly easily as they are not in completely unfamiliar territory.

But Kennan is soon reminded of the differences between himself and the inhabitants of the country he is visiting. On the way to Semipalatinsk, the unkempt village gate-keeper reminds Kennan of Rip Van Winkle after his twenty years' sleep. The Otherness of the rest of the older inhabitants of the village is emphasised when Kennan realises that none of them had even so much as heard of America.

Kennan presently starts drawing parallels between Russians and Americans, with the former shown as inferior to the latter. He (1891, 2: 296) finds the repeated shrugging of shoulders 'in the significant Russian way' exasperating. At the Nerchinsk mines Kennan's suggestion of improving conditions by making better use of available resources is met with surprise. 'As an American' he cannot come to terms with what he regards as the indifference, inefficiency and apathy he runs into everywhere in the district.

In addition to Russians, Kennan comes across several indigenous peoples in the region. He is always keen to observe the local inhabitants, though he consciously tries to hide his open curiosity. At the Altay Station, for example, he spends several hours in the little shops pretending to look at goods in order to study the Kirghiz closer. If caution is not taken, an opportunity is easily lost. Once, when Frost tries to sketch a Kirghiz child, the mother snatches her offspring away from what appears to her as a stranger's unexplained, searching look. Having been outwitted by an ordinary indigenous woman, there is a sneer perceptible in Kennan's reference to the child as a 'ragged little urchin.'

Arriving in a village near Chita, all the Russian inhabitants appear to be drunk following festivities to celebrate the consecration of a new church. A Buriat coachman is the only sober person around, an irony not lost on Kennan. All the same, his classifying the coachman as 'a pagan' has a condescending ring to it.

This is not an isolated incident. Kennan also seems to enjoy mocking the Buriat chief of police who accompanies him and Frost to the Goose Lake lamasery as the following extended extract shows:

He had on a long, loose, ultramarine-blue silk gown with circular watered figures in it, girt about the waist with a scarlet sash and a light-blue silken scarf, and falling thence to his heels

over coarse cow-hide boots. A dishpan-shaped hat of bright red felt was secured to his large round head by means of a coloured string tied under his chin, and from this red hat dangled two long narrow streamers of sky blue silk ribbon. He had taken six or eight more drinks, and was evidently in the best of spirits. The judicial gravity of his demeanour had given place to a grotesque middle-age friskiness, and he looked like an intoxicated Tatar prize-fighter masquerading in the gala dress of some colour-loving peasant girl. I had never seen such an extraordinary chief of police in my life. (Kennan 1891a, 75)

Visiting the Tatar communities near Minusinsk, Kennan (1891b, 400) finds a group of people he can relate to as they remind him of American Indians: 'If they were dressed in American fashion, [they] would be taken in any Western State for Indians without hesitation or question.'

Kennan also feels a bond with the political exiles he meets. Near Barnaul he visits two young men, both university graduates, who speak French and German while one also reads English. They are particularly interested in questions of political economy, and Kennan feels that either of them might have been taken for a young professor, or a post-graduate student, at an Ivy League university. According to Hundley (2000) Kennan was overwhelmed by the 'noble heroic characters' of the exiles that he met. Hundley (ibid. 6) quotes a letter to Emeline, Kennan's wife, in which he admits that 'From every meeting with them I come away all inspired and stirred up.' Kennan also feels completely at ease when he spends time with a Scottish businessman in Tyumen, where he is received by the whole family with warm-hearted hospitality.

Thus Kennan experiences alterity in different ways, depending on whose company he is in. Sometimes he feels like a complete outsider but at times he bonds more closely with the people he meets.

About to cross into Siberia, Kennan is once again struck by the 'greatness' of the country even on this, his third, visit to Russia. Travelling up the Kama River on the way to the Ural Mountains, he is also aware that the familiar is being left behind, with everything becoming stranger, 'more primitive' and wilder.

As if to compensate for the unknown territory he is entering, Kennan refers to the familiar right from the outset and continues to draw comparisons with America for the remainder of the journey. So, for example, the scenery of the Ural Mountains where the railroad crosses the range is reminiscent of West Virginia where the Baltimore and Ohio railroad crosses the Alleghenies. The pleasing and picturesque landscape of Western Siberia between Barnaul and Tomsk reminds him of the southern part of New England. Frost, who hails from

Massachusetts, agrees with this analogy. Travelling in the Trans-Baikal region, the log houses and barns of the Buriat farmers also remind Kennan of 'home'.

Near the Mongolian border, when the scenery becomes alien and more uniquely Siberian, Kennan is thrilled to find an American clock in a second-hand kiosk, which, according to him, proves that the whole world keeps step to his country. Finding a copy of Mark Twain's *Life on the Mississippi* a short while later gives his feelings of patriotism yet another boost.

Kennan also does not hesitate to point out contrasts between his own country and the unfamiliar territory he is travelling through. In Western Siberia he is immediately struck by the complete absence of fences and the virtual absence of farmhouses or other buildings. His impressions remain the same on the road to Semipalatinsk. In the midst of extensive tracts of cultivated land, there are no signs of habitation by humans. Kennan repeatedly mentions the shabbiness and cheerlessness of most of the settlements as other peculiarities which catch the attention of American visitors.

When at a loss for an American equivalent, Kennan looks for similarities with other familiar locations to describe a landscape. So, for example, the road from Yekaterinburg to Tyumen resembles an avenue through an extensive and well-kept park, and he expects to see an English castle or country villa at any moment. Sometimes the change from the familiar to unfamiliar and conversely is sudden and unexpected. Semipalatinsk reminds Kennan of a Muslim town built in the middle of a north African desert, but only a few days later, reaching the foothills of the Altay Mountains, they enter what he calls 'this superb Siberian Switzerland.'

As he moves further east and starts encountering indigenous tribes, Kennan becomes more aware of the fact that he is travelling in unknown territory. Approaching the first Kirghiz encampment, the uproar caused by his presence indicates that foreigners are rare in these parts. Children, women and even men disappear helter-skelter in their tents. Kennan gradually comes across an increasing number of settlements where the inhabitants are ill at ease in the presence of foreigners.

At other times the travellers are not treated as unwelcome intruders and they try to blend in with their surroundings. On a hot and sultry evening in Semipalatinsk Kennan (1891a, 160) describes how 'we sat until eleven o'clock without coats or waistcoats, beside windows thrown wide open to catch every breath of air, listening to the unfamiliar noises of the Tatar city.'

Sometimes Kennan is flabbergasted by an unanticipated encounter or experience. He (1891b, 94) finds it unbelievable that the Grand Lama of the Goose Lake Monastery, 'an educated man and high ecclesiastical dignitary' has never heard of America and is not completely convinced that the world is round. Later on in the journey, Kennan's Russian host in Kiakhta (on the Russo-Mongolian border) humbly offers him a Chinese dinner of 'only' 40 courses.

Towards the end of the journey, in winter in the Nerchinsk mining district, the travellers notice half a dozen dark objects which seem to be animals of some kind on the white slope of an adjacent hill:

'I verily believe,' said Mr. Frost, after a prolonged stare at them, 'that they're camels!' 'Camels!' I exclaimed incredulously. 'Who ever heard of camels at the mines of Nerchinsk? and how could they live in such a climate as this?' (Kennan 1891b, 298)

This is not a unique occurrence. On the way back home, near Omsk, Kennan is once more surprised by the appearance of camels on the road. This time there are four camels, drawing Kirghiz sledges on a frosty moonlit night.

Most of the instances when Kennan is not ill at ease occur when he comes across other foreigners. As he (1891b, 105) says, with more than just a hint of superiority, upon unexpectedly meeting a Scottish woman in Kiakhta on the Russo-Mongolian border: 'We were very often surprised in these far-away parts of the globe to find ourselves linked by so many persons and associations to the civilized world and to our homes.'

Going through a collection of Kennan's papers, Ruttum (2008) found many family letters sent home by Kennan over the course of his first Siberian travels. One of the reasons for keeping up this correspondence was to mitigate his sense of being cut off (Hundley 2000) from the familiar.¹⁴⁷ In addition to descriptions of the sights, people and hardships he encountered, Kennan also expressed nostalgia for home. On the journey the present study is based on, Kennan similarly appears to suffer because of the lack of contact with his home. He is thrilled, in Irkutsk, to run into a countryman, Lieutenant Schuetze, who is on a US Government mission to Yakutsk. Kennan eagerly uses the opportunity to catch up on news from New York and Washington, and to compare their respective experiences of Siberian travel.

¹⁴⁷ Another reason was that Kennan's family feared for his physical safety when he undertook this journey. In order to set their minds at ease, he punctiliously wrote to them, especially to his wife and his brother John (Hundley 2000).

Just before reaching Chita, having crossed the watershed that divides the river systems of the Arctic Ocean from the river systems of the Pacific, Kennan muses that America would now be closer to reach across the Pacific than across Siberia. He excitedly starts noticing all kinds of American products, brought from California, appearing in village shops. It feels to him as if it should be possible to catch sight of San Francisco and the Golden Gate from a high hill at any moment.

Once he has reached the Nerchinsk mines and starts the homeward journey, Kennan becomes increasingly morose. Gazing at the abandoned Akatui mine, he claims that he has never seen a place so lonely, so cheerless, so isolated from all the living world. But only two pages later Kennan (1891b, 289) finds an even more dismal place:

Far down in a snowy trough between two of these mighty surges we could just make out a little cluster of unpainted log houses, which our driver said was the mining village of Algachi. I wondered, as we stopped for a moment on the summit to look at it, whether in all the world one could find a settlement situated in a more dreary and desolate spot. As far as the eye could see there was not a tree, nor a dark object of any kind, to break the ghastly whiteness of the rolling ocean of snowy mountains.

Not long afterward he reaches Kadaiya, yet another miserable, forlorn mining village, which does not help to lift his spirits.

Once Kennan leaves the mining district behind, conditions still do not improve significantly. Travelling between Irkutsk and Krasnoyarsk, the monotony of being on the way night and day is only relieved by passing a party of convicts, an occasional rich merchant or army officer going in the opposite direction or a few caravans of one-horse sleighs bound for the Nizhniy Novgorod fair. As Kennan mentioned on the way east, the area is thinly settled and uninteresting, with just a few 'wretched' little villages which are literally buried in drifts of snow.

The appearance of the town of Minusinsk, on the road between Krasnoyarsk and Omsk, encapsulates Kennan's (1891b, 386) feelings at this time: 'There were no lights visible, the wide streets were empty, and the whole town had the lonely, deserted appearance that most Siberian towns have when seen early in the morning by the faint light of a waning moon.'

Kennan becomes gradually more disillusioned as the journey drags on. Challenges begin to appear less and less surmountable and eventually there is but one desire left: to get back home. In mid-November Kennan (1891b, 275) and Frost leave 'the mines of Kara forever, and with glad hearts [turn] our faces, at last, homeward.'

At the time Kennan and Frost travelled to Siberia, the railroad went only as far as Yekaterinburg, so transport was one of the major issues they had to contend with. Kennan describes their experiences along the Great Siberian Post Road, their main source of vexation, in great detail. A good example is his depiction of the road between Tobolsk and Tyumen, where repairs had recently supposedly been made:

The only result of the 'improvement' was to render the road more nearly impassable than before, and to add unendurable jolting to our other discomforts. At last, weary of lurches, jolts, and concussions, we alighted, and tried walking by the roadside; but the sunshine was so intensely hot, and the mosquitoes so fierce and bloodthirsty, that in twenty minutes we were glad to climb back into the tarantass¹⁴⁸ with our hands full of flowers, and our faces scarlet from heat and mosquito bites. (Kennan 1891a, 71)

Upon finally arriving in Tyumen, Kennan's neck and spine are so stiff and lame from the incessant jolting and he is so tired that he can hardly climb the stairs leading to the second story of the house where he is staying. He goes to bed exhausted and sleeps for twelve hours.

Seemingly interminable downpours render the stretch of road from Tomsk to Irkutsk almost impassable in places. The jolting of the heavy *tarantass* gives Kennan violent headaches and once again prevents him from getting any undisturbed sleep. From Irkutsk, he decides to travel on transfers.¹⁴⁹ It turns out to be the most wretched, exasperating, body-bruising, and heart-breaking transportation system he has ever had to make use of in his life.

Trekking on horseback along the treacherous trails of the Altay Mountains also presents its challenges. Kennan, although experienced in this kind of mountain travel, confesses that his heart is in his mouth for hours at a time which makes it impossible to enjoy the scenery to the full.

Finding suitable accommodation likewise proves to be fraught with complications. Except for the rare occasions when he is invited by wealthy local residents or officials to stay in their homes, or there happens to be a well-run hotel in town, Kennan has to make do with shoddy post-stations, inns and 'hotels' of inferior quality. To add to his misery, after arriving exhausted at a new destination, he soon finds that warm, nourishing food is rarely obtainable.

¹⁴⁸ A four-wheeled horse-drawn vehicle designed to reduce road jolting on long-distance travel.

¹⁴⁹ This meant no longer using his own vehicle but transferring baggage from one vehicle to another at every post-station instead.

Sleepless nights become the norm as new arrivals at post-stations interrupt at any hour and predatory insects torment him night after night.¹⁵⁰ Once Kennan wakes up to find one of his eyes closed and his face generally so disfigured by bedbug bites that he is ashamed even to show himself in the street. Nearing Semipalatinsk, the road skirts the edge of a great marshy steppe and Kennan is tormented by huge grey mosquitoes. Wearing thick gloves and covering his head with a calico hood and horse-hair netting do not suffice and he has to defend himself constantly with leafy branches. Yet another sleepless night follows. Eventually, travelling in the Tans-Baikal district, as the result of sleeplessness, insufficient food, and constant jolting on the road, he becomes incapable of enjoying the landscape, or anything at all.

Finally heading home in winter, on the way to Chita, the intensity of the cold increases until Kennan can hardly endure it from one post-station to another. He drinks three or four tumblers of hot tea every time there is a stop to change horses but in the long, lonely hours between midnight and morning, when he can get no warm food and his vital powers are at their lowest ebb, he suffers severely. At the end of the journey, having experienced cold, hunger, jolting, and sleeplessness, Kennan is reduced to a state of silent, moody, half-savage exasperation, in which life, or at least such a life, seems no longer worth living. He claims that he is ready to sacrifice everything for a hot bath, a good dinner, and twelve hours of unbroken sleep in a warm, clean bed.

On the way east the intense heat of the Kirghiz steppe complicates the journey further. Kennan reports a temperature of 33⁰C which leaves him panting for breath, while fighting off huge horseflies. Nearing the Altay Mountains, he rides through a sand storm, gasping for breath for more than two hours. On the way back, it is the severe cold that tortures him. The journey to the Nerchinsk mines is tough at the best of times and to exacerbate matters, he ends up travelling in temperatures that are almost constantly below -17⁰C. Owing to a smallpox epidemic raging in the area, Kennan is advised against entering peasants' houses to obtain food or shelter. Notwithstanding the warning, need forces him to run the risk of becoming infected.

Both Kennan and Frost come through unscathed on this occasion but Kennan does fall ill earlier on in the journey, near the Russo-Mongolian border. In a letter home he describes how he, running a temperature and sick like a dog, has to lie on a hard plank floor, with all

¹⁵⁰ Insects are not the only problem. In the Nerchinsk district Kennan once finds himself sleeping in a makeshift 'bed' on top of the coop of a Shanghai rooster which makes 'more disturbance in a small room at night than a whole ark-load of quadrupeds' (Kennan 1891b, 284).

his clothes on, tormented to the verge of frenzy by bedbugs. Kennan also has to break the journey in Boti when he becomes so exhausted after riding across the mountains in a temperature below -17°C , that he can hardly sit in the saddle.

In addition to coping with physical hardships Kennan is constantly stressing about incurring the wrath of the local authorities. Following his first confrontation with the police in Perm, long before reaching the Siberian border, Kennan becomes anxious about how the rest of the journey will go.¹⁵¹ Being in possession of documents issued by the authorities in St Petersburg clearly does not guarantee a smooth passage. From the moment in Tomsk that Kennan starts to change his view on the exile question until they re-cross the Siberian frontier on their way back to St Petersburg, he is subjected to a nervous and emotional strain that he describes as harder to bear than cold, hunger, or fatigue.

Initially Kennan is wary and unsure of himself when trying to arrange clandestine meetings with political exiles, but by the time they reach the Kara gold mines, he is more confident after six months' experience of how best to deal with suspicious police officers. By then he is also in possession of all the information and all the suggestions that political ex-convicts in other parts of Siberia could give him which make him more bold in his attempts to meet political exiles. At times though he is aware of being under close surveillance and can accomplish nothing. Towards the end of the journey, Kennan is carrying a mass of documents, letters, and politically incendiary material of all sorts concealed about his person and in his baggage. He admits to becoming so nervous and so suspicious of everything unusual long before reaching the frontier of European Russia, that he can hardly sleep at night.

Not only the emotional strain, but also the strain of constant anxiety that they are liable, at almost any moment, to be arrested and searched, eventually take its toll. On the way home, near Tobolsk, Kennan becomes concerned about Frost's mental state of mind. Up to that point Frost has usually been quiet and patient, never complaining about anything and bearing all the suffering and privations with fortitude. But then he slowly starts breaking down under the combined nervous and physical strain of sleeplessness and the constant fear of arrest. In the end, upon the advice of some of his friends in Minusinsk, Kennan decides to get rid of all his note-books, documents, letters from political convicts, and other dangerous and incriminating papers. He destroys some of it but forwards many items by mail to a friend in St Petersburg where he later retrieves them successfully.

¹⁵¹ Kennan and Frost had twice walked up a hill to get a better view of the city, by chance passing the prison along the way, an activity that aroused the suspicions of the local police.

2.7 Conclusion

Kennan undertook an ambitious study which won him an international reputation for his exposé of the Russian penal system (Danilov 1991). He turned from admirer to bitter critic when his observations of the exile system at first hand compelled him to revise his former views of what he had thought of as the benign nature of Russia's 'civilizing mission.' Kennan's aim now became to reveal the evils of the Russian government to the American public and government, while maintaining respect for the Russians as a people (Hundley 2000). However, his work has received mixed reviews. Kennan's abilities as a skilled, acute observer are acknowledged but, owing to his lack of formal education, he is seen as a journalist, not an academic, and many question his real motives for undertaking the journey which resulted in the two volumes which are the subject of this study (Danilov 1991).

Nevertheless, whether Kennan's change of heart was premeditated or whether he experienced a real epiphany on the journey, he did not ignore the positive side of the region he was travelling through. In the midst of battling the elements, travel fatigue and an ever present fear of persecution, he still managed to report favourably on his surroundings when he felt it was warranted.

One example of a positive response is when Kennan visits the Technical School in Tyumen, which is modelled on the German *Real Schule*.¹⁵² He admits that one would scarcely expect to find such a school in European Russia, and that it would be hard to find a similar school even in the United States. Another hundred *versts* along the way Kennan visits a wealthy Siberian manufacturer whose residence is a fine example of comfort, taste and luxury. The experience is repeated in Krasnoyarsk at the home of a wealthy gold mine owner, where Kennan (1891a, 359) is thrown into a 'state of astonishment [...] by the sight of so many unexpected evidences of wealth, culture, and refinement in this remote East Siberian town.' The dinner guests too consist of 'attractive and cultivated people.' Upon entering the ballroom in the home of another mine magnate, this time in Nerchinsk, Kennan feels compelled to rub his eyes to make sure that he is awake, as he is astounded to find so much luxury in the wilds of Eastern Siberia, 8 000 km from St Petersburg.

¹⁵² A *Real Schule* is a secondary school where, in contrast to classical education, primary attention is given to natural sciences, physics, mathematics and modern languages.

Introducing themselves as American travellers to their host in Kiakhta, on the Russo-Mongolian border, Kennan and Frost are received with the sincere and cordial hospitality that Kennan holds as characteristic of Russians everywhere, from the Bering Strait to the Baltic Sea. Likewise, in the midst of winter in the village of Algachi, in the Nerchinsk mining district, the mining engineer receives Kennan with generous Russian hospitality. After taking breakfast with his host, Kennan pays his respects to a local government official, who lives in a large, comfortable house full of blossoming oleanders and geraniums. The official also promptly insists that Kennan needs to take a second breakfast with him.

Even when his newly acquired negative point of view of the exile system is contradicted by fresh evidence, Kennan acknowledges the exception to the rule. Describing the new prison at Verkhniy Udinsk in the Trans-Baikal region, he admits that the arrangements for heating, ventilation and cleanliness seem to be close to perfect and on the whole the prison impresses him as being not only the very best he has seen in Russia, but also in any other country. Unfortunately though, this prison is not representative of all the prisons he visits in the region.

Describing Tomsk, Kennan says that although the streets of the town are unpaved and imperfectly lighted, they are reasonably clean and well cared for, and on the whole the town impresses him much more favourably than many similar towns in European Russia. Even though it is, in size and importance, ranked as only the second city in Siberia, Kennan puts it first in enterprise, intelligence and prosperity.

Kennan also delights in nature and on the way to Semipalatinsk, in the middle of the steppe he asks the driver to wait while he walks into the flowering landscape to enjoy the stillness and the fragrant air. Later Kennan states that if the object of their Siberian journey had been merely enjoyment, he would have remained at the Altay Station all summer, as neither in Siberia nor in any other country could he have hoped to find a more delightful place for a summer vacation.

Kennan believes in the potential of the people in Siberia and focuses on their achievements when an opportunity presents itself. He regards the Minusinsk museum, an institution of which all educated Siberians are deservedly proud, as a striking illustration of the results that may be attained by unswerving devotion to a single purpose and steady, persistent work for its accomplishment. In relation to this, he believes that Siberians are well aware that if they want integrity, capacity, and intelligence, they must look for these qualities not among the official representatives of the government, but among the lawyers, doctors, scientists, authors, journalists, and academicians who have been exiled to Siberia for political untrustworthiness.

3. Harry de Windt: Siberia as it is and The New Siberia

3.1 Contents

Siberia was not unfamiliar territory for De Windt as he had undertaken a three-month long journey through the region in 1887, writing a book titled *From Peking to Calais by Land* about his experiences. The aim of his subsequent two visits, on which the volumes of the current study are based, was to set the record straight regarding the negative view of the Russian exile system prevalent in Britain at the time. The books are based on his own observations and experiences but he admits to having consulted additional sources to supply historical and ethnographical information.

The first volume, *Siberia as it is*,¹⁵³ starts with an introduction by Olga Novikova.¹⁵⁴ It is intended to give the English reader essential background information on Russian life and the Russian psyche. She advises the reader to ignore sensational texts on Siberia and urges for greater understanding between Russia and Britain.

De Windt, travelling alone, starts his own contribution to *Siberia as it is* with a brief reference to his trip from London through France and Germany to the Russian border. After crossing the border, he describes the landscape in more detail until he arrives in St Petersburg, a city which, according to him, lacks the originality of Moscow and the picturesqueness of Odessa.

De Windt immediately pays a visit to Komarsky, the Inspector-General of Siberian prisons, who undertakes to supply him with letters authorising visits to the prisons of Tomsk, Tobolsk, and Tyumen as well as permission to talk to political prisoners. Komarsky suggests that De Windt visit Irkutsk, Nerchinsk, Kara and Sakhalin as well, recommending an east to west route. De Windt declines, having travelled through Siberia before and not wanting to repeat

¹⁵³ De Windt, H. *Siberia as it is*. London, 1892.

¹⁵⁴ Mellon (2010) refers to Novikova as a Russian-born cosmopolitan aristocrat who became famous in England for her relentless advocacy of Pan-Slavism and Russian imperial interests. Her avowed goal was to promote a better understanding between the British and Russian empires.

the trip in winter. However, he follows up on the suggestion later, basing the second volume of the current study on that journey, when he sets off from Vladivostok and travels westward.

Recalling the events surrounding the assassination of Tsar Alexander II,¹⁵⁵ De Windt gives a detailed exposé of his own negative opinion of 'Nihilists' and 'Nihilism'¹⁵⁶ and paints a positive picture of the ruling tsar. While waiting for the letters of authorisation to be processed, De Windt finds the day time heat in the capital intolerable and he accepts the invitation of a friend to spend some time in Finland.¹⁵⁷ De Windt gives some background information on the country (history, economics, Russo-Finnish relations) then describes the scenic route the train follows to Vyborg.

Upon receiving notification ten days later that his letters are ready, De Windt returns to the capital and finally sets off for Siberia on 20 July 1890, spending only a few days in Moscow on the way. The first leg of the journey as far as Nizhniy Novgorod, where the annual fair is in full swing, is by rail. Kennan then transfers to a steamer for the voyage via Kazan to Perm, where he arrives in mid-August. He spends only one day in Perm before boarding the train for Tyumen. De Windt gives a glowing report of the privately owned Ural Railways, regarding the buffets at the principal stations as almost equal to any first-class restaurant in London or Paris. He is impressed with Yekaterinburg but describes Tyumen as a colony of hovels surrounding a few insignificant brick houses.

Owing to the low water level of the Tura River, De Windt has to continue by post horse carriage to board a steamer further upstream. In spite of being involved in a coach accident along the way, De Windt just manages to catch the steamer and continues his journey in relative comfort. He describes Tobolsk, the next major stop, as the most cheerless, depressing place in Siberia.

At this point De Windt interrupts the narration to give a summary of the history of Siberia. When he resumes the description of his own journey, it is at the moment that his steamship

¹⁵⁵ Alexander II was assassinated in 1881 and succeeded by his son Alexander III.

¹⁵⁶ The term 'Nihilism,' referring here to the philosophy of scepticism which originated in Russia in the mid-19th century, can be traced back to the Middle Ages when it was on occasion applied to describe heretics. After the publication of Ivan Turgenev's celebrated novel *Fathers and Sons* in 1862, the philosophy of nihilism began to be associated with the regicide of Alexander II, as referred to by De Windt, and acts of political terror carried out by members of clandestine organizations opposing absolutism.

¹⁵⁷ Finland was a Russian Grand Duchy at the time of De Windt's visit.

runs aground in the Irtysh River. Fortunately they manage to make it back to the deeper parts of the river and complete this leg of the journey without further incidents. The steamship docks for a few hours in pouring rain in Surgut, another 'miserable place'. After noticing Ostiak encampments on the banks of the river for the first time, De Windt gives background information on the original inhabitants of Siberia. The cruise continues for several days, mostly in pouring rain, but they finally arrive in Tomsk in glorious sunshine.

Next follows lengthy descriptions of the Siberian exile system and visits to the Tomsk prisons. De Windt then continues with his impressions of Tomsk itself, first describing a ball he attends shortly after his arrival. His conclusion is that the town is picturesque from a distance but loses its charm on closer acquaintance. Tomsk is De Windt's final destination on this journey and he starts retracing his steps with Tyumen as his first major stop on the way back. He inspects the prisons he did not visit on the way east and once again expresses his dislike for Tyumen, which he describes this time as dull and stagnant and a sad contrast to Tomsk and Irkutsk. De Windt concludes the book with favourable remarks in defence of the penal system in Siberia, quoting other travellers who have reported favourably on the topic and refuting the work of those who condemn the system.

The title of the second volume, *The New Siberia*,¹⁵⁸ refers to the island of Sakhalin which was intended to become the new main destination of exiles. In the preface De Windt draws attention to the fact that he was the first foreigner to be granted permission to travel at will on the island, and to converse with political exiles at the Nerchinsk penal colony on the mainland.

The description of the voyage begins in the spring of 1894 when De Windt sets sail from Nagasaki for a month long voyage on board a prison steamship, which becomes the topic of investigation of the second chapter. He continues with a detailed account of the fate of one of his fellow passengers, a 'charming' young lady on her way to join her fiancé who was exiled to Sakhalin on a murder conviction. The first glimpse of the island makes an unexpected pleasant impression on De Windt, though he admits it could be due to the glorious weather and exhilarating air. But upon closer inspection, although the settlement of Korsakovsky-Post appears cheerful compared to many mainland villages, he considers the surroundings grim, gloomy and bleak. Yet De Windt is astounded by the level of sophistication he encounters in the home of the prison governor, who invites him to breakfast.

¹⁵⁸ De Windt, H. *The New Siberia*. London 1896.

After visiting the prison, De Windt sets off for a nearby village to see how exiles who are no longer confined to prison live. De Windt is pleasantly surprised by the cleanliness of a cottage he enters. It is inhabited by a cheerful, thrifty Polish woman (who had poisoned her husband in Russia) and a Finnish man De Windt simply describes as sulky and morose.

Back on the steamship he runs into two fellow countrymen, the one permanently settled on the island, where he is running a successful fishing industry, and the other a visitor of his. In Aleksandrovsk-Post, which De Windt describes as a pretty town, he follows the same routine of breakfast with the prison governor followed by a visit to the prison. De Windt had read that the area was completely devoid of vegetation and was, once again, pleasantly surprised to find roses, heliotrope, and other summer flowers blooming freely.

The next day De Windt sets off, accompanied by an escort, on a three-day trip to the interior of the island. After a fleeting visit to a Gilyak village along the way, he reports more extensively on the local native populations. The travellers arrive at their destination, Rykovskaya, at night. The town reminds De Windt of a Christmas card, with its starlit church, quiet main street, and prim white dwellings, with lights gleaming through red-curtained windows. He walks straight into a reception, in his honour, at the prison commandant's house, an event which turns out to be a most pleasant surprise due to the presence of the commandant's daughters and a female friend of theirs.

De Windt starts the second part of the book with a description of the local prison. He tells the story of one exile, a notorious fraudster, in detail. Neatly dressed and still showing traces of her former beauty, she is happy to receive him in her cottage and entertains him with vivid descriptions of her colourful past. De Windt arrives back in Aleksandrovsk-Post just in time to board the steamship for Vladivostok, a city he describes as imposing at first sight. However, he finds the overwhelming presence of the Russian Pacific Fleet disconcerting and is soon on the road to his final destination, the Nerchinsk mines.

The first leg of the journey is on a short stretch of the newly, partially completed Trans-Siberian Railroad. De Windt gives some background information on the project, before continuing with a description of the next part of the trip which is undertaken in a variety of horse-drawn contraptions. Inundated roads and frequent breakdowns slow down his pace but he determinedly pursues his way westward, even on horseback on occasion. Passing through one nondescript village after the other, he alternately enjoys the landscape along the way or flounders helplessly in almost impassable morasses.

De Windt eventually arrives in the village of Busse, just missing the steamship which had left the day before. He has to share a dingy, vermin and cockroach infested apartment with

several fellow travellers and is grateful for the relative luxury offered by the steamship he boards seven tedious days later. So great is his relief at being on the way again, that he declares this as possibly the most enjoyable stretch of the entire journey.

At the village of Koslovsky, the steamship passengers are treated to a special event. The inhabitants dress up specially to meet the governor of the district, who is also on board. The gaily attired men and women, led by the *ataman*, in full uniform, are followed by an attendant bearing a huge loaf of black bread and a saucer of salt on a tray covered by a snowy napkin.¹⁵⁹ After the interlude, the cruise continues until they reach Khabarovsk at the confluence of the Ussury and Amur Rivers. This turns out to be De Windt's favourite place in Siberia with its well laid out streets, fine buildings and amenities such as a club, a weekly newspaper, a theatre and good shops. However, for want of better accommodation, he is forced to stay on the steamship until the arrival of the boat on which he is to continue the rest of his journey.

While waiting, De Windt attends a dinner hosted by the Governor-General. Eventually setting off again, there are 31 stops before the next destination, Blagoveshchensk, is reached. Near the city, which he describes as picturesque, the steamship collides with another steamer but the damage is not too severe and they are able to continue sailing to the town. After a short stopover, De Windt continues to Sretynsk but on a flat-bottom barge as the low water level has rendered navigation by steamship impossible. The arrival of the barge at villages along the way is a momentous event for the local inhabitants, some of whom come to meet it all dressed up. The barge moors at the historic town of Albazin for a while before sailing up the Shilka River. Making slow progress against the current, they reach Sretynsk, a town that impresses De Windt favourably, especially as there is proper accommodation available, on 21 June, three weeks after leaving Vladivostok.

De Windt sets off for the Nerchinsk mines the very next day, once more having to battle against becoming bogged down in the pouring rain. First he describes the transport system of convicts to reach the mines and then the mines themselves. Kara has been abandoned so he visits Akatui, where the prisoners have been transferred, instead. De Windt is taken ill but the prison governor, who receives him with true Russian hospitality, undertakes to look after him. Once De Windt has recovered, he inspects the prisons, then sets off on the return

¹⁵⁹ It might have been De Windt's first experience of the distinct Slavic custom of offering *khleb-sol* (Хлеб-соль – bread-and-salt) when welcoming special guests. He does not seem to recognise it as a typical tradition.

journey.¹⁶⁰ As nothing worth reporting happens, he only takes up the narration again in Khabarovsk, where he arrives mid-July.

De Windt hoped to retrace his steps, but flooding and an outbreak of horse disease make an overland trip impossible and he is forced to take a 2 400 km detour by steamship via Nikolaevsk on the Amur estuary. After setting off in a violent storm, the weather calms down and a dull journey starts down the Amur with only occasional Gilyak settlements and dreary, semi-deserted villages to be seen along the way.

The steamship arrives four days later in Nikolaevsk but there is neither an ocean going vessel nor accommodation available. Fortunately a fellow traveller from earlier on in the journey invites De Windt to be his guest until he can procure a passage. Nikolaevsk, once a prosperous town, now appears to be in the same state of ruin as most of the villages on the Lower Amur, owing to the diversion of trade, resulting from the rapid increase in importance of Vladivostok. De Windt whiles away a dreary month before he gratefully boards a steamship and bids farewell to Siberia for the third time.

3.2 Structure

The first volume, *Siberia as it is*, appeared two years after the completion of the journey. It opens with an epigraph in French on the title page:

One is told that Russia is a closed country; do not believe a word of it. I saw everything I wanted to see and even more than I had asked for. *Victor Tissot*.¹⁶¹

(On vous a dit que la Russie est un pays fermé; n'en croyez pas un mot. Tout ce que j'ai désiré voir, je l'ai vu, et on m'en a même montré plus que je n'en demandais.)

A dedication to the Princess of Monaco is likewise written in French.¹⁶² In the preface De Windt acknowledges the sources he consulted when writing the book.

¹⁶⁰ De Windt does not cover the area between Nerchinsk and Tomsk (a distance of 2 800 km) on either of the journeys the current study is based on.

¹⁶¹ The Swiss journalist and author (1844--1917) wrote several travelogues. The quotation is probably taken from his book *La Russie et les Russes*, published in 1884.

An extensive introduction by Olga Novikova follows. The book itself contains twelve chapters with short headings, almost all of which indicate a stage of the journey, e.g. 'London to St Petersburg,' 'The Urals,' 'Yekaterinburg,' 'Tyumen,' Tomsk. Two chapters, titled 'Siberian Exile' and 'A Siberian Prison,' are devoted exclusively to the exile issue. In the last chapter De Windt summarises his findings and compares it to those of other writers such as the missionary explorer Reverend Henry Lansdell, German physicist Georg Adolf Erman, newspaper correspondent Julius Price, arctic explorer Captain Joseph Wiggins and the French travellers E. Cotteau and M. E. Boulangier. De Windt also refers specifically to George Kennan's articles in the *Century* magazine. The book ends with seven substantial appendices, containing statistical information and letters by other travellers to Siberia, supporting De Windt's point of view. The writers of these include the German born missionary Dr. F. W. Baedeker. Curiously, the cover of the book depicts Nizhniy Novgorod, i.e. not a Siberian city.

The second volume, *The New Siberia*, was published the year following the completion of the journey it is based on. The sub-title reads as follows: 'A Visit to the Penal Island of Sakhalin, and Political Prison and Mines of the Trans-Baikal District, Eastern Siberia.' The book is dedicated to the author's sister. De Windt starts with a short preface written by himself.

This volume also contains twelve chapters, with the heading typically giving a geographic location, e.g. 'The Island of Sakhalin (Aleksandrovsk Post),' 'The Ussury and Amur Rivers.' As in the first volume, only two chapters, 'The Prison Ship' and 'The Silver Mines of Nerchinsk' deal exclusively with the penal system. A chapter titled 'Olga' describes the plight of a fellow passenger who is following her fiancé into exile. De Windt calls it 'a sketch'. 'On the Road' is devoted to the toughest stretch of the Great Siberian Post Road De Windt had to tackle, while 'Vladivostok and the Trans-Siberian Railway' gives more information on the latter which was still under construction at the time of writing.

The book includes eight appendices on diverse topics dealing with the exile system, (plan of a prison ship, clothing, diet, death rate and wearing of fetters), a programme of a theatrical performance by convicts, a letter by De Windt to *The Standard* about Sakhalin fugitives, a

¹⁶² At the time the book was written the Princess of Monaco was Alice, the American-born second wife of Prince Albert I of Monaco. I was unable to determine De Windt's motivation for this dedication.

table of distances and fares.¹⁶³ De Windt makes periodic use of footnotes, mainly to explain Russian terms, but on occasion a footnote comprises an entire anecdote, such as the hoax bomb incident near Tomsk (1892, 372). The book contains a map and an index which only refer to the contents of the second volume.

Both volumes are richly illustrated. Always having his Kodak on hand, De Windt took his own photographs, which in the first volume were reproduced as sketches by an unacknowledged artist. In the second volume, the photographs are reproduced directly. Generally photographs depicting convict life were supplied by the Government, as convicts tended to shy away from the camera. De Windt (1896, 24) recalls: 'I often tried, during the long sunny mornings, to get a snap-shot of the convicts at exercise; but at first sight of the "Kodak" they invariably turned away in a body, notwithstanding the good-humoured remonstrances of the guards.'

The volumes total 504 and 324 pages respectively.

3.3 Language and style

In a letter to Olga Novikova dated April 2, 1892, the English historian Froude dismisses *Siberia as it is* with the following words: 'I have read De Windt's book with interest. Your own preface is the smartest part of it. De Windt himself is dull, though his facts may be accurate' (in Stead 1909, 340). This harsh judgement could be owing to the fact that Russia did not fall within the ambit of Froude's interests.¹⁶⁴

De Windt's detailed, vivid descriptions of every aspect of his journey can hardly be described as dull. He (1892, 11) turns, for example, the leisurely wait while clearing passport control in Russia into a lucid scene:

¹⁶³ The appendix on the death rate at the Nerchinsk mines consists of a letter written in French by the Vice-Governor of the Trans-Baikal region, ostensibly in response to enquiries made by De Windt.

¹⁶⁴ James Anthony Froude (1818–1894) was an eminent historian, biographer and novelist of the Victorian era. Originally intending to become a clergyman, he wrote extensively on issues concerning faith. His other main focus was the history of England and the British Empire.

Everything is in perfect order, from the cool spacious *salle à manger* with its array of snowy linen, glittering glass, and bright silver, to the huge gendarme in grey and red, who receives your passport as you enter the buffet, and politely requests you not to hurry yourself. There is plenty of time for both food and digestion. No greasy scalding soup, no petrified sandwiches, nor warm lemonade here, but the cuisine perfect, wines well iced, and tea (served *à la Russe*) delicious.

Throughout the work, De Windt focuses on appearances when describing persons, giving thorough descriptions of physical features and attire. *Monsieur* Demetrius Kamorsky, Inspector-General of his Imperial Majesty's prisons in Siberia, for instance, is far removed from the typical Russian prison official as represented in England. He is fashionably dressed in a light grey suit, varnished boots, and, as a final touch, wears a gardenia in his button-hole.

De Windt's two compartment companions on the train from Perm to Tyumen receive the same attention. The man, bottle-nosed and over fifty, is genial and *bon garçon*. His wife is more than pretty, fresh from a Paris finishing school, and dressed in one of Worth's latest *chef d'oeuvres*, complete with long grey suede gloves, and a becoming little straw hat. We learn that she is charming, musical and well read.

French words and expressions are interspersed throughout the work. The couple mentioned above are, according to De Windt, an example of one of those *mariages de convenance*, 'so common in France'. *Déjeuner, enceinte, mot, nourrice, hors concours* and *articles de Paris* are but a few more instances of French terms which appear in both books.

There are also long quotations in French, without translations supplied by the author. For example, when travel plans go awry in Yekaterinburg, the husband (the fellow traveller previously mentioned), comments to De Windt in a confidential tone:

She left the Champs Elysees barely a month ago and Siberia is not an place for fun. One must be indulgent during the honeymoon!

('Voilà seulement un mois qu'elle sort des Champs Elysees, et la Sibérie n'est pas bien gaie! Faut etre indulgent en lune de miel!') (De Windt 1892, 113).

Spicing up his work with French words seems to be part of De Windt's writing style as he does the same in his other books. He could be doing it to impress his readers or it could be pure pretentiousness. Overuse of these terms lead to an affectedness which distances the reader from the work. On the other hand, his turn of the century readership might not have found it out of place.

Detailed stories of individuals that De Windt finds worthwhile retelling are included from time to time, such as that of the photographer on the steamship who turns out to be a Nihilist. These sketches present a welcome diversion from sections dealing with the exile system. It also offers a refreshing change from first person singular narration. Dialogues and direct speech, usually involving De Windt as a participant but sometimes only as an observer, similarly frequently follow long descriptive passages, preventing the contents from becoming monotonous. It also changes the focus of the reader, bringing an immediacy to the work. For instance, stumbling into a village in the dead of night after a carriage breakdown, De Windt's coachman tries to get help:

'This must be Simonov's' says the *yemstchik*, [coachman] violently shaking the heavy padlocked gates. 'Simonov! Eh, Simonov!' yells the little Tatar. But there is no reply. The ripple of a brook hard by, the crunching of hay by cattle in the yard, are the only sounds that break the dark, dead silence.

'We must break one of the windows,' says my companion, after a pause. 'It is useless trying to climb over these gates.'

[Fortunately Simonov shows up before any damage is done, but he is armed with a gun.]

'*Kharosho!*¹⁶⁵ Don't shoot; we are not robbers,' cries my companion, well under cover of one of his horses.

[But Simonov is not to be appeased so lightly.]

'Was there ever such a thing known as waking honest people at such an hour, and with a Government official in the house too? Who knows what trouble may not come of it?' (De Windt 1892, 147).

And so the exchange continues until Simonov is placated at the prospect of making some money off De Windt.

Dialogues also liven up what could become drab chapters dealing with the exile system. Inspecting the prison at the Nerchinsk mines, the question of women joining their exiled husbands is reported in the following dialogue between De Windt (1896, 251) and the prison Governor:

'These poor souls, many of whom come here, expect that their husbands will be liberated at once. This is of course impossible.'

'How long must these women wait,' I asked, 'and how do they live in the meantime?'

¹⁶⁵ Meaning 'Good!' (The correct transliteration is *Khorosho*.)

'It all depends on the crime. Some men remain in prison only six months others from one to five years; seldom longer.'

'But how do their wives and families exist meanwhile?'

'That is our great difficulty,' replied Tomilin.

Pleasing, at times even lyrical descriptions of nature, appealing to all the senses, also serve as digression from the central topic of the work from time to time. Approaching Tyumen De Windt describes wild flowers growing freely by the roadside, which, mingling with the scent of beans and clover, shed a delicious perfume around. West of Vladivostok the forests are cool, fragrant oases where one can hear the drone of insects or the soft, low notes of a cuckoo far away, while breathing in the fresh, pine-scented air and fragrance of violets and lilies-of-the-valley growing freely by the roadside. On the way to the Nerchinsk mines the distant mountains, wide stretches of thyme, scented moorland, pine forests carpeted with fern and wild flowers, and pretty villages dotted over the smiling landscape, justify the name of 'Siberian Switzerland' that has been given to the district. On Sakhalin, De Windt finds an expanse of short grass, carpeted with fragrant wild flowers, while on every side of the road fields and forests present an ever-changing kaleidoscope of colour, varying from darkest russet to the tenderest shades of green.

Sailing on the mighty Siberian rivers makes an indelible impression on De Windt. In parts the Ob, which he terms a 'stupendous volume of water,' appears as a succession of huge lakes teeming with fish and wild fowl. Sailing up the Shilka towards Sretynsk, the scenery surpasses anything he has seen up to that point. Precipitous mountains border the river on both banks, in places huge crags of granite, that look as if a child could dislodge them, tower immediately overhead.

Even when the going gets tough, there are rewards. Sailing down the Amur, the intense, stifling heat similar to that which De Windt experienced in India is compensated for by evenings that are cool and delicious, while the night air is laden with the scent of pines, dewy grass, and flowers. Sailing from Tomsk at night, growing weary of the long journey, he still marvels at the white walls and towers of the city that are flushed with the warm, tender tints of a glorious sunset, while to the west a fleecy mass of purple cloud hangs, still and motionless, against a background of gold and turquoise sky.

All Siberian villages, however, are shrugged off as typically consisting of one long straggling street of great width, with unpainted wooden houses on either side, ranging from a hundred yards to a couple of miles in length. De Windt softens this caustic appraisal by introducing

humour, saying that the first glance of a Siberian village is suggestive of a fleet of ships without sails or rigging, riding at anchor in a heavy gale.

Humorous interludes are scattered throughout the books. On the crowded steamer to Perm, for example, De Windt finally sinks into an uneasy slumber, only to be shortly afterwards awakened by a friendly but inebriated co-traveller wishing to drink to the health of Queen Victoria and the English. At the ball in Tomsk, De Windt invites the reader to imagine the sound of an orchestra composed of a fiddle, a flute, and a cracked trombone. After a long coach ride De Windt despairingly asks his host at the hotel in Tyumen if he could wash anywhere, to which the host responds enthusiastically by pointing to the slime and duckweed coated pond in the yard.

On another occasion, De Windt learns that the villainous looking coachman he has just engaged was exiled for murder, but fortunately he turns out to be an excellent driver. In another incident involving a coachman, De Windt is stranded in the middle of nowhere after an accident near Tyumen. His Tatar driver remarks that there was a village nearby three days ago but that it is nowhere to be seen now, as if it were quite possible that the houses had walked away in the meantime. Finally on the way to the Nerchinsk mines De Windt travels through Undinsky-Kavikotchi, a village, he says, like many in the district, that contains more letters in its name than inhabitants. The humour in the work is possibly incidental, but more likely included to bring some needed levity to a work dealing with a depressing topic.

De Windt's tone is frequently abrasive, even insulting, the narrative 'I' is overused and some of the characters described are borderline caricatures. Yet he redresses the imbalance this causes with descriptions of nature and landscapes which are clear and convincing. His use of imagery, for instance comparing Sakhalin to a huge centipede, or 'a great black snake asleep upon the grey, dawn-lit sea' (1896, 49), is vivid and evocative. The balance between serious and more entertaining sections also contributes towards making the text easy to absorb in spite of the extensive length of many paragraphs.

3.4 Point of view

Commenting on a polemical issue which made headlines in the English press, De Windt (1892, 260) says that he has no intention of taking sides, either for or against the Russian Government, as he is unbiased either way and his object in visiting the prisons of Siberia is 'not to theorise, but to lay bare plain, unvarnished facts.' However, he makes his positive

attitude towards Russia and Russian officialdom clear right from the start. Crossing the border, he welcomes the change: at Eydtkuhnen in Germany¹⁶⁶ there was dirt, discomfort, and confusion while he finds everything in Russia in perfect order.

De Windt does not disguise his conservative political views, describing disciples of Nihilism as very young men and women who abandon home, family, and religion ‘for the cause;’ which means adopting ideas of free love and disseminating treason throughout the country.¹⁶⁷ Upon visiting Irkutsk on his previous journey through Siberia, De Windt was begged by a member of the International Socialist movement to deliver a coded letter to a member in England, a request De Windt patently refused. He openly supports the reigning tsar, Alexander III, whom he describes as self-willed, but a man of simple habits, fond of domestic life, art and music. De Windt blandly states that in Russia, notwithstanding all that has been reported to the contrary, there is plenty of liberty, provided you do not meddle with politics.

Regarding Siberia, De Windt disparages the ignorant perception of the West. Nearing the frontier of the region, he says how, according to English novelists and playwrights, he should now be travelling through dark impenetrable forests and dreary wastes of steppe-land, with only the occasional prison or pack of wolves breaking the monotony, while his own experience is quite the opposite.

However, De Windt’s superior, condescending attitude makes him a detached observer. After a single glance at a political exile on his train, De Windt summarily dismisses the prisoner as a long-haired, dirty individual, but nevertheless strikes up a ‘harmless’ conversation with him.¹⁶⁸ Riding into town from the station at Tyumen, the coachman tries to make small talk, but De Windt snarls at him, calling him an idiot and admonishing him to concentrate on his job. De Windt does not find fault with this outburst, dismissing his own behaviour merely as a somewhat ungracious reply.

¹⁶⁶ Present day Chernyshevskoye in the Kaliningrad region.

¹⁶⁷ De Windt subscribes to the view of Prince Dolgorukov: ‘There are two kinds of Nihilists in Russia; those who have nothing in their heads, and those who have nothing in their pockets’ (De Windt 1892, 34). This quotation is most likely attributable to Prince Vasily Andreyevich Dolgorukov, Executive Head (1856–1866) of the Third Section (so called Secret Police) of the Imperial Chancellery.

¹⁶⁸ The prisoner was duly relegated to a third class compartment behind a barred window with a guard in attendance.

A contributing factor to De Windt's high-handed dealing with the people he encounters could be a feeling of insecurity due to his limited knowledge of Russian. It is not clear just how proficient he is but there are indications that he is far from fluent. Sailing from Nagasaki, he admits that, although *acquainted* with the Russian language, he is relieved to find that his fellow travellers, barring one, speak French. When learning a new card game, he has to have the rules explained to him using a phrase book. Visiting the Tomsk transit prison, the chief jailer suggests that De Windt would perhaps prefer to speak French, and offers a French convict to accompany him and serve as interpreter. De Windt also speaks French to the doctor in the Tyumen forwarding prison.

De Windt himself admits to struggling with the intricacies of the Russian language. So, for example, he meets someone whose surname he dismisses as 'unpronounceable'. He also makes mistakes when transliterating words, such as writing *prasnik* instead of *prazdnik* (праздник). He makes another basic error in referring to Simonov (Semonov) as meaning the 'son of Simon', thereby mistaking a surname for a patronymic. De Windt also mistakenly describes the origin of name of the Samoyed tribe as derived from 'people who eat salmon.' This is a simplistic, erroneous deduction as the Russian word for salmon is *losos* (лосось).

De Windt's pro-Russian position does not restrain him from making unflattering comments about the inhabitants of the country he is travelling through. So, for example, he calls Russians 'proverbially dilatory' when travelling. On one occasion he gets an easy head start on securing a passage on a steamship, and the fact that those who missed out on the present opportunity would have to wait a week before the next departure does not seem to trouble them in the least.

Siberians are shown in an even worse light. When De Windt calls Siberians 'late risers', he is obviously hinting at their indolence and sloth. According to him, they are coarse, ill-bred, aggressive, arrogant, vulgar, fond of scandal and do not know the value of time. They have no fixed hours, save those for the midday *siesta* from two until four o'clock. The colonists of the Ussury Valley are depicted as lazy, only growing a sufficient quantity of potatoes for their own consumption, while contentedly idling the rest of their lives away.

The women, De Windt concedes, are perhaps a degree better intellectually, if not in manners, for they 'do occasionally read.'¹⁶⁹ As for the men, he suggests that their origins should be taken into consideration. Though many of them have millions in their pockets,

¹⁶⁹ Paradoxically, sailing on the Ob River, De Windt describes one of the female passengers as a vulgar, red-faced creature, of balloon-like proportions, a true *Siberienne*.

they have never known better; have never seen, perhaps never even heard of the ways and customs of Western civilization and are not to be blamed for having the manners of 'navvies'. He concludes that they are not all bad, as is shown by their 'good works.' De Windt's attitude towards and descriptions of the indigenous peoples, not of Russian origin, are even harsher and only two races are shown in a positive light.

At the end of the first volume, De Windt claims to have attempted to report his observations faithfully, yet his point of view is outright judgmental and he does not make provision for observations from a perspective other than his own. He makes no allowances for the positive aspects of diversity, a concept that appears to be alien to his way of thinking and absent in his writing. However, De Windt treats senior government officials and members of the upper echelons of society less harshly. Though on the rare instances where he does make concessions, it is often done in a patronising way. The inhabitants of the country he is travelling through remain in the role of the observed with no indication of attempts at involvement or participation by him, the observer.

3.5 Discourse

De Windt swings virtually imperceptibly between the roles of narrator and hard news reporter. A good example is the first part of the chapter titled *The Silver Mines of Nerchinsk* (1896, 233–254).

In the introductory paragraph he gives background information on the town of Sretynsk, a description of the hotel where he is staying, commentary on how former convicts, including his current host, manage to quickly amass small fortunes and improve their standing in the local community. In the next paragraph, De Windt reports on his visit to the regional official in charge, then follows directly with a description of his evening meal (consisting of salmon trout, a roast capon, well-iced Pommery, coffee and liqueurs). De Windt continues, in the same paragraph, with a report on his restless night (the result of the incessant rounds made by the night watchman), the weather conditions the following morning (the sky is of a dull leaden hue, and the rain pouring down in torrents), his hurried breakfast and subsequent departure in a virtual 'sea of mire.'

Then, while on the road, De Windt gives 'a brief sketch' of the journey which convicts exiled by land from Europe must undertake before reaching the mines of the Trans-Baikal district. First he mentions statistics related to the number of convict and voluntary exiles, adding his

own comments, such as that it is not generally known that there are far more free emigrants in Siberia than convict exiles, and that the number of the former is increasing annually. Next follows a three-page description of the transportation system of exiles.

Finally De Windt addresses the topic of the chapter, starting with a history of the Nerchinsk mines. But then he reverts back to his present journey, relating the night spent at the Shalopugina post station. This time the complete, eerie silence and thoughts of the possible presence of runaway convicts in the area keep him awake. The following morning is sunny and he feels sufficiently inspired to give a lyric description of the landscape they are passing through. The incessant chatter of the postmaster at the next station drives De Windt to the point of quoting the final lines of a poem:

I do not tremble when I meet the stoutest of my foes,
But Heaven defend me from the friend who never never goes!¹⁷⁰

The postmaster first drags De Windt off to see his kitchen garden, reporting on the prices of fresh produce and livestock, then shows off his family. A long evening of more chatter follows. In the subsequent paragraph De Windt finally announces his arrival in Nerchinsk. He introduces the governor and his cultured wife, 'an admirable French scholar' then gives comprehensive descriptions of the prison, the adjacent orphanage and the plight of women accompanying their exiled husbands.

This chapter, representative of those found in the rest of the work, with its flow from one topic to another and its eclectic contents, is structured in a way that makes it difficult to discern different types of discourse. All the same it is written in such an entertaining manner that the reader can follow the virtual stream of consciousness pouring from the pen of the writer without difficulty.

3.6 *Thematic analysis*

As this is not De Windt's first visit to Russia and Siberia, he has already experienced being the outsider, faced with cultures very different to his own. So, in St Petersburg meeting Kamorsky, the Inspector-General of the Siberian prisons mentioned earlier, De Windt is pleasantly surprised to be talking about the merits of the current year's Derby winner and

¹⁷⁰ *My Familiar* by the American satiric poet, John Godfrey Saxe (1816–1887). Not referenced by De Windt.

Sarah Bernhardt's latest Parisian appearance. This reminds him that he shares mutual interests with at least some members of the local population.

But more often, De Windt points out differences. At the station in Moscow, setting off for Siberia, he is faintly amused at the custom amongst the Russian *bourgeoisie* to gather all dressed-up late at night at railway stations, with no special aim other than to observe and criticize the passengers. On the train between Tyumen and Tomsk De Windt looks askance at the couple sharing his compartment, who are obviously the outcome of a marriage of convenience, which he implies is another custom common in Russia but *not* in England.

For De Windt, Siberians are a strange people and he agrees with one of his compatriots who described them as 'civilized savages.'¹⁷¹ De Windt asserts that culture, refinement, and politeness are the attributes of every 'true' Russian but when you cross the Ural Mountains, the opposite is true, even amongst the 'upper classes'. Although they maintain common courtesies such as bowing and shaking hands, they will not hesitate to blow their noses in their fingers, spit on the carpet, and insult you by asking personal questions.

Siberians seldom take exercise, he claims, and are reluctant to walk even a short distance. The majority of wealthy Siberian women have no occupation, no object in life, and lead an aimless, unwholesome existence. But De Windt contradicts himself here, as he states elsewhere in the texts that though the women lack refinement in their manners, at least they read occasionally which leaves them better off intellectually. On a hot day, near Sretynsk on the Amur River, close to the steamer a group of young women calmly proceed to undress and bathe in the river regardless of onlookers. As no one seems to pay any attention, De Windt assumes it is another custom of the country only he as an outsider finds offensive.

The indigenous peoples are even further removed from De Windt's own reality and he brutally points out the contrasts. His personal knowledge of the different ethnic groups inhabiting the region is limited and he admits having had to quote partly from another source when writing about them.¹⁷² The Samoyed women are described as almost repulsive in appearance but, surprisingly, extremely vain. The men are kind and hospitable except for

¹⁷¹ De Windt does not identify the author of these words.

¹⁷² *Frozen Asia: A sketch of modern Siberia together with an account of the native tribes inhabiting that region* by Charles H. Eden, F.R.G.S, published in 1879. Biographical sources I consulted do not mention this work. In the preface to the book, Eden does not claim to have visited the region himself. It is possible that his work is purely based on information gathered from other sources.

their diabolic cruelty to the women. The Yakuts are genial and hospitable but the majority are timid, if not cowardly. The Tunguses are the wildest and the filthiest but also the most picturesque and extremely honest. The Ostiaks are good-tempered and hospitable but lazy and evil smelling. At first De Windt refers to the Gilyaks as wild but friendly then he contradicts himself a few pages later by describing them as savage, cruel and evil looking. The Koriaks are treacherous and degraded. De Windt holds the Ainos in slightly higher esteem as they are of particular interest to students of ethnology, who have referred to them as the Aztecs of the North. He describes the Kamchatdales as 'relatively' civilized and hospitable, referring to their more frequent contact with Europeans as a possible reason for this.

According to De Windt the Buriats fall somewhere in the middle, serving as a link between 'civilized' Siberians of Russian extraction, and the indigenous peoples. From being wild and uncouth a hundred years ago, they have now become Russianised, performing a variety of duties as Government officials, in some cases more efficiently than the Russians.

Occasionally De Windt admits that his preconceived notions are wrong. A coachman he estimates at 80 and incapable of performing his job properly, turns out to be confident and capable. In fact, De Windt feels that, although their style is unique, the Russian coachmen are the finest in the world and their colleagues in London and Paris could learn from them how to treat their animals. De Windt also praises the Siberian peasant woman who is, as a rule, clean, thrifty, and religious. There is little or no immorality among them, for the women not only conduct household affairs, but help to plough, sow and reap, working like beasts of burden from sunrise to sunset.

In spite of the distance between himself and most of the Siberians he meets, De Windt believes progress is being made through the expansion of education opportunities such as the foundation of the first Siberian university in Tomsk. Moreover, Siberians are charitable, hospitable and ready to welcome a stranger in their midst, as he experiences first-hand on several occasions.

Passing a horse-driven paddle boat on the Ob, De Windt (1892, 250) exclaims: 'One sees strange things in Siberia!' Not only is he surrounded by Russians, but here in Siberia there are also numerous other nations which deepen his feelings of alienation. In a Tatar village near Tyumen, he passes a Muslim funeral procession, remarking that such an Eastern scene in the midst of European looking surroundings seems strangely out of place.

Sailing down the Irtysh, near its junction with the Ob, the unfamiliar landscape compels De Windt to quote some lines from a poem:

Miles, on miles, on miles, of desolation,
Leagues, on leagues, on leagues, without a change,
Sign or token of some elder nation
Which would make this strange land seem less strange.¹⁷³

By reflecting on the North Sea, he tries to conjure up an image he can relate to here in a remote, alien territory. De Windt frequently tries to make unfamiliar landscapes more accessible by comparing it with places he is familiar with. So, for example, he describes Blagoveshchensk as picturesque but the greenery and gardens convey to the stranger the impression of an untidy, unpaved German watering-place, such as Homburg or Wiesbaden. Travelling westwards from Vladivostok, he remarks on the lovely countryside, closely resembling the most picturesque parts of Southern England. The scenery around Kazakevitch, near Khabarovsk, also reminds him of an English landscape, with thickly wooded valleys and silvery streams, alternating with dark patches of ploughed land. The approach to the Nerchinsk mines reminds him of the Wiltshire or Sussex downs with the white *verst* posts suggesting the presence of a racecourse.

In the same way, De Windt's first glimpse of Sakhalin, in a brilliantly sparkling sea, reminds him of the Mediterranean Sea set against the backdrop of the snowy peaks in the interior. In Aleksandrovsk-Post he idles over coffee and cigarettes in the glorious sunshine, under an Italian sky, while roses, heliotrope and other summer flowers bloom as freely and smell as sweet as in some carefully-tended garden around Paris. Travelling into the interior of Sakhalin, snowy peaks glittering on the horizon, the still sunlit meadows, tinkle of cattle bells and scent of freshly mown hay remind him of idle summer days in Switzerland.

Once more sailing, this time from Nagasaki on the *Yaroslav* steamship with its part cargo of prisoners, De Windt associates the most enjoyable evenings of this part of the journey with the strange, weird melodies of Moskovsky and Glinka played on the piano by a fellow traveller. To De Windt the melodies are typical of the great, mysterious land that gave them birth. Even while enjoying the music, he is aware that it belongs to another, distant country and evokes memories he alone is not part of.

Although De Windt tries to come to terms with his sense of not belonging to the country he is travelling through, when he finally leaves he does not mind that the boat is very old and dirty,

¹⁷³ *By the North Sea* by the Victorian poet, A.C. Swinbourne. De Windt does not provide a reference for the poem.

as he is overjoyed to be finally sailing under the Union Jack again after having spent a long time in alien territory.

It is especially while sailing that De Windt falls victim to feelings of loneliness and desolation. Even before entering Siberia, going up the Kama River, he has a foreboding of what is to come: though they pass innumerable timber rafts drifting down stream, the river is void of activity and there is no sign of human life visible in the villages on the bank. On the Ob River, De Windt (1892, 238) contemplates once more:

Nothing human is visible, but the silhouette of the steersman standing darkly out against the starlit sky; not a sound to be heard but clank of engines and quick patter of paddle-wheels as we swing along past the low shadowy banks, shrouded in haze. For a true sense of loneliness and depression commend me to a Siberian river at night-time.

His general comment on river travel in Siberia is that, once the novelty has worn off, there are few things so dreary and depressing. Passengers soon become subject to a universal boredom on board. Generally De Windt tries to counter the boredom by socialising with selected fellow-travellers, but setting off from Nagasaki at the beginning of his second journey, he laments feeling particularly lonely as he does not know a soul on board.

Waiting for a week for a steamship on the Ussury River turns out to be an equally trying experience. Long sunny days crawl slowly by in dreary monotony, with literally nothing to do but to stroll aimlessly down to the riverside and back again. Even a simple activity like watching someone water the little garden outside his room becomes a diversion.

De Windt's perception of Siberian villages as a rule also contributes to his overall feeling of despondency. He comments that possibly their most depressing feature is the utter absence of trees or gardens. When an attempt is made in summer to create a garden, climatic conditions soon wither the plants which tend to increase rather than diminish the melancholy appearance of the place.

Towns, cities and post stations also fill De Windt with melancholy feelings. In Tobolsk, for instance, he notices a deserted, dilapidated kiosk, where on summer evenings a military band is supposed to play, but says that he has never heard one anywhere east of the Ural Mountains. At a post station on the way to the Nerchinsk mines, the lights are extinguished by nine o'clock and a dead stillness reigns, broken only by mournful gusts of wind, and the pattering of rain.

Even when enjoying a glorious Siberian sunset upon approaching Tomsk by road, with dusk creeping almost imperceptibly over the earth, while the night slowly envelops the dense

forest and wild steppes, filling the fresh, delicious air with the sweet scent of pines, newly turned earth and dewy grass, De Windt is aware that he is travelling in a strange, isolated land. Yet these feelings do not get him down. A while later, leaving Tomsk for the last time towards evening, De Windt (1892, 396) does so with regret, 'for Siberia, though a land of melancholy associations, has, and ever will have, a strange and irresistible attraction for me.'

Leaving emotions and feelings aside, most of the physical challenges De Windt has to face deal with transport. For a start, there is the notorious Great Siberian Post Road. Usually he tackles it with a *tarantass* which is the best type of coach on offer, but once, after an accident, he is forced to continue in a more primitive *telega*¹⁷⁴ which leaves his bones aching for a day.

De Windt is involved in several accidents along the way. He regards most of his coachmen as able and fairly skilful, but atrocious road conditions and worn-out vehicles and equipment render every leg of the journey hazardous. Once at night in the middle of nowhere, a broken axle overturns the *tarantass* landing De Windt full length on the ground. To make the situation worse, a weird, wailing cry pierces the deathly silence, followed by a chorus of deafening howls, and he realises there is a pack of wolves in the vicinity. He admits though that they only present an occasional threat in deep winter and as it is summer, there is no need for concern. Still, it is an unnerving experience in the wake of the accident.

On Sakhalin De Windt is fearful of being attacked, or even murdered, by runaway convicts on the road so he travels with a loaded revolver. He adds that night travel on Sakhalin is decidedly trying, even to a person whose nerves are of average strength. However, he declares the road to Khabarovsk on the mainland to have been the most disagreeable, difficult, and exhausting part of his journey.

River transport turns out to be equally trying. Still only on the way to Siberia, lack of water in the Upper Kama River forces De Windt to board 'a miserable little tub' instead of the luxurious vessel he had bargained on. Once in Siberia, between Tobolsk and Tomsk his steamship crashes, also as a result of the low water level. Later, taking a detour towards Nikolaevsk on the Amur River, he is caught in a violent storm. The intense pitching of the steamship leaves him lying on the floor of his cabin for most of the night and he fully expects the vessel to sink at any moment.

¹⁷⁴ Similar to a *tarantass* but built entirely of wood and with the primary purpose of transporting grain, hay and other agricultural products.

Travelling by rail appears to be less hazardous from a safety point of view. But De Windt warns that it is a slow, time consuming way of travel. If you are anxious to reach your destination, a train journey becomes intensely irritating.

The scarcity of a reliable food supply along the way also affects the journey. Ever present hunger pains spoil more than one potentially pleasant drive. Once, when the pangs of hunger become almost insupportable, De Windt manages, with difficulty, to secure a large piece of horrid tasting rye bread as a last resort.

Insects and parasites present another constant hazard on the journey. Clouds of huge horse-flies are a plague on the road, but cockroaches and mosquitoes vex De Windt day and night on land and on water. A species of small sand-fly inflict poisonous bites in marshy regions. Rats and lice become common companions on the way, especially once the lights have been extinguished.

Even when the parasite problem is under control, there is still no guarantee for a good night's rest. In Sretynsk, as in most of the Siberian cities De Windt visits, the night watchmen keep him awake. An over familiar garrulous landlord can have the same negative effect. One postmaster does not cease chattering from the moment the troika is unharnessed until De Windt departs the next morning.

Fellow travellers range from pleasant and interesting to those who add to the hardships of the journey. A loquacious American, who loudly proclaims his views on the countryside the train is travelling through, declaring his own country as far superior, annoys De Windt to such an extent that he moves to the adjoining compartment even though it is hot and crowded.

On a steamer a government official, who understands a few words of English, pursues De Windt persistently for the duration of the journey in an effort to improve his proficiency in the language. De Windt does his best to escape the irksome pursuer so as to spend more time conversing with his other fellow-travellers, whom he describes as amiable fellows. On the prison boat from Nagasaki to Vladivostok, De Windt shares cramped, evil smelling quarters with a military bandmaster and a quiet, 'inoffensive man' of Polish extraction. The bandmaster plays the clarinet every night, hideously, and the other passenger has 'dubious' hygienic habits.

The deprivations and trials De Windt faces on the journey do not break his spirit. He seems to be remarkably resilient and comes to terms with his situation with relative ease. His nonchalant approach is reflected by the tongue-in-cheek, often sarcastic way he describes his experiences. Parasites swarming in the dirty straw on which he has to sleep are

described as 'myriads of uninvited fellow-travellers.' They do not bite but 'make their presence unmistakably felt.' A *telega* is described as 'not the most luxurious transport.' Below standard rye bread, as black as coal, is eaten in desperation and tastes of soot mixed with treacle.

While a storm is raging De Windt wonders whether he has only escaped drowning earlier on the Upper Amur, to now find a watery grave in the Lower Amur. On another occasion he shrugs off a fellow-traveller's irritating music practice reasoning that the ship's fog-horn would, under any circumstances, have successfully kept him awake. Finally he sees insect problems as minor annoyances in relation to real hardships, with glorious weather and pleasant fellow-travellers amply atoning for them.

2.7 Conclusion

De Windt sets off on his journeys across Siberia to prove a point, namely that the Russian government was justified in maintaining the Siberian exile system. He also hopes to show his readers the 'real' Siberia where people are hardly the cruel bigots that English Russophobes have portrayed. De Windt does not approve of everything he observes along the way and his criticism is often scathing but he tries to offer his observations in a balanced way. So, for example, after crossing treacherous marshes, green, undulating pastures with cattle browsing knee-deep in rippling, fern fringed brooks appear. Neglect and squalor epitomise most of the Siberian villages he travels through but in between there are pretty, homely-looking ones with neatly built log-cottages and well-kept gardens.

Ultimately De Windt's overall impression is positive. Visiting the village of Koslovsky on the Ussury River, he is surprised at the intelligence shown by some of the younger boys, considering the fact that education in the district has been made compulsory only recently. The school children look healthy, happy and contented as do the rest of the villagers who are, according to De Windt, well cared for by the government. Early on in his journey, observing the laughing, boisterous behaviour of inmates on a prison barge in Perm, De Windt finds it hard to believe that they are on their way to Siberia, the mysterious land of supposed despair, desolation and death, as Russophobes will make one believe.

De Windt (1896, p.202) remains weary though, with no illusions about what living in Siberia would really be like, stating unequivocally: 'Were I condemned to pass the rest of my days in Siberia (which Heaven forbid !), I should certainly select Khabarovsk as a residence. ... for

my first impressions of the place were decidedly favourable, the more so that Khabarovsk has not the depressing influence of most Siberian towns.' But on the steamship between Tobolsk and Tomsk, sailing under a cloudless sky, experiencing the invigorating effects of a fresh grass and flower-scented breeze, De Windt concludes once more that Siberia is not such a bad place after all.

CHAPTER 4

COMPARATIVE OVERVIEW OF THE AUTHORS-TRAVELLERS

1. Introduction

This chapter consists of a comparison of the portrayal of Siberia through the lens of the individual author versus the Russian view existing at the time the works were written. The main texts will be compared in order to ascertain the similarities and dissimilarities of the authors in their reception of Siberia, seen from the perspective of a modern reader. In order to make comparisons of the texts more meaningful, background information of the authors relevant to the current study will also be considered.

Although Kennan was born about twenty years before Chekhov and De Windt, all three authors lived during roughly the same period, reaching adulthood in the middle to late middle 1800s. Owing to financial difficulties, Chekhov and Kennan both started earning a living at a young age but in contrast to Chekhov, Kennan was unable to complete his secondary education. De Windt was born into relative financial comfort, following the traditional path of young men of his station in life by enrolling in a prestigious school and university. However, he squandered these opportunities unlike Chekhov who, despite trying circumstances, successfully completed his high school education and subsequent training as a doctor.

The families of Chekhov and Kennan continually looked to them for financial support which kept them under constant pressure. De Windt had no such responsibilities and could initially afford to indulge his own passions. His financial resources were, however, not unlimited and he had to take up a career. Like Kennan, De Windt tried his hand at many crafts, following a variety of pursuits, but he was always yearning to be on the road, travelling to a new destination, preferably more exotic than the one before.¹⁷⁵ Between journeys, Kennan, under duress, took on a number of jobs he had no inclination for. Career wise, Chekhov appears to have been the steadiest. Although he devoted time to both his vocations, that of

¹⁷⁵ Stolberg (2001) erroneously refers to De Windt as an American engineer.

physician and writer, Chekhov worked assiduously at the latter, honing and perfecting his unique style to achieve worldwide recognition as a great artist. He tried hard to avoid distractions that would side-track him.¹⁷⁶

Kennan too received recognition, if on a much smaller scale. He was in constant demand as a lecturer, and not infrequently as a consultant, on Russia. Both Kennan and De Windt were members of the Geographic Societies in their countries, the National and Royal respectively, a fact that De Windt liked to remind his readers of. Recognition did not, however, bring Kennan financial security and he was forced to continue working, if at a slower pace, until his death at the age of 79. De Windt died at almost the same age as Kennan and was still working 15 years prior to his death. Chekhov was writing up to the end of his life and his last completed story appeared in 1903, shortly before he died. It appears as if none of the writers enjoyed extended periods of inactivity as circumstances forced them to continue earning a living throughout, and in the case of Kennan, beyond their productive lives.

Despite turbulent, insecure childhood years and constant financial worries, Chekhov appears to have had the most settled life of the three writers. Considering the peripatetic nature of their lives, it is almost inconceivable to imagine Kennan and De Windt working for an extended period under the same circumstances as Chekhov, bound, by choice, to a location with only occasional, short forays into unknown territory.

2. Motivation for undertaking the journeys

The reason for Chekhov's journey was ostensibly to carry out a census of the exile population on Sakhalin Island but this was merely an excuse to enable him to move around relatively unencumbered. As Chekhov stated himself in *Sakhalin Island* 'my main aim was not the results of the census but the impressions obtained during the process of taking it.'¹⁷⁷

Yet, there may have been explanations other than those mentioned by Chekhov for undertaking such a daunting journey. Reeve summarises the reasons mentioned repeatedly by commentators: Chekhov was looking for fresh material for his works of fiction, he had a

¹⁷⁶ Ironically, the journey which the current study is based on was initially seen as just such a distraction but was later regarded as an important part of Chekhov's development as a person and, consequently, as a writer.

¹⁷⁷ Chekhov: Чехов, Антон. *Остров Сахалин*. Москва, 1987b, 66.

desire to put an end to criticism levelled against him for his lack of political engagement in his work, he was disappointed after the recent failure of a play, he wanted to get away after the death of his brother Nikolai the previous year, or from a romantic entanglement, he had diagnosed himself with the early symptoms of tuberculosis and wanted to reflect on his life on his own in a completely unfamiliar environment. He also hoped to turn his observations into a thesis which could launch an academic career. Reeve furthermore mentions a letter from Chekhov to Suvorin of 9 March 1890, in which Chekhov refers to Kennan, whose study of the Russian penal and exile system in Siberia, Reeve believes, undoubtedly influenced Chekhov's travel plans and research method.¹⁷⁸ Another source simply suggests the following: 'Dissatisfaction with his creative output, his knowledge, especially his knowledge of life, entices him to make the decision which would surprise his contemporaries – to travel to Sakhalin Island'.¹⁷⁹

Chekhov could have been motivated by a combination of all the factors mentioned, but judging from his own admission in *Sakhalin Island*, he definitely intended to gain fresh impressions in unfamiliar terrain.

According to Ryfa Kennan travelled with a specific goal in mind: to study the Russian penal system.¹⁸⁰ But there was more at stake. Asked once where he was educated, Kennan was said to have replied, 'Russia'.¹⁸¹ He was still in his teens when he arrived in the country for the first time to work on the telegraph survey project. It was a unique experience that left an indelible impression on him. On his second journey, to the Caucasus in 1870, Danilov describes Kennan as astonished by what he had seen. He felt that the barbarism in the isolated mountainous region had to be replaced with Western civilization and it was Russia's 'noble' role to do so.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁸ Chekhov, A. *Sakhalin Island*. Richmond, 2013.

¹⁷⁹ Editors. Биография Чехова (*Краткий биографический словарь*), 2000. (<http://chehov.niv.ru/chehov/bio/biografiya-kbs2000.htm>).

¹⁸⁰ Ryfa, J. Literary, scientific and moral implications in the inquiry into the penal system: Anton Chekhov's journey to Sakhalin Island. PhD Thesis 1997.

¹⁸¹ Hunter, C. George Kennan, an investigative reporter who helped found the National Geographic Society. Washington DC, 2012.

¹⁸² Danilov, N. George Kennan and the Challenge of Siberia. *Demokratizatsiya* 1991, 7(4).

Bernbaum states that Kennan was fascinated by the diversity of the Russian people and their vast, beautiful country. He believed that the native peoples of Siberia too would benefit from becoming part of the Russian Empire.¹⁸³ Defending all things Russian, Kennan took on critics of Russia who increasingly highlighted its repressive government and exile system. He insisted that the 'evil revolutionaries' who opposed the tsar deserved to be punished for their violent actions.

Kennan had clearly developed Russophile leanings following his previous sojourns in the country and he wanted to silence those critics in the USA who saw Russia as a wicked empire. More specifically, he wanted to take critics of the penal system to task by investigating it for himself and reporting back his findings which he had expected, at the time he set off, would be favourable.

In the preface to the first volume of *Siberia and the exile system*,¹⁸⁴ written once he had changed his point of view, Kennan's previous pro-Russian fervour has clearly subsided. He simply states that the assassination of Alexander II in 1881 and the subsequent exile of a large number of revolutionists to the mines of the Trans-Baikal had piqued his interest in Siberia, the exile system and the Russian revolutionary movement. He continues to explain that these events had served as the impetus that set him off on the journey which his books are based on. His aims were to become acquainted with exiles, outcasts, and criminals and in addition he wanted to establish how opponents of the government were treated in the prisons and mines of Eastern Siberia.

A factor that could also have contributed towards undertaking this journey was Kennan's constant search for a fresh news story, or at least a fresh angle on an old story, in his capacity as news correspondent. An assignment like this proposed voyage to Siberia would be ideal as it combined his job with one of his on-going passions, namely Russia.

At the time that De Windt travelled to Siberia, British public opinion on Russia was divided. Memories of the disunity in the British government concerning the Russo-Turkish war, fought barely a decade earlier, were still fresh. Detractors of the Russian government were keen to spread negative propaganda about the country and one of their favourite topics was the Russian exile system in Siberia.

¹⁸³ Bernbaum, J. America's First Expert on Russia. *JB's Reflections on Russia* (blog) 2012 (<http://jbrussianreflections.blogspot.com/2012/04/explorer-discovers-russia-george-kennan.html>).

¹⁸⁴ Kennan, G. *Siberia and the Exile System Volume 1*. New York, 1891.

Mellon confirms such observations of the negative press Russia was receiving throughout the 19th century.¹⁸⁵ According to Stead, exaggerations of the horrors of Siberia and of the atrocities of the Russian prison system were favourite weapons for assaulting Russia in the English press.¹⁸⁶ Russophobia was fuelled further by coverage of terrorist activity in Russia and the negative testimonies of political exiles.

In order to set the record straight, De Windt decided to undertake an investigative journey to Siberia. He found the virtually weekly English press reports of atrocities committed in the region during 1888-89 lacking in credibility as he had not come across any such episodes during his 1887 journey. His stated objective was to expose both the positive and the negative side of the Russian exile system.

All three authors claimed that searching for the truth about the Siberian exile system, the way the Russian government was implementing it and the conditions existing in the region at the time of writing as the motives for undertaking their journeys. They hoped to raise the general awareness among the readers in their native countries of the extant conditions of the system. Although this appears to have been their main motivation, commentators have also mentioned other contributing factors. Some of these are fairly speculative in the case of Chekhov, as he did not disclose anything beyond the motives stated above in his correspondence or other writings. As for Kennan, combining the role of investigative reporter on a topic to be researched in one of his favourite countries presented a perfect prospect. De Windt too must have been happy to have another excuse for indulging his ceaseless yearning after foreign shores.¹⁸⁷

3. Travel dates

Chekhov set off from Moscow in April 1890 and left Siberia in October but only arrived back home in December of the same year, after completing an extended sea voyage calling at destinations unrelated to the main objective of his trip. Thus the Siberian leg of the journey

¹⁸⁵ Mellon, M. *Friend or Femme Fatale?: Olga Novikova in the British Press, 1877--1925*. MA. North Carolina, 2010.

¹⁸⁶ Stead, W. *The M.P. for Russia: Reminiscences & Correspondence of Madame Olga Novikov Volume 2*. London, 1909.

¹⁸⁷ De Windt's autobiography which appeared in 1909 is suitably titled *My Restless Life*.

lasted about seven months and was undertaken from spring to autumn. This was his first and only visit to Siberia.

Kennan's journey lasted ten months. He left St Petersburg on 31 May 1885 and arrived back there on 19 March of the following year, having travelled through summer and winter into early spring. He had also spent three years in Siberia when he was working on a feasibility study for the proposed telegraph cable route between the USA and Europe two decades earlier.

De Windt based his first volume on a journey of almost three months undertaken in the summer of 1890 (July to September). The journey related in the second volume started in the early spring of 1894, lasting through the summer until September of the same year. He had previously travelled along the Tea Caravan route in 1887 from Beijing, through Russia to Europe.

Kennan had undertaken the longest journey of the three authors and he was the only one of them to have braved the Siberian winter.¹⁸⁸ His journey predates those of Chekhov and De Windt by five years which implies that conditions in the region might have changed during the interim years and that marked differences could possibly be observed in the same locations. De Windt's first journey partly overlaps with that of Chekhov but their paths did not cross as Chekhov was always further ahead along the route and he did not retrace his steps.

Chekhov and De Windt were aged around 30 when they undertook the journey and Kennan was a decade older. Both De Windt and Kennan appear to have been in a good physical condition when they set off on their journeys, but Chekhov was already showing symptoms of tuberculosis, the disease that he would die from barely 15 years later. However, he does not appear to have suffered from health related issues on the way. By contrast, both Kennan and De Windt fell ill *en route* and had to break their journeys in order to recuperate.

4. Knowledge of each other's work

Chekhov prepared himself thoroughly for the journey and eagerly devoured all the relevant sources he could lay his hands on. He had definitely read Kennan's work as in the second

¹⁸⁸ Part of De Windt's subsequent 1901–1902 journey through Siberia was undertaken in winter.

chapter of *Sakhalin Island* Chekhov writes (1987b, 60) of G. Kennan and his 'well-known book' (известная книга).¹⁸⁹ As mentioned in the previous section, Ryfa (1997) believes that Kennan's journey across Siberia influenced Chekhov's decision to focus on the study of the penal system of Sakhalin.

Kennan and De Windt were at least partially aware of each other's work. Kennan refers to De Windt in response to De Windt's criticism of his own articles. De Windt (1896, 308), who refers to Kennan alternately by name or as 'the American traveller', read the articles on which Kennan's books were based and made frequent, often scathingly critical remarks on their contents in his own work.¹⁹⁰ However, this did not deter De Windt from including a page long quotation from Kennan's work, from a section that De Windt regarded as an excellent depiction of the size of Siberia. De Windt (1892, 468) described Kennan's writing as the 'simple, unaffected style of [a] gentleman's narrative.' De Windt also frequently referred to Kennan indirectly, by commenting on the '*Century Magazine* articles', without mentioning Kennan's name (see De Windt 1892, 18, 114, 171, 332, 345, 355).

De Windt dismissed Kennan's observations of the Tomsk prison as untrue and, calling himself an Englishman and an unbiased witness, expressed the hope that his own descriptions would be met favourably in England at least, if not elsewhere. While still on the road in Siberia, De Windt (1892, 349) already attacked Kennan in the *Pall Mall Gazette*.¹⁹¹ Kennan's response to the accusations by De Windt, whom he in turn called 'an English traveller', turned into a polemical argument in the form of letters to the editor, which is reproduced in an appendix of Kennan's second volume. De Windt included part of the same correspondence in the chapter on Tomsk in *Siberia as it is*.¹⁹² Eventually De Windt (1982, 359) discovered that he and Kennan had been writing about two different prisons and that the discrepancy in their descriptions had thus been the result of a misunderstanding.

In a footnote in *Siberia as it is*, concerning the prison in Tobolsk, De Windt accused Kennan of being selective in the prisons he examined. Paying minute attention to the prisons in

¹⁸⁹ The specific context is a reference to the Governor of Sakhalin Island, V.O. Kononovich, one of the few officials whom both Chekhov and Kennan held in high esteem.

¹⁹⁰ The articles had appeared in the *Century Magazine* in 1888 – 1889, prior to the publication of the books in 1891.

¹⁹¹ A London newspaper aimed at the upper classes of British society. It was published from 1865 until being absorbed by the *Evening Standard* in 1923.

¹⁹² De Windt, H. *Siberia as it is*. London, 1892.

Tomsk and Tyumen, Kennan virtually ignored those of Tobolsk. However, De Windt pointed out that the discrepancies in their depictions of the prisons could have been due to the fact that he visited the penal colonies of Siberia in 1890, more than four years after Kennan had done so, and that a number of changes had taken place over the intervening years.

De Windt continued to defend his positive assessment of the *status quo* in Siberia, claiming that the only negative reporting he had come across, after having thoroughly researched the subject for a decade, were Kennan's articles in the *Century Magazine* and works by political and non-political exiles. De Windt regarded the latter as unacceptable evidence which he considered obviously biased and unreliable. He blamed Kennan and works of fiction by other authors that were accepted as fact to have been responsible for the negative view of Siberia.

On occasion De Windt even questioned the accuracy of Kennan's travel companion Frost's drawings. De Windt believed that Frost's depiction of the melancholy departure of a work gang into the Siberian wilds was the fruit of the artist's imagination. An English friend of De Windt, while mining in the Ural Mountains, had several times witnessed the departure of such gangs and he had experienced it as anything but melancholy.

Chekhov and De Windt did not refer to each other as they undertook their journeys at the same time and their books would only appear later. For the same reason Kennan did not refer to Chekhov either, as Kennan had completed his journey before Chekhov set off on his.

As mentioned previously in the study, there is one instance where the work of all three authors is linked. Both Kennan and De Windt are mentioned in an extensive annotation of the authoritative edition of Chekhov's collected works published by the Russian Academy of Sciences in 1987. It states that Chekhov was well acquainted with Kennan's work, even though the volumes condemning the exile system had been banned in Russia. Chekhov was also aware of the Russian government's negative attitude towards Kennan and was afraid that his own attempts to visit the penal settlements and prisons might be compromised as a result.

The reference to De Windt in the annotation asserts that, in order to counter Kennan's negative views, the Director of the Russian Prison Services Galkin-Vraskoy had arranged, in person, the publication of material by the former author. It appeared in two issues of the influential weekly newspaper *Eastern Review* (*Восточное обозрение*), which focused on literary, political, geographical, economic and ethnic issues in Siberia.

In conclusion, it is clear that Kennan and De Windt supported two opposing, irreconcilable points of view and knowledge of each other's work, or parts thereof, would not have swayed their opinions. On the other hand, it is not clear to what extent Chekhov might have been influenced by Kennan's assessment of the penal system and conditions it had given rise to. Chekhov had to be circumspect when expressing his views on the books as they had been banned and a positive appraisal could have put him in a quandary.

5. Knowledge of the Russian language

For the type of investigations that the travellers had in mind, a good command of the local language was essential. Vital information could be lost if constant use had to be made of interpreters.

During his first visit to Russia, working mostly in Kamchatka, Kennan had picked up a somewhat rough, basic Russian among the indigenous native population, which was frowned upon in the more refined circles of Siberian society. So, during his second visit with the Caucasus as his main destination, he dedicated some time to language study. Travis indicates that Kennan's aim was to speak a Russian more suited in polite, cultured surroundings.¹⁹³

Once back in Russia in 1885 Kennan admits at the beginning of the journey that his Russian is completely out of practice. In Yekaterinburg, for example, Kennan (1891a, 45) and his travelling companion express to their host and hostess, 'as well as we could in Russian, our grateful appreciation of their cordiality and kindness.' But later in the work references to problems with the language disappear which most likely indicates that immersion in the local surroundings has restored Kennan's former level of proficiency.

De Windt was not fluent in Russian. He struggled with the language, always preferring to speak English or French instead, whenever possible. He openly admitted his lack of proficiency, having had to resort to phrasebooks, and repeatedly made elementary mistakes.

It would be reasonable to assume that Kennan found it easier to communicate with whomever he happened to come in contact with, while for De Windt it was frequently a battle to understand and make himself understood. In the process, while having to concentrate to

¹⁹³ Travis, F. *George Kennan and the American-Russian Relationship*. Athens, 1990.

grasp the essence of what was being said to him, the more subtle but potentially equally important nuances or subtexts of conversations were lost. As a result, Kennan's observations were likely to be more accurate and complete.

Needless to say, Chekhov would not have experienced any of the problems mentioned above. Conversely, being a native speaker of a language does not automatically qualify a person as a good observer. But Chekhov's skills as an author, who gleaned his material from scrutinizing the world around him, would have served him well on the journey in all respects.

6. Approach and method of work

Both Kennan and De Windt were used to travelling to exotic destinations off the beaten track under difficult circumstances, but for Chekhov, the voyage to Sakhalin was a novel experience. All three authors mention taking notes along the way to keep record of their experiences and observations. They consulted the notes after the journey at the time they started writing their books.

In a letter to Suvorin on 20 May 1890, Chekhov writes that he is keeping a short diary in pencil (Reeve, 2013). Chekhov admits to finding note taking along the way more difficult than he had anticipated, due to difficult travelling conditions and fatigue resulting from a long, hard stretch on the road. Kennan used his own shorthand and occasionally Morse code when taking notes, most likely to save time but possibly also to confuse an unsanctioned reader. Although De Windt frequently complained about transport arrangements, accommodation and food on his journey, he did not mention experiencing problems when recording his impressions.

Chekhov intended to produce a scientific work upon the completion of his journey and approached the project in a methodical way, reading extensively before he set off. According to Reeve (2013, 455) Chekhov 'hurled himself into a study of the geography, history, nature and ethnography of the island, as background material to his study of the penal settlement.' Once on his way, in addition to taking notes, Chekhov collected a copious amount of information in the form of census questionnaires which he completed for almost

the entire exile population on Sakhalin Island.¹⁹⁴ Chekhov claimed to have done all the research on his own, with only occasional help from other persons (Reeve, 2013).

Hundley argues that Kennan too approached all his writing in a scholarly way with *The Siberian Exile System* being no exception. He would research a topic well before embarking on a project.¹⁹⁵ Hundley also raises the issue of Kennan's knowledge of Russian, which undoubtedly served as an advantage when gathering information.

De Windt claimed to have read numerous reports, articles and books on the exile system, disagreeing vehemently with those that were critical of the system. In the preface to his first volume, he mentions two sources that he had consulted prior to his departure. In the preface to the second volume, he stated that he did not want to bore the reader with statistics, relying on his own, personal experiences instead.

The element of surprise, to prevent authorities from anticipating their visits, was important to all three travellers. They stated that they did not want local officials to make special preparations in order to impress them. Kennan went to extraordinary lengths to try to mislead local officialdom, taking alternative routes and travelling off the beaten track, extending his journey considerably in the process. De Windt also tried to arrive at prisons unannounced. He was usually allowed to enter but on occasion asked to come back later at a more convenient time for the authorities.

In addition to trying to surprise the authorities by arriving unexpectedly at the next, sometimes undisclosed destination, Kennan was calculating in his approach once he had arrived at a new location. He would try to call as early as possible on the chief of police, and bombard him with all kinds of information concerning himself and his plans. In this way Kennan tried to pre-empt any suspicions the official might have about the new arrival and his artist companion. To intimidate the ordinary policemen, Kennan would appear in public as often as possible in the company of their superiors.

Another diversionary tactic in Kennan's effort to create the impression that he was visiting Siberia for scientific reasons was to visit the local schools, conspicuously taking notes, pretending to have an interest in popular education. His illustrator Frost formed part of the charade, sketching in the streets, collecting flowers and butterflies, or lecturing to the local

¹⁹⁴ Gentes (2012) states that around 10 000 standardised questionnaires of Chekhov's census are currently archived in the Russian State Library, Moscow.

¹⁹⁵ Hundley, H. George Kennan and the Russian Empire: How America's Conscience Became an Enemy of Tsarism. *Kennan Institute Occasional Papers 277*. Washington DC, 2000.

population on geography and astronomy. Although Kennan was convinced that they had managed to dupe everybody, it was becoming harder to conceal the increasing number of compromising papers and documents he had been accumulating along the way. He started to secrete the most important ones in a leather belt around his body; but eventually got rid of some of them.

Neither Chekhov nor De Windt acted in a way that compromised their status as legitimate visitors to the region, remaining within the limits set down by the agreements they had undertaken when setting off on their respective journeys. They therefore did not have to take the same precautionary measures as Kennan.

Once back home, Chekhov was the writer who had by far the biggest amount of material to work through. However, he was not in a hurry to publish his work and constantly had to placate his publisher who had a greater sense of urgency about seeing the work in print. Kennan immediately started producing his magazine articles as he was always in need of funds and could not afford to delay the publication of his work. De Windt, like Chekhov, does not appear to have been working towards a deadline and could write at his own pace.

On an extended journey across difficult terrain under trying circumstances, it is essential for a travel writer to take accurate notes for later reference. It appears as if all three writers applied this technique, but Kennan admitted to having discarded possible incriminating material. Filling the gaps from memory opens up the possibility of inaccurate reporting. Kennan was also constantly side-tracked by ploys to keep his real mission secret and could have ended up focusing on a restricted number of issues at the expense of others. He also faced time pressure when producing his final manuscripts which could further have negatively affected the accuracy of the contents. De Windt did not have to be concerned about the time factor, but an aspect influencing the quality of his work could have been lack of sufficient research prior to the journey and relying instead almost solely on his own observations. Chekhov struck a healthy balance between preparation, on site gathering of information and digesting the data at a comfortable pace before submitting his work to be published.

7. Travel companions

Chekhov and De Windt travelled on their own, while Kennan was accompanied by the artist and illustrator of his books, George A. Frost.

Chekhov did not try to persuade anyone to undertake the journey with him. He probably did not want to be disturbed on his mission and preferred to be able to make decisions independently without having to consult with a partner. Chekhov admits to getting lazy towards the end of his journey, but it could have been the result of physical exhaustion, a factor that inevitably affected all three authors eventually.

Kennan and Frost seemed to get along well, as Kennan does not refer to any disagreements between them on the long, arduous journey. Although he predominantly used first person singular in his writing when dealing with hard news topics such as the prisons and exiles, Kennan often included Frost in his narration, frequently reverting to first person plural narration, especially in passages dealing with the actual journey itself. Kennan appeared to have been a patient partner and showed great concern when his illustrator fell ill towards the end of the journey.

De Windt was happy to be the centre of attention wherever he arrived and a travel companion would have cramped his style. Deft at making acquaintances, he was content to spend time with people whom he regarded as his equals but did not shy away from shrugging off unwanted approaches by those whom he regarded as inferior or annoying. Travelling alone opened up more possibilities for integrating with the local population resulting in more frequent, close observations. On the other hand it could have become stressful eventually which might have led De Windt to withdraw from social contact. In addition his poor understanding of the vernacular could have impacted negatively on his attempts at striking up conversations.

8. Political views

Ideology, according to Bennett and Royle, are at the centre of personal identity, of how we see ourselves as part of the world.¹⁹⁶ Acclaimed authors habitually do not simply or passively convey their own ideology in a text. Instead the text becomes a location where conflict and difference, values and preconceptions, beliefs and prejudices, knowledge and social structures are represented and opened to transformation. The three writers of this study approached this topic in different ways.

¹⁹⁶ Bennett, A., Royle, N. *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory*. Harlow, 2004.

Chekhov's deliberate distancing from direct personal involvement in the political issues of his day is well documented. He believed that joining a political movement or party removed the onus from a person to think for himself, resulting in an abdication of personal responsibility. But Chekhov rejected accusations that his reluctance to be labelled resulted in texts that lacked ideology. He insisted that truth was at the heart of his work and that this constituted his ideology: to always be opposed to lies and falsehood. The 'message' was there in his work, subtly the key that would unlock it.

Chekhov's views were expressed more directly in the volumes that resulted from his journey to Sakhalin. As with his fiction, Chekhov's aim was to report the truth, but on this occasion he did so in a forthright, direct way. Chekhov was not pro or against the government's exile policy when he set off. He had read material both justifying and condemning the system and he was open to conviction.

Kennan and De Windt, on the other hand, set off on their journeys with an undisguised bias in favour of the government. Both had grown tired of the constant stream of criticism levelled against the exile system and, by implication, Russia itself.

De Windt's association with Olga Novikova who was, as stated before, a member of the Russian aristocracy well-known for her advocacy of Pan-Slavism and Russian imperial interests, clearly indicated where his sympathies lay.¹⁹⁷ Novikova called De Windt's book worthy of imitation, on the grounds of its having been guided by a respect for truth, in contrast to the literature on the topic that are based upon imagination.

Kennan had set off in the same frame of mind as De Windt, ready to justify the actions of the Russian authorities. Based on experiences of his previous journeys to Russia, Kennan gave a lecture at the American Geographic Society in 1882, defending the Russian Government, Siberia and the exile system which he believed had previously been misrepresented. He also saw Russian revolutionists in a most unfavourable light. But three years later, fairly early into the journey on which he intended to discover the truth for himself, Kennan had a complete reversal of opinion. He changed his political views radically, casting the Russian government in the role of villain, declaring the exile system evil, and singing, instead, the praises of the virtuous revolutionists.

¹⁹⁷ In her introduction to *Siberia as it is*, Novikova (1892, xi) describes herself as 'a thorough Russian, a staunch believer in Greek Orthodoxy, in autocracy and nationalism, convinced of the grand future of Russia.'

At the end of the journey Chekhov still did not proclaim a preference for one political faction over another. He had observed and he had reported his observations. It was up to the reader to draw his own conclusion. Kennan and De Windt, however, made their preferences patently clear. Their strong convictions smacked of bias, which cast doubts over the honesty and authenticity of their final product.

9. Intended readership

Chekhov confessed, in a letter to Suvorin dated 9 March 1890, that he did not harbour high hopes for the literary outcome of his journey (Reeve 1997). He doubted that he would be making a valuable contribution to either literature or science, but in the very next sentence Chekhov stated that he intended to write at least 100 to 200 pages to make up for the way he had been neglecting the science of medicine. He had at some stage intended to submit the manuscript in the form of a thesis to serve as a stepping-stone to an academic career. It therefore appears that his work was initially aimed at a scientific oriented readership. Yet in the same letter, Chekhov refers to the guilt of all his fellow Russians in being responsible for the perpetuation of the exile system. This indicates that the work was aimed at Russian society at large, including the ruling circles.

Kennan and De Windt were writing for the public of the United States and Britain respectively. They wanted to impart their findings to the educated public of their countries, and probably hoped to attract the attention of the authorities and decision makers as well in the process, in order to further their own careers.

Thus, in a way, all three authors were aiming their work at the same strata of society, if in different countries, while Chekhov had added a slightly more scientific angle, aimed at his colleagues working in the field of medicine.

10. Comparison of the texts

In order to lend more credibility to their work, all three authors included references to external sources in their books. Chekhov prepared thoroughly for his journey, read extensively, and eagerly devoured all the relevant material he could get hold of. In his books

he referred to some of the works he had scrutinized, but usually only in the footnotes in order to clarify, emphasise or substantiate a potentially contentious point. He based the main body of the text on the information he collected on site.

Ryfa (1997) finds Kennan's descriptions factual, accurate and exhaustive. Hundley (2000) has identified the newspapers *Vostochnoe Obozrenie*, along with *Sibir'* and *Sibirskaja Gazeta* as extremely important sources for Kennan's books.¹⁹⁸ Kennan did not supply footnotes for all the information he used but occasional references are provided. Kennan made his own analysis of the statistical data he had obtained from official sources which covered a period of more than sixty years. He worked some of this information into the main text but also compiled substantial appendices containing subsidiary information.

The books of De Windt contain a considerable amount of direct references from additional sources, acknowledged in the preface of the first volume, which he regarded as reliable. He appears to have included the contents without modifications. The extensive appendices consist mostly of letters written to him after he had undertaken his journeys and contain information corroborating his point of view. It also includes documents in French, without accompanying translations or explanatory summaries in English.

Kennan and De Windt devote the first chapters of their first volumes to descriptions of travel preparations and the initial part of their journeys through European Russia, while Chekhov is already well on his way in mainland Siberia in his opening chapter. As far as Tyumen the travellers follow the same route, but then Kennan makes a detour to the south, crossing the Kirghiz steppe, passing through Semipalatinsk, the Altay Mountains and Barnaul before re-joining the main route in Tomsk.

Chekhov and Kennan disagree completely in their appraisal of Tomsk and Krasnoyarsk. Chekhov calls Krasnoyarsk the fairest city in Siberia, dismissing Tomsk as unworthy of being the seat of the first (and at that time only) Siberian university. Kennan, on the contrary, extols Tomsk as a first rate city but only mentions Krasnoyarsk in passing. On his first journey, De Windt only travels as far as Tomsk, a city he feels rather indifferent about. He does not visit Krasnoyarsk on either of his journeys.

Kennan continues with descriptions of his journey through Irkustsk, the Russo-Chinese border town of Kiakhta, and Chita near the Amur River, the furthest east he will go before backtracking his route. Chekhov does not mention any of these cities, only picking up his

¹⁹⁸ *Восточное обозрение, Сибирь and Сибирская газета*. The papers were recommended to Kennan by the publisher of *Vostochnoe Obozrenie*, Nikolai Iadrintsev, himself.

narration again once he reaches the Amur River, shortly before sailing for Sakhalin Island. Sakhalin Island is also De Windt's destination on his second journey but he devotes the first chapter of the second volume to the sea crossing from Nagasaki. Chekhov, upon setting sail from Sakhalin towards the end of his journey, travels a part of the same route as De Windt but in reverse.

Chekhov and De Windt visit the same major towns on Sakhalin Island (Aleksandrovsk-Post and Korsakovsky Post) and although De Windt undertakes one trip to the interior of the island, Chekhov spends more time visiting the smaller settlements too. De Windt continues his journey on the mainland, through Khabarovsk, which becomes his favourite city in Siberia. He travels down the Amur River, along a route not covered by either of the other two travellers, to board a steamer homewards in Nikolaevsk, on the estuary.

Although parts of the travellers' journeys overlap, there are some deviations. In most instances at least two of them cover similar destinations in their work. The one major exception is Kennan's detour to the south which he alone visits. Chekhov is the most selective in deciding what to describe or omit. Unless he has a particular comment, he excludes, or makes only fleeting reference to the more frequently visited destinations, assuming that his readers would already be familiar with them. Kennan and De Windt work through their itinerary more thoroughly, as they are writing for readers with scant or little knowledge of the region.

Although all three authors consulted additional sources, the bulk of their work is based on personal experiences. Their basic observations appear authentic and convincing even to a reader who disagrees with their interpretation thereof. Whereas both Kennan and De Windt round off their books with some concluding, reflective remarks on their journeys, Chekhov's book ends abruptly with the final chapters devoted to his research findings.

10.1 Structure

Even though all three authors published their work in two volumes, they had different reasons for doing so. Chekhov regarded *From Siberia*¹⁹⁹ as an introduction to his main work, *Sakhalin Island*. Kennan had to divide his work into two volumes as it would have

¹⁹⁹ Chekhov: Чехов, Антон. *Из Сибири*. Москва, 1987.

been too cumbersome to handle in one volume. De Windt was describing two separate journeys, undertaken a few years apart.

Whereas the two volumes of Kennan and De Windt are roughly the same size, Chekhov's first volume is considerably shorter than his second. His second volume consists of two distinctly different sections, with the delineation clearly indicated by Chekhov himself. The second part of the second volume is of purely academic interest, with little significance as a travelogue. The work of the other writers is more conventional, forming a unity with a discernible introduction, body and conclusion.

Chekhov did not include a preface or introduction in either of his volumes. He launched straight into the main body of the text. A preface appears in Kennan's first volume but it applies to the contents of both volumes. De Windt wrote separate prefaces for his two volumes. The first also contains a comprehensive, separate introduction, written by a member of the Russian aristocracy. De Windt dedicated the two volumes to two different persons.

The format of all the travellers' books are similar in that they are divided into chapters, generally indicating a geographic location but on occasion dealing with a topic related to the exile question. Chekhov made extensive use of footnotes which could be due to the fact that he wanted to present his work as an academic thesis. Kennan and De Windt used footnotes to a lesser extent but they included a considerable number of appendices containing additional material relevant to the main topic of their work. Kennan supplied an index, covering the contents of both books, at the end of the second volume. De Windt only provided *The New Siberia*²⁰⁰ with an index while Chekhov failed to compile one.

Kennan and De Windt's books are illustrated and include images of the authors. Both of Kennan's volumes and De Windt's first volume contain drawings. Kennan was accompanied by an artist who recorded images along the way while De Windt took his own photographs which were reproduced as drawings in the first volume. His second volume contains only original photographs. Kennan and De Windt also added maps to indicate the routes they followed. I have not been able to establish if the original edition of the two texts by Chekhov were illustrated or supplied with a map, but as a rule he left his writing unillustrated.

The maps and illustrations enhance Kennan's books considerably. While the maps facilitate tracing the travellers' route, giving a better perspective on the extent of the distances covered, the often exquisitely detailed illustrations bring an immediacy to the work. Even

²⁰⁰ De Windt, H. *The New Siberia*. London, 1896.

though the illustrations in De Windt's book are less detailed, they also contribute positively to the overall impression of the work.

10.2 Language and style

Although all three authors set off with an agenda other than that of writing a travelogue, their works do contain most elements that would qualify them as travel writing. As they had intended to write about a socio-political issue, the outcome could have been a dreary, academic treatise. Yet, in addition to political commentary and observations, the books contain vivid descriptions of people, places and incidents not related to the main topic of their investigation. They also make use of literary devices such as vignettes and dialogues, which they alternate with serious, critical sections of the text to prevent their work from becoming stale and tedious. Effective inclusion of humour and irony likewise enliven the otherwise serious contents of the books.

The writers turn, perhaps unwittingly, into story tellers in addition to being investigative reporters. In the case of Chekhov, being relatively close to his home territory and harbouring no ulterior motives, the story is straight forward with comparatively minor incidents along the way. Kennan's unauthorised attempts to establish contact with political exiles turns his work into an adventure story, gradually becoming fraught with conspiracies and intrigue. The general tone in De Windt's work is less intense than that of either Chekhov or Kennan. If the chapters dealing with the exile issue were to be removed, what remains would be a colourful depiction of a leisurely, if at times uncomfortable, jaunt through Siberia.

All three authors are captivated by and in awe of the natural beauty and evocative landscapes that are virtually omnipresent in their journeys. Detailed, lengthy, often lyrical descriptions are found in all the texts. Settlements, from apparently semi-deserted hamlets to the major cities, are also painted in detail but in their final appraisal the authors do not always reach consensus as was demonstrated earlier.

The way Chekhov, Kennan and De Windt depict the people they come across also differs. Chekhov, given his innate ability to connect with people and the fact that he is after all travelling among compatriots, perhaps not surprisingly manages to portray Siberians with a sincerity and warmth lacking in the accounts by the other two authors. Kennan, by contrast, is soon on a mission to prove a newfound political conviction and he carefully selects the persons he wants to foreground, either as martyrs or oppressors, in what he now regards as

an evil system. For De Windt, a new acquaintance is merely either a source of entertainment or annoyance. His appraisals are frequently superficial, based on appearances, first impressions and ostensibly even his prejudices.

The first person singular 'I' is central to travel narrative and difficult to avoid, often resulting, inadvertently, in subjective reporting. Chekhov was wary of becoming too subjectively involved with his work and deliberately tried to create distance by giving people he met along the way a chance to take centre stage. Kennan allows persons to give their point of view on the occasions that it furthers his own agenda, but more often he remains the central character in his work. De Windt never considers stepping aside to let a voice other than his own be heard except to embellish something he is describing.

It can be argued that Chekhov, being Russian himself and close to the topic he is investigating, would be a less objective observer compared to Kennan and De Windt. But as was mentioned earlier, Chekhov was aware of the danger and took great pains to avoid it. On the contrary, Kennan is the author who gradually becomes more and more absorbed in the lives of opponents of the Russian government, demonstrating an increasingly critical attitude which might be seen as being less objective.

Chekhov and De Windt did not share Kennan's approach of trying to get involved with the political exile community. Their writing is, in the end, more clear and unhampered than Kennan's eventual tense, conspiratorial way of writing. They openly take notes and are not afraid of being confronted by the authorities, while Kennan is constantly fearful of being accosted by the police and having his notes, which he eventually conceals about his person, exposed.

10.3 Point of view

It is crucial for an author, from the perspective of travel writing, to attempt to become part of the places visited, to have a mind open to possible persuasion. Yet it is virtually impossible to approach a debatable issue in a neutral, objective manner and all three authors must have arrived in Siberia with pre-conceived notions about the region and the topic they intended to investigate. To complicate the matter further, they were primarily writing from two points of view: that of an investigator, but also, if inadvertently, that of a traveller.

In addition, both Kennan and De Windt were at an obvious disadvantage, compared to Chekhov, on account of being foreigners when it came to trying to blend in with the local population. Notwithstanding their proficiency (or professed proficiency) in Russian, they were to remain 'outsiders'.

Chekhov put a concerted effort into becoming part of the region by talking to as many of the local inhabitants as possible. More importantly, he spoke *to* them, not *down* to them. His emphasis was on observation, not being observed, on learning from them, not instructing them, on blending in with the surroundings, not standing out. Having steered clear of favouring a particular political or ideological position all his life, Chekhov was determined to try to maintain his impartial point of view. Although he had made a thorough study of all the sources he could get hold of before setting off on his journey, Chekhov relied almost solely on his own notes and observations when he started to write the books this study is based on.

Kennan too succeeded in communicating with a variety of people, though his perspective shifted gradually until he was focusing almost exclusively on political exiles. Everyone else he had to deal with as an intermediary in an attempt to establish contact with them was eventually of little more than nuisance value. Kennan progressively reported his change of heart, thereby indicating that he was open to persuasion. However, in tandem with his conversion to the opposite point of view, Kennan's feelings of patriotism subsequently became more evident. As a result of assuming a sense of superiority, he started drawing more frequent negative comparisons between the region he was travelling through and his native America. In addition, Kennan did not rely only on his own observations but also used material from other sources, some of dubious authenticity, thereby advancing a point of view not necessarily exclusively his own.

De Windt ostensibly never had intentions of becoming part of the local milieu in any case. He was content to observe from a distance, and not infrequently protested loudly whenever forced into unwanted close physical proximity with the local inhabitants. Rudely, brazenly brushing off unsolicited approaches became a matter of routine for him. Openly critical of his surroundings, De Windt's innate superior, condescending attitude made him a detached observer. He claimed to be neutral in his political approach, but did not hesitate to express himself in favour of maintaining the status quo while openly despising opponents of the government such as 'Nihilists'.

Although all three authors claimed to be in search of the truth, it is unavoidable that preconceived notions and personal opinions would have affected the way they reported their observations. As a consequence, the final product is, at best, three versions of the truth,

seen from three different points of view. Of the three, Chekhov was the least vociferous in making claims in favour of or against existing conditions at the time he set off. Even though he is judgmental at times once he is on the road, he does not insist on advocating his own standpoint in the way the other travellers do.

10.4 Discourse

Although Chekhov, Kennan and De Windt admittedly all had a specific purpose for undertaking their respective journeys, they ended up writing about themes not directly related to their primary aim. In addition to reporting on the exile system, they wrote about the region they were travelling through and their experiences along the way. It was inevitable that there would not be only one single, uniform discourse used and as a result two predominant types of discourse can be identified in the texts.

The parts of the contents dealing with factual reporting, connected with the main aim, are written in a more formal register, similar to that used in non-fiction texts. When reporting, for example, on conditions in the prisons, the author moves to the background, shifting the focus to the contents of the text, in an attempt to be more objective. In addition to the exile system, Chekhov concentrated on medical and social issues, while Kennan showed more interest in commerce and industry in his books. Unlike Chekhov and Kennan, De Windt did not have a distinguishable secondary topic of interest.²⁰¹

As a rule, the scientific discourse is concentrated in chapters dealing with topics concerning the exile system and appendices. At times though, the different discourses are fragmented, intertwined and difficult to identify, more often so in the work of Chekhov and Kennan than in that of De Windt. In the work of Chekhov and Kennan, there is less continuity of discourse than in De Windt's books. In the case of the former two, the reader is more aware of the switching from one type of writing to another. It is less of a problem in De Windt's texts, possibly because his writing is of a more cursory nature.

²⁰¹ All three authors wrote about ethnic topics, at times as part of their personal experiences in a specific district, while at other times in a more factual, impersonal way.

10.5 Thematic analysis

When travelling, an individual enters a world where he does not belong. There is a mutual awareness, both on the side of the traveller and the inhabitants of the alien territory he has entered, that there are fundamental differences between them. The locals regard themselves as 'standard,' while the visitor sees them as the Other.

Finding himself, geographically speaking, on home ground, one would expect Chekhov not to feel an outsider. Yet he appears to be almost constantly aware that he is facing the Other. He instantly notices a gaping chasm between himself and the people he encounters. He observes differences not only between himself and the exiled convicts but also the established inhabitants of the region. But instead of rejecting or judging the people for their Otherness, Chekhov harnesses his innate feelings of empathy and tries to find common ground or redeeming factors to bridge the gap between them. Some of his comments on the indigenous populations come across fairly harsh a century after they were penned, but he never hints at Russian (European) superiority, believing on the contrary that the inevitable process of Russification will not necessarily have a positive outcome for the local indigenous people.

Although Kennan identifies the Other as curious subjects worthy of his comments, he is, in contrast to Chekhov, critical from the outset. Kennan soon starts making comparisons between Americans and Siberians, focusing on typical characteristics, attitude and mentality and brazenly proclaims the superiority of the former group. The indigenous populations are often shown as amusing and exotic, but Kennan does not give the impression that anything worthwhile can be gained or learnt from them. By contrast, he admires the political exiles, holding them as examples of virtue and victims of an unjust system. Kennan relates to them and connects with them in a more intimate way than he does with 'ordinary' Siberians.

De Windt unashamedly celebrates his own sense of separateness. To him, virtually everybody he encounters on the way is a remote being, preferably to be avoided. The only exceptions are the 'upper-classes' consisting of senior officials and the local mining and business magnates. Even for them De Windt makes only limited allowances as he finds that culture, refinement, and politeness are encountered only on rare occasions east of the Ural Mountains. Indigenous native inhabitants are other-worldly creatures, preferably observed from a safe distance. Trying to avoid personal contact, most of his references to them are taken from other sources.

Fuelled by his awareness of being an outsider, a sense of being lost, of drifting in unknown territory pervades Chekhov's two volumes. Before setting off he already expressed misgivings as to how one will be able to centre oneself in a vast country such as Russia. But more than just feeling lost, Chekhov also routinely feels alone. The feeling of loneliness is compounded when travelling through ostensibly deserted villages, but sometimes even in the presence of the local population he feels himself cast in the role of outsider. Notwithstanding his efforts to become involved with the people he meets, he remains a visitor.

Chekhov repeatedly refers to the long distance between where he finds himself at a given moment along his route and Moscow, or European Russia. He regularly counts down the *versts* as he moves further and further east. Chekhov's books also contain frequent comparisons with familiar places back home, or even abroad, in an attempt to find something he can relate to. Being constantly reminded of his insignificance in the face of the overpowering presence of nature exacerbates the sensation of being hopelessly adrift.

Despite the fact that Kennan has been to Siberia before, he is yet again overwhelmed by the sheer size of the country. Regular encounters with exotic landscapes, people and customs, fascinating though these may be, serve as constant reminders of the vast distance between himself and the alien world in which he finds himself. To compensate for the sense of insecurity this arouses in him, Kennan immediately reaches out for the familiar, his native country. Occasional meetings with compatriots and members of other European nations placate his feeling of complete alienation. Recurrent comparisons with America are likewise used in an effort to help him come to terms with his alien surroundings.

Like Chekhov, Kennan is also struck by the eerie appearance of apparently deserted villages. Eventually Kennan's feelings of travelling through a deserted region, coupled with the stress brought on by the illicit activity of contacting political exiles, arouse in him a sense of being persecuted. The constant presence of a compatriot as travel companion does not help to alleviate Kennan's situation, as his fellow traveller is going through the same experiences, eventually in an even more acute way.

De Windt frequently comments on his curious experiences and the unfamiliar environment confronting him along the way. He usually finds odd encounters amusing, indicating that he is not affected negatively by them, but at times he does feel completely out of place in his surroundings. De Windt tries to come to terms with his feelings of alienation by recalling familiar verses or comparing the strange landscapes with places familiar to him. The entire Russia, he admits, is a mysterious country. He does not try to fathom or unravel the mystery, preferring to find shelter behind a shield of aloofness and detachment. Comfort

also appears in the form of the local upper-crust, some of whom he finds refined enough to be regarded as kindred spirits.

Eventually the constant forced interaction with strangers, the long distance from familiar surroundings as well as having to spend an extended time away from home were among the factors which must have had a marked impact on the psyche of all three travellers.

Chekhov's journey, except for the times when he gives himself over to the splendours of nature, is cheerless and gloomy. He notices only rare occasions when there is evidence of happiness or the sound of laughter is heard, and even then it lasts but a fleeting moment. Chekhov confesses to feelings of boredom and melancholy, often of inexplicable origin, from the moment he sets off. He finds the people he meets along the way apathetic, their lives and lifestyles tedious, dull and meaningless. Attending a supposedly festive occasion, Chekhov laments the general absence of music in Siberia. Music could have alleviated the pervading sensation of despair he encounters, but then he declares that it would be out of place under the circumstances after all. It seems as if nothing can alleviate the pervading sense of despondency, and Chekhov's growing anguish, of having observed so many lives wasted, is eventually expressed as a sense of futility. It is also possible that his dominant feelings of melancholy and futility had a more personal cause. He was, in all probability, already aware that he had contracted tuberculosis and that he was unlikely to live to a ripe old age.

Kennan, by contrast, sets off on his journey in a flurry of excitement, keen to prove a point and silence his critics. But when he changes his point of view, his enthusiasm soon wanes. The adventure becomes a tiresome duty and Kennan starts longing for home. Boredom is relieved by rewarding himself with frivolous outings and excursions unrelated to the main objective of his journey. These only last a while before he is forced back to the reality of the task at hand. One destination replaces the other as 'the most desolate in the whole world' and Kennan grows increasingly morose. Winter sets in which aggravates the situation. To alleviate his feelings of melancholy and longing, Kennan becomes increasingly desperate for news from his native land. He looks up the company of compatriots or other likeminded individuals whenever possible in an attempt to assuage his nostalgic longings.

Feelings of isolation, loneliness and boredom also plague De Windt, but mostly when he is sailing on one of the mighty Siberian rivers, especially at night. Villages on the banks that appear to be deserted intensify his feelings of abandonment. Post stations, towns and cities, though filled with people, also become desolate places in the absence of suitable company. It is hard to keep De Windt down, though. Instead of being overwhelmed by negative feelings, he always attempts to find a congenial interlocutor, as challenging a task as it may

be at times. If he is successful, he whiles the time away in a constructive manner. If not, he amuses himself by surreptitiously mocking the hapless victim in whose company he happens to be at the time. De Windt admits that he has melancholy associations with Siberia, but almost simultaneously confesses that the region remains irresistible to him.

The travellers are virtually constantly on the move, covering vast distances, which makes it impossible to forge attachments. Being continually uprooted, they grow weary and boredom sets in. The excitement is soon gone and, enchanting as their natural surroundings may be, all three eventually long for home. They are relieved when the final destination is reached and the homeward journey begins.

The constant feeling of desolation and loneliness was exacerbated by survival concerns, including the frequent demand to deal with danger, incessant fatigue and discomfort, which are the obvious challenges facing any traveller embarking on a journey into Siberia. All three authors struggled with the basic issues facing a travel writer: making travel arrangements, finding suitable accommodation, and procuring nourishing meals.

At times using the post horse system worked well, but delays, accidents and breakdowns were frequent and unpredictable. All three authors wrote extensively about the perils of the Great Siberian Post Road. At the best of times, the condition of the road was marginally acceptable but for the better part it would be either completely flooded or pock marked with potholes. They were involved in various minor and not so minor accidents and breakdowns but fortunately managed to come out unscathed.²⁰² As a rule, they found steamship travel more comfortable and reliable, provided the water level of the rivers was sufficiently high. Unlike Chekhov, Kennan and De Windt also completed part of their journeys on horseback, a taxing undertaking for the better part.

Accommodation ranged from excellent when fortunate enough to be invited by a mining magnate to stay at his luxury villa, to atrocious when stuck in a cramped, dingy room of a 'hotel' or sleeping on the floor of a post station. The quality of meals also varied from a four (or more) course gourmet dinner to a scrap of stale bread and several mugs of tea, purely depending on luck and circumstances.

In addition, there were factors the travellers had no control over. While nature offered awe inspiring landscapes, it also provided numerous obstacles. In the first place, there was the climate to contend with. In summer the intense heat became unbearable while in winter it was the freezing cold that was insupportable. Seemingly interminable downpours were

²⁰² De Windt also survived a steamship crash and a violent storm on the Amur River.

common the entire length of the journey. An exception here would be Kennan's detour to the south, through the arid Kirghiz steppe, where he was battered by sandstorms instead. Travelling in summer was further marred for all by the abundant presence of swarms of insects, notably mosquitoes and sand-flies. Vermin and parasites became constant travelling companions during stopovers, irrespective of the season.

Although the threat of falling victim to crime, ranging from robbery to murder, was at the back of their minds, none of the travellers suffered on this account. Kennan, due to his unsanctioned involvement with political exiles, was however continually worried about getting arrested by the authorities. Even the copious amount of incriminating material in the form of notes and letters he had accumulated towards the end of the journey became a source of anxiety for him. De Windt, keeping to the conditions under which he had been granted the right to travel to Siberia, had no such problems but found the presence of undesirable co-travellers intolerable at times. Chekhov also avoided confrontation with the authorities and, though annoyed by his fellow travellers on occasion, was more tolerant of them as a rule.

Chronic fatigue, the result of all the negative facets of the journey, also became a constant companion on their journeys. Kennan even had to break his journey three times. Once he was taken ill, and on another occasion he found it impossible to continue after a lengthy, exhausting stretch on horseback. Finally Kennan had to take another break when his travel companion was on the verge of suffering a nervous breakdown.

11. Conclusion

The conditions facing the authors selected for this study must have been essentially the same and they reported the difficulties in great detail but the way in which they coped with their situation differed. As a rule Chekhov faced hardships stoically while Kennan complained more insistently and De Windt appeared to be alternately annoyed and irritated, and even occasionally faintly amused.

For Chekhov, encounters with the Other were enriching experiences, for Kennan only selectively so, while De Windt regarded contact with the Other as a necessary evil. As for the matter of European, and by implication American, superiority in relation to the inhabitants of Siberia, Kennan and De Windt subscribed to it unquestioningly. Chekhov was more

guarded. Yet even though some of his statements were judgmental of the indigenous native peoples, he did not support subjecting them to European-Russian norms.

All three travellers felt lost and alienated during a substantial part of their journeys. It is possible that Chekhov was taken aback by these feelings of being a foreigner in his own country, especially as he had tried hard to fit in with the local people. Kennan, being a real foreigner, could not have harboured the same expectations as Chekhov. Yet being isolated from the familiar for so long must have been a curious, uncomfortable feeling which he tried hard to compensate for by reaching out to the familiar. De Windt, forever looking for new adventures in uncharted territory, appeared to relish this sense of being adrift. To him it was but another experience to add to all the others he had gone through so far.

Of the three travellers, Kennan was the one who struggled most along the way. This was in part due to the fact that his defiant stance towards the authorities added considerable strain as the journey progressed. His was also the longest uninterrupted journey out of the three and he was the only one to press on through summer and winter. In spite of describing hardships for the entire duration of his journey, Chekhov handled the adverse conditions reasonably well. He had a clear goal in mind and was determined to see it through. It was also a prudent decision to take the scenic route home as looking forward to this well-deserved reward must at the difficult times have served as an incentive to continue the journey. De Windt appeared to have suffered the least on his journeys but they were the shortest and undertaken strictly in summer which, despite harbouring its own problems, appeared to be the most favourable season to travel.

CONCLUSION

As outlined in the *Introduction*, the main aim of this research was to determine how the travel narrative contributes towards establishing the image and essence of a locality, in this instance Siberia, seen against what may be perceived as the general view of the region at the time of writing. This was attempted by way of analysing the work of three authors, who were selected among a substantial number of travel writers who have written about the region. The rationale for this selection was to make the contributions more representative, which would result in more balanced, objective and credible findings. The authors were of different nationalities, professions and backgrounds, upholding divergent political convictions. However, they undertook their journeys at roughly the same time, visiting partially overlapping destinations.

The dissertation began with a brief overview of the genre of travel writing which has until relatively recently been neglected by literary scholarship. The fact that there is an increasing amount of research in this field, opened the possibility of an interesting new assessment of writing about Siberia. However, owing to the absence of definitive scholarly texts in the genre, part of the overview was devoted to an attempt to summarise the accepted requirements for and conventions of travel writing. It showed that crucial requirements for a persuasive travelogue include the establishing of credibility. This is achieved by attempting to remain objective and avoiding any tendency towards stereotyping or assumption of cultural superiority. Emotional involvement with the local population, attempts to promote understanding and a willingness to learn are likewise of importance when writing a travelogue. In addition, exceptional skills as observers and the ability to convey these observations in an acceptable literary style are further requirements for the genre. Finally, an attempt should also be made to include the most frequently recurrent themes associated with the genre, notably that of the Other, which encapsulates the essence of travel writing.

A further consideration concerning research material, was the paucity of secondary sources available for Kennan and De Windt in relation to the far more substantial studies that have been devoted to the work of Chekhov. Even in the case of Chekhov though, there is an imbalance resulting from an overwhelming amount of source material devoted to the Russian author's purely literary oeuvre at the expense of the non-fiction texts that fall within the interest of this study. Nevertheless the lack of availability of abundant secondary sources did not hamper the research and reaching of conclusions.

The background survey of Siberia that followed the chapter on travel writing showed that a negative view of the region had resulted from adverse, often hostile reporting on conditions by some visitors, reluctant settlers and exiles who were residing there against their will. Attempts to monopolise the natural resources of the region also resulted in unreliable reporting by stakeholders who had already set up their businesses. The very nature of the conquest of Siberia by 'heroic' adventurers, some of whom had acquired the status of legends, lent itself to the creation of sensationalist, epic tales. Romantic as some of the ventures might have seemed, it did not lead to the establishment of a positive image of the region. The study also indicated that Siberia was not exclusively a place of exile as volunteer settlers were in the majority. Nevertheless, the erroneous assumption of Siberia as the dumping ground of the unwanted had gradually become entrenched. In addition, the very remoteness of the region and its challenging climatic conditions also added to its overall negative image.

Concerning the authors of the texts, an attempt to determine their credibility and objectivity led to the following observations. While all three travellers proclaimed to be searching for 'the truth', they produced distinctly different texts. Although they specified their main motivation as an attempt to raise awareness among their readers about conditions surrounding the Siberian exile system, it is apparent that they also had ulterior motives for undertaking their journeys, which might have influenced their writing.

In the case of Chekhov there is uncertainty as to the real driving force behind his decision to undertake the journey. The possibilities suggested by scholars range from his desire to receive academic recognition, to an elaborate attempt to escape the mundane, monotonous world with its petty daily worries that he so disdained in his works of fiction. As for Kennan and De Windt, they were clearly set on experiencing another adventure in a country that provided them with unlimited resources for exotic escapades. They hoped, particularly in the case of Kennan, to increase their fame and fortune. As a result, they had more to gain from sensationalist reporting than Chekhov.

Although the present study focused on the authors in the role of travel writers as opposed to that of commentators on the exile system, the way the writers approached the political exile question was relevant since it affected the way they observed and experienced the region. Kennan observed from the point of view of a working man, sympathising with the revolutionaries who opposed the government of the day while De Windt, being a privileged member of the upper classes, defended the authorities, with no wish to change the status quo. Chekhov, with no evident 'hidden agenda', had the most neutral approach, observing and reporting what he saw without, by all accounts, applying self-censorship.

Chekhov's reluctance to become entangled in political activities is well documented. During his journey, he had only limited, supervised contact with political exiles as he had undertaken not to get involved with them. For Kennan, contact with political exiles turned from a side issue into a main aim as the journey progressed. He set off believing that they were terrorists with no justification for applying drastic, destructive methods but ended up justifying their actions.

De Windt took the opposite view, holding strong convictions about the impiety of the radical opposition. He claimed that he could speak to political exiles whenever he wanted to but did not show a particular inclination to do so. On the rare occasion that he met one, it was usually an unplanned, coincidental encounter, such as with an exile serving as an interpreter, or as a passenger travelling on the same train.

Chekhov was not intent on championing a particular political point of view and would consequently not have gained anything by manipulating his findings. He was content to leave the final verdict to his readers. On the other hand, Kennan and De Windt had clear political agendas and they were set on converting their readers to their way of thinking. This opened up the way for selective, distorted reporting. It also brings into question the selection of the sources they consulted and incorporated in their final works. Only references supporting their own stances were used.

Moreover, the research undertaken for this study seems to lead to the conclusion that of the three travellers, Chekhov is the one who most fully embraced the Other, trying to experience every encounter to the full, even under difficult circumstances. There were no language barriers and he could fully understand what was happening around him. This was contrary to Kennan and De Windt who remained on the periphery, with a discriminatory approach in their dealings with the Other. They often carefully calculated their meetings with local inhabitants and restricted their acquaintances to those persons who could serve the purpose of propagating their own point of view. Thanks to his knowledge of Russian Kennan ostensibly did not experience communication problems, whereas De Windt, owing to his lack of proficiency in Russian, must have ended up with serious gaps of information, and possibly even misunderstandings, in his writing.

The source material demonstrates that all three travellers took notes along the way that they planned to develop into books upon the completion of their journeys. Chekhov and De Windt took their notes openly, but fearful of being caught with compromising material, Kennan disposed of some of his notes and would to a large extent have had to rely on his memory and the testimony of often dubious sources in the end. In addition to this, his prejudiced point of view, the constant need to keep his true objective secret and the

deadlines he faced at the time of writing the articles his books were based on, must have affected his final product too. By contrast, Chekhov had no similar external pressures when writing his books. His publisher was keen to see the work in print promptly, but Chekhov managed to keep him at bay in a good humoured way. In fact, Chekhov reported enjoying his work on the books, finding it a welcome diversion from his standard literary writing and it is possible that he was protracting the writing process on purpose.

An aspect all three travellers experienced in a relatively similar way was the sensation of being lost and feeling alienated for an extensive part of their journeys. In addition, they also had to overcome the sheer physical challenges of travelling through a wild, barely developed region. Initial excitement soon turned into feelings of gloom and sometimes even despair. Along the way they compensated for their feelings of alienation by looking for something familiar they could relate to, usually comparing a particular part of the landscape they were travelling through to a 'place back home.'

However, the length of their journeys, and the seasons they undertook them in, differed considerably. Kennan's was the longest uninterrupted journey, travelling through summer and winter, which must have affected his writing negatively compared to that Chekhov and De Windt, whose journeys were shorter and only lasted from spring, through summer and into autumn. In addition, Kennan suffered in particular as a result of taking on the authorities clandestinely. This added stress affected his health and he had to interrupt his journey on account of illness. Becoming increasingly exhausted, he began to rush to get home. He gradually started concentrating only on those issues that would further his own point of view. It is possible that he ended up seeing what he wanted to see, instead of what was really there.

Considering all the factors mentioned above though, it would appear that Chekhov was in a position to give the most truthful account of his journey. Nevertheless, it could be argued that he was the least seasoned traveller of the three, not having ventured beyond the Ural Mountains before, and that he might have been overwhelmed by the whole venture. But although Chekhov sometimes appeared to be an outsider, he was, after all, on home territory. It may be assumed that being Russian himself, he had a clearer understanding of the psyche, of the mentality and even the customs of his compatriots than the other two writers. Furthermore, of the three, Chekhov was the least vociferous in making claims in favour of or against existing conditions at the time he set off. Even though he was occasionally judgmental once he was on the road, he did not insist on advocating his own standpoint.

Being able to create from within Chekhov had not, prior to this journey, seemed to feel the need to be constantly on the move in search of new adventures and challenges to assuage an inherent restlessness. Kennan and De Windt's continual chasing after chimeras brought them in contact with a never ending stream of humanity which, on the one hand, enriched them but yet left them judgmental and prejudicial, often reinforcing existing stereotypes. By contrast, Chekhov possessed an instinctive tolerance and acceptance of humanity and was keen and willing to learn, and also open to changing his mind-set. Comparing the different approaches by Chekhov and Kennan, Ryfa stresses Chekhov's high degree of personal involvement. This became a pivotal factor in his final depiction of the region.²⁰³

This study shows that, in spite of Chekhov's perceived confusion as to what he wanted his work to be and whom he deemed to be the eventual reader, he left an incisive, penetrating image of a vast land brimming, the empty spaces notwithstanding, with life. The scenes he portrayed mostly spoke of suffering, of lives wasted, missed opportunities and even a sense of futility experienced by many of the local inhabitants he met. Yet, driven by the instinctive curiosity of a seasoned author, Chekhov reached beyond the clearly evident to show another side of Siberia as was pointed out in Chapter 3. The subtext portrayed Siberia as a place of limitless potential which, under the right circumstances, would have a bright future. In a chapter devoted to the free population and educated classes, Chekhov states that public opinion will inevitably be present where the intelligentsia is well represented. He believed that this would result in a moral controlling force which would make ethical demands on everyone that could not possibly be avoided with impunity.

Chekhov's writings on Siberia stand as evidence that he had not given up on the region, believing in a future when the region would give birth to its own novelists and poets. While admiring Krasnoyarsk from the banks of the Yenisei, he foresaw a time when a brave, intelligent life would illuminate its shores, a prospect that filled him with a feeling of contentment.

Regarding Kennan, it was shown in Chapter 3 that his work was treated with ambivalence in some circles owing to his complete reversal of opinion while on his journey and distrust of his status as an authoritative writer. However, Kennan continued to defend his conversion to the opposite view as genuinely based on his experiences on the road and his final work appears to have been met with approval by his intended readership, judging by the success of his subsequent lecture tours based on the experiences outlined in the books.

²⁰³ Ryfa, J. Literary, scientific and moral implications in the inquiry into the penal system: Anton Chekhov's journey to Sakhalin Island. PhD. Bloomington, 1997.

Despite the fact that Kennan could not be accused of having been aloof, he never fully integrated with the inhabitants of Siberia. Even when he spent time with political exiles, feelings of sympathy did not turn into those of empathy. He was happy to report the distressing details of individual cases but only from the point of view of the narrator without investigating any of the claims made. Keen to collect as many stories as possible to fuel his newly found convictions, Kennan remained an uninvolved observer who became increasingly eager to show the negative side of the region he was travelling through.

Kennan was not adverse to admitting that Siberia is, when looking at it from the point of view of a leisure traveller, a treasure trove worthy of exploration. His depictions of the landscapes and nature in general, leaving aside adverse weather conditions, are true gems of travel writing. He was in awe of the *land* he was travelling through and did not shy away from proclaiming its beauty and magnificence in his work.

Kennan also believed in the potential of the local inhabitants, particularly members of the exiled intelligentsia, occasionally pointing out their achievements. Yet he remained sceptical about the region's ability to fully develop its potential without outside intervention. He did not believe in the Siberian people's capacity to harness their forces sufficiently on their own. In addition, he frequently pointed out the comparative superiority of his native country, suggesting on several occasions that conditions would have been much better if his compatriots had been in charge.

Feeling constantly threatened on his journey, Kennan had a score to settle with his persecutors who were perpetuating what he perceived to be an unjust system. His books offered him a perfect opportunity to do so and are filled with countless passages of stark, condemnatory criticism of a region without discernible prospects.

De Windt, on the contrary, hoped to achieve the opposite effect in his books. He arrived in Siberia in a positive frame of mind and left it more convinced than ever of the fact that it was an unjustly maligned region. It remained his conviction that many things in the virtually unknown region had, like the ferocity of the Siberian wolf, been vastly exaggerated. He was keen to dispel the entrenched image many of his fellow countrymen had of Siberia as a cold, sterile land buried under snow almost year round and inhabited mostly by indigenous tribal peoples and prisoners.

However, not everything De Windt came across on his journey met with his approval and he admitted openly that he would have balked at the idea of having to live in Siberia. Yet his criticism was less censorious than that of either Chekhov or Kennan. Based also on his experiences during his previous journey through the region, he seemed determined to

portray the region in a favourable light and, although he was confronted with the same evidence as Kennan, De Windt remained true to his original beliefs.

Ultimately De Windt experienced the problems facing Siberia as temporary obstacles that would eventually be surmounted. In a way similar to both Chekhov and Kennan, De Windt saw the salvation of the region in the potential of its inhabitants, from intelligent little peasant boys who finally had an opportunity to receive a formal education, to exiles who were accepting their new lives with a positive attitude.

In the final analysis, even though all three authors claimed to be in search of the truth, it is unavoidable that preconceived notions and personal opinions would have affected the way they reported their observations. As a consequence, the final product is, at best, three versions of the truth, seen from three different points of view. At a first glance, the depiction by all three authors appears to support the negative view of Siberia prevalent at the time of writing. However, a closer look reveals decided positive impressions which, though few in number, show evidence of optimism about the eventual destiny of a region in a stage of transition.

In a way they had barely scratched the surface of a seemingly infinite land. Perhaps Chekhov (1987b, 86) summarised the situation best when he remarked 'A lot here is unclear' (Тут много неясного) and likely to remain so.

I compared the work of three authors, from three different countries, who undertook their journeys at roughly the same time, along fairly similar routes, ostensibly with the same goal in mind. Considering the vast amount of travelogues set against the backdrop of Siberia, numerous possible permutations for comparisons remain. Research might, for example, be approached from a historical (chronological) perspective comparing the same route undertaken at different times or it may focus on comparing travelogues with memoirs or autobiographical texts written by inhabitants of the region. A thematic approach offers yet another possibility of studying literature devoted to Siberia, concentrating, for instance, on travelogues dedicated to the Trans-Siberian Railroad. Last but not least an interesting perspective on the region may be gained from juxtaposing works of fiction with non-fiction travelogues.

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APPENDIX

Biographical notes about the authors-travellers

Anton Pavlovich Chekhov

Chekhov was born in the provincial port town of Taganrog, on the Sea of Azov in southern Russia, in 1860. Chekhov enrolled in the Moscow University Medical School, qualifying as a doctor in 1884. The first symptoms of tuberculosis, the disease that was to take his life, appeared at this time. While still at medical school Chekhov began to publish comic short stories, using the income to support himself and his family, which he had become the head of and was to remain for the rest of his life. Chekhov undertook his journey to Siberia in 1890 after being awarded the Russian Academy of Sciences' coveted Pushkin Prize for a collection of short stories. Chekhov married a leading actress of the Moscow Arts Theatre, Olga Knipper, more than a decade after returning from Siberia. He died in 1904 at the age of 44, leaving a rich legacy to Russian and world literature.

George Kennan

In the first volume of *Siberia and the Exile System* Kennan describes himself as an American newspaper man but he was far more than that.

Born in Norwalk, Ohio, in 1845, he had to start working at the age of 12 due to the family's restricted financial resources and never completed his formal education. Kennan's long fascination with Russia began in 1865, when he went to work in Kamchatka on a feasibility study for a telegraph cable route linking the United States with Europe through Siberia. His first book, *Tent Life in Siberia*, published at the age of 25, was a travelogue based on his experiences of the three years spent in the region. The success of the book launched his career not only as an author, but also as a popular, charismatic lecturer.

Kennan's second trip to Russia in June 1870, sponsored by the income from his book and lectures related to it, focused on the Caucasus region. Travelling on a limited budget, he was forced to leave Russia when his money ran out. Travis (1990) points out that, during his early travels, Kennan was more interested in exotic people and their customs, or unusual and beautiful landscapes than in political affairs. Yet he was soon seen in the United States

as a leading authority on Russia. Nevertheless, in order to support himself and his family who had come to depend on him for support, he was forced to take up a position in a bank for five years. He subsequently moved to New York and once again had to work at a job he had no interest in, this time as a clerk for a life insurance company.

Kennan's break finally came in 1878 when he started working with the Associated Press in Washington, D.C., which would launch his career as a correspondent to conflict areas around the world, in order to write contributions for a variety of magazines. Two years later he married the daughter of a prominent citizen of the small town of Medina, New York.

Kennan proved to be a successful correspondent, covering a variety of major events but Russia always remained at the back of his mind. At the time that he had conceived the idea of writing the books which are the subject of the current study, he paid a short exploratory visit to St Petersburg, during which he won support from the Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs Alexander G. Vlangali, who believed his visitor to be a pro-Russian observer set on improving Russia's image in the West. Kennan duly received a letter requesting local authorities in Siberia to render him every assistance. A year later, in 1885, Kennan arranged to be sent by *The Century Magazine* on a 10-month journey to investigate the Siberian exile system.

Once he had changed his pro-Russian stance, severely criticising the exile system and those responsible for it in his books, Kennan became *persona non grata* in Russia. He left the country for the last time after a visit in 1901, during which he had intended to do research for a biography of Leo Tolstoy, was cut short by the local authorities.

Kennan continued working as a freelance reporter and correspondent, covering American politics, the Spanish-American War, the Russo-Japanese War, World War I and, from a distance, the Russian Revolution. He also kept up a rigorous lecture schedule, built on his reputation as an expert on Russia, and served as occasional advisor to President Theodore Roosevelt on Russia and some other countries. Kennan could not afford to retire and at the age of 70, landed the coveted project of writing a two volume authorised biography of the American railway magnate, E.H. Harriman. It was to keep Kennan occupied for eight years. Kennan was living in Medina when he died of a stroke in 1924, aged 79.

Though his work is sometimes criticised because of his limited exposure to formal education, Kennan was held in sufficient regard to become one of the 33 founder members of the National Geographic Society of America.

Harry Willes Darrel De Windt

A truly amazing man, handsome, with dash and flair, adventurous, brave, foolhardy, a great traveller, a dashing explorer who 'kept his nerve and his panache' are typical terms used to describe De Windt. An apparent restlessness kept him travelling and moving about for a great part of his life.

Born in Paris in 1856, De Windt grew up in a villa that his mother had inherited from her mother, the Vicomte Campt de Rastignac. Both his parents had died by the time he was 14 and when the Franco-Prussian war broke out, he was sent to school in England. De Windt was admitted to Cambridge University in 1875 but did not complete his studies. He nonchalantly dismisses his academic failure at Magdalene College, describing it as a club rather than a place of higher learning, where students idled their days away riding instead of studying, with a complete disregard for university rules and regulations.²⁰⁴

His father, Joseph Clayton Jennyns De Windt, had been a captain in the British armed forces and De Windt subsequently opted for a career in the military. He became *aide-de-camp* to his brother-in-law, the Rajah of Sarawak, travelling with him until 1878. But De Windt's lack of formal education meant that he would have little chance of gaining a commission so he decided to set off on his own, usually choosing exotic destinations, less frequented by his compatriots. A number of extensive, adventurous, usually arduous journeys undertaken up to 1913, often as a newspaper correspondent, supplied De Windt with a great source for travelogues. During World War I, De Windt was involved in recruiting soldiers for the British army. He was married three times and had a daughter with his first wife. De Windt died at the age of 77 in 1933.

Though not taken seriously by some of his contemporaries, De Windt's knowledge of prison conditions in Siberia was seen as sufficient to qualify him as a British delegate to the fifth International Prison Congress held in Paris in 1895. He had furthermore been elected as a Fellow of the prestigious Royal Geographic Society in April 1890 and added the abbreviation FRGS as a post-nominal title in his books.

²⁰⁴ Notwithstanding De Windt's failure to achieve academically, Magdalen students are still awarded the *Intrepid Magdalene* grant for unusual travel projects, established to acknowledge De Windt's epic journey from Paris to New York via Siberia, the Aleutian Islands and Alaska in 1901–1902. Former recipients include George Mallory, the Himalayan climber who died in 1924 in what may have been the first successful summit attempt on Mount Everest.

De Windt's books, the contents of which span several continents and a variety of topics, are still regarded as entertaining yet informative. A selection of titles bear witness to a restless spirit who wanted to take in as much of the world as possible: *From Peking to Calais by land*, *Through savage Europe*, *On the equator*, *True tales of travel and adventure*, *Through the goldfields of Alaska to Bering Straits*, *A Ride to India Across Persia and Baluchistan*, *From Paris to New York by land*, *The Klondike gold fields* and his aptly titled autobiography *My restless life*.