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Peregrinare necesse est...

Literary Studies in Poland 22, 103-124

1990

Artykuł został zdigitalizowany i opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej bazhum.muzhp.pl, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

Stanisław Burkot

Peregrinare necesse est...*

1

Travelling, not out of one's own choice, but out of necessity, or rather under constraint, is as old as wars and conquests. Victorious armies used to drive crowds of prisoners of war and slaves and employed them for their own purposes. The history of the Russian conquest of Siberia, undoubtedly a form of great colonial processes characteristic of European policy from the discoveries of Christopher Columbus,¹ started in the 16th century when a Cossak attaman, Yermak, escaped his death sentence as far as the Urals and was hired there by the Stroganovs. Yermak recruited a small army for the Stroganovs and organized the first armed expeditions against the tribes who lived in Central Asia. The population of Central Asia and Siberia was composed of the Turkic, Mongol and Paleo-Asiatic peoples, the Manchurians, Somoyeds, Ugurs and some Tunguistic tribes. Very early Russia started employing adventurers, outlaws and prisoners to extend her colonization in Siberia. This was the beginning of the institution of *zsyłka*, that is, the administrative deportation of people to Siberia, which continued incessantly for a few hundred years.

In the first half of the 19th century, the century we are particular-

* A part of Chapter III of *Polskie podrózpisarstwo romantyczne (Polish Romantic Travel Books)*, Warszawa 1988.

¹ The process of colonial expansion in Siberia started even earlier. In the 13th cent. the boyars of Novogrod started to subordinate *Pomoriye*, the coasts of the Arctic Sea, which opened the way to the areas beyond the Urals from the North. See A. Kuczyński, *Syberyjskie szlaki (Siberian Tracks)*, Wrocław 1972, p. 27.

ly interested in, Siberia was already changed. Some native tribes became extinct due to rampant lawlessness and colonial extortion, others survived in a vestigial form having considerably changed their way of life, beliefs and folklore under the influence of Russian settlers. Nowadays some old tribes are to be found only in a few villages. Thus the Nentsy and Ngasans, from the larger ethnic group of the Somoyeds, have only the population of 1000 people each, just like the Eskimos, Itelmens, and Kets from the Paleo-Asiatic group. There are only 4000 Aleuts left, and not many more of the Yukaghirs, Karagasses, Oroks, Ulches, Orocznis, etc.²

The population of these tribes in the first half of the 19th century is unknown. However, starting from the 16th century,³ it is possible to find some information about the native Siberians, their beliefs and folklore in the accounts written by Polish prisoners taken during the Muscovite wars who were exiled to Siberia and wandered along Siberian tracks. In the first half of the 19th century romantic interests in primitive cultures and folklore motivated our Polish exiles to register the relics of cultural independence in Siberia and also fostered a profound, scientific reflection in the field. It is important to stress that the exiles somehow *ex natura* had warm feelings towards the conquered natives; their accounts are free of the conquerors' feeling of superiority, and thus more objective.

The rapid decrease of the native population started in the 17th century. This process was intensified by the corruption and avarice of government officials. Fur trade became the source of great fortunes and was accompanied by merciless exploitation. The decrease in incomes from the fur trade in the 18th century caused the increase in the deportations to Siberia, and also brought about the first attempts at reaching legal agreements with the natives. These attempts turned out to be very helpful in recognizing and describing the economic potentials of Siberia. The discovery of precious minerals

² *Ibidem*, pp. 80–87.

³ M. Janik in his *Dzieje Polaków na Syberii (A History of Poles in Siberia)*, Kraków 1928, p. 36, tries to unravel the mystery of the authorship of the so-called *Kronika Polaka (A Pole's Chronicle)*. He reminds the reader that there was a Pole employed as a secretary at the court of Khan Kutchum, the ruler of Siberia, who was finally defeated by the Russians. The Pole was probably a Russian prisoner who fled to Kutchum.

and metals, including gold, resulted in the development of industry. Deportees became the source of cheap manpower. It was at that time that the most severe kind of deportation came to being—hard labour in the mines of the Urals and beyond the mountains, in the 19th century also in the alcohol distilling trade and in new factories.

Despite the continuous deportations Siberia was scarcely populated. In the early 1830s Siberian towns and villages were still in a colonial depression. Most modern big cities were at that time built of wood and their populations were never over 20 000. Tobolsk had 20 000 inhabitants. In the whole *guberniya* (province) there were approximately 3432 villages and 540 000 people. There was just one secondary school, 8 district and 4 parish ones; together there were 39 teachers and 735 pupils. Tomsk had 11 000 inhabitants and Omsk 11 428.⁴ The calculations concerning the population are precise only in the case of big cities. They took into account primarily settlers, the number of nomads and natives living in the wilderness could be only estimated.

The consecutive stages of the conquest and exploration of Siberia are a part of a more general European phenomenon—the great colonial expansion. The conquest of Siberia required large armed forces in the area. In Russia an old method was used for solving this problem. Another category of deportations was created—to Siberian garrisons and fortresses, built, to a great extent, by the convicts themselves. In the 1850s, only in the region beyond Lake Baykal, there were 1600 Poles working in factories and 2500 serving in the army.⁵ And this was only a small fragment of vast Siberian areas.

The rapid changes and the growth of the non-native population gradually changed the countries and peoples of Siberia. By 1850 the land was finally conquered; our Polish travellers under constraint faced only the relics of aboriginal culture. More numerous nations and tribes—as the Yakuts, Altai, Khakass, Nentsy, Khants, and primarily the Buriats and Tartars, could not escape the influence of

⁴ J. Kobyłecki, *Wiadomości o Syberii i podróże w niej odbyte w latach 1831, 1832, 1833, 1834 (Information on Siberia and Travels in this Region in...)*, Warszawa 1837, pp. 57, 78.

⁵ A. Giller, *Opisanie zabajkalskiej krainy w Syberii (The Description of Siberia beyond Lake Baykal)*, Lipsk 1867, vol. 2, p. 18.

the newcomers despite efforts to preserve their uniqueness. As the time passed, there appeared certain rules of coexistence of the various groups. This made Siberia especially interesting for historians and students of ethnology and linguistics. In the Polish culture of that time Siberian motifs and themes occupied a special place, side by side with the oriental ones (in the European meaning of the word—coming from the Near East). This was also a consequence of the deportation of Poles to Siberia. Travel accounts of our exiles are important for understanding Part III of *Dziady* (*The Forefathers' Eve*), *Anhelli*, the works of Gustaw Zieliński and of the Caucasus poets.⁶

2

Zsylka was then a state institution in tsarist Russia—it served to build up Russian economy, it enriched the Tsar and his governors. This highly professional institution employed a large number of people.

What was the trip like then? We shall reconstruct its picture on the basis of the accounts written by our travellers under constraint. They devoted most space in their diaries to the very trip to Siberia. Exile parties followed a regular route on which, at intervals, there were *etapes* for rest. The general character of travelling had not changed much from the reign of Catherine the Great. Sometimes court verdicts, special rules during unrest, and finally the inventiveness of the warders could cause minor differences.

The most detailed description of the Siberian march and its *etapes* was given by the Rev. Stanisław Matraś, who, in 1863, was sent from Janów Ordynacki (west of the Bug) to Ichera on the Lena (in the *guberniya* of Irkutsk) for taking part in the Polish uprising of 1863. Escorted by a squad of soldiers, he set out from Janów on 20th of August, 1863 with 5 other prisoners and arrived at his destination on 25th of June, 1864. He made almost half of the trip on foot. When he was suffering from typhus he was being carried in

⁶ This was a group of poets deported to the Caucasus to serve in the army: Władysław Strzelnicki, Tadeusz Łada Zabłocki, Leon Janiszewski, Michał Buttowt Andrzejkowicz.

a cart through a part of the *guberniya* of Tomsk and the whole *guberniya* of the Yenisei.⁷ His route was not the longest one. It took 2.5 years to get in *etapes* from St Petersburg to Nerchinsk and even longer to Vladivostok. Convoys bound for Siberia were formed in stages—convicts from jails in the Kingdom of Poland and western *guberniyas* joined them on the way. The *etape* prison in Moscow was the starting point for the complete convoy. All prisoners had had their heads shaved already before joining the convoy: in the case of the political offenders it was one half of the head from the forehead to the nape, in the case of the common criminals, sentenced to hard labour or penal service in the army, the front of the head from the forehead to the ear line. This was a mild form of branding; in the 18th century convicts had had their ears or noses cut off.⁸

Russian tribunals used to give 4 categories of punishment which influenced the treatment of the sentenced on the road: hard labour, penal servitude in convict gangs, army service of unlimited duration, and forced colonization. Usually several convicts belonging to the first two categories were chained to a long pole and thus transported eastwards. Those who were to serve in convict gangs could expect to work in the garrisons and citadels of European Russia (hard labour and chores). Those who were to end up in the armed forces had the perspective of 15 up to 20 years of service, however, the court's verdict could extend this punishment for the remainder of their lives. The penal settlers were placed either in specially built colonies,⁹ or separately in villages, towns or even cities, where they directly depended on local administrators. The exiles were often accompanied by their families who followed them on the road. The convoys usually consisted of 300–500 people, and they made their travels with irregular frequency. Usually, however, they set out to Siberia every week. After crossing the Urals the routes of particular convoys were divided according to their destination. The last *etape* was a

⁷ S. Matraś, *Podróż po moskiewskich etapach w 1863 i 64 roku (A Trip through Russian Etapes in 1863 and 64)*, Chicago 1895, p. 95. The Reverend Matraś was looked after by Krasuski, a nobleman from Podlasie, who died on his way to Siberia having become infected with the disease.

⁸ This detail is mentioned by both Beniowski and Kopec. It can also be found in Słowacki's *Beniowski*, the poetic, ostensible biography of the confederate of Bar.

⁹ Kobyłecki, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

distributing place from which people were sent to their destinations. The exiles' station houses, *etapes*, were situated at regular intervals of about 30 miles and were meant to make the marches easier. The *etapes* were crudely built log houses, surrounded by high spiked fences, and divided into 4 chambers (*kazamats*). The first room was intended for the hard labour convicts, the second for the penal settlers, the third for the exiles accompanied by their families, and the fourth for single women. There was no furniture in the rooms and the prisoners slept on the dirt floor covered with straw. A separate building was used by soldiers and officers. Between each two *etapes* there were the half-way buildings known as *polu-etapes*—here the guards were changed. The *etapes* were designed to provide a day's rest for the prisoners, however, in spring and autumn, when the mud made the road a morass after a downpour, they sometimes had to spend whole weeks at the *etapes*.

The ritual of transmitting the prisoners by the guards of the neighbouring *polu-etapes* was quite characteristic—the prisoners were to be counted, this was done by two soldiers. One of them counted aloud, the other touched the chest of each convict repeating numbers after his colleague. This procedure was known as *proverka*.

Each prisoner was given a long grey or black woolen overcoat, coarse trousers and a shirt, a visorless cap, and a pair of shoes. The final destinations of the prisoners could be read on the triangle-shaped patches in yellow, blue or red placed on their coats. The clothes were meant for the six-month-long march. In winter the convicts were given extra shirts, coats and shoes and apart from this, furhats, gloves, woolenstockings and so-called *berlaches*.¹⁰ Noblemen among the prisoners had the right to transport their bundles on wagons, others had to carry them on their backs.

The march continued irrespective of the weather (with the exception of the above-mentioned spring and autumn breaks). When the convoy had to march for two days, the rest was organized in the open air, the prisoners slept on the ground by camp fires.

The convoy had its own internal organization. The prisoners used to choose from among themselves a selfgovernment of six people. Its head was the *starosta* (chief), then there was the second

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 21; Matraś, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

starosta, 2 *maidanshchiki* who were authorized to buy paper, candles, sugar, tea, etc. for the whole party (from the funds collected by the prisoners), and finally 2 prisoners responsible for water supplies for the convoy.

Not all exiles could stand the hardships of this march. Many suffered from contagious diseases and individual ailments. The sick were either left behind at the *etapes*, or piled into wagons. They were taken care of by other prisoners. The dead were handed over to the authorities in the nearest village who were obliged to bury them, and the convoy continued its march.¹¹

Those who could afford it were allowed to hire wagons from peasants along the road. The penal settlers and women were entitled to this privilege.¹²

Both ordinary criminals and politicals were transported together in the convoy. Theoretically, they were to have overcoats in different colours, but this distinction was not thoroughly observed. Some participants of the Polish uprisings of 1831 and 1863 wore the uniforms of criminals, and it was up to prison commanders in Europe whether they were shaved as criminals or non-criminals.¹³ There were usually violent conflicts between these two groups which most often broke out at the *etapes*.¹⁴ If such conflicts threatened the order in the convoy, the guards intervened. The guilty, and often the innocent as well, were severely punished. Sometimes even the entire convoy was punished. Agaton Giller in his *Prisoner's Trip to Siberia*

¹¹ Matraś, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

¹² A private carriage was used by P. Wilczopolska and J. Rzażewska during their trip to Siberia. They were sentenced in the case of the participants of Sz. Konarski's plot. See E. Felińska, *Wspomnienia z podróży do Syberii i pobytu w Berezowie (Reminiscences from my Journey to Siberia and Stay in Berezovo)*, Wilno 1852, p. 11.

¹³ Matraś (*op. cit.*, p. 28) tells the story of Ignacy Staniewski of Werbkowice who was sent to Siberia for having been visited by Polish insurgents. There was no formal court verdict. It turned out that it was not Staniewski, but another prisoner, Staszewski, who was sentenced to forced colonization. When he wanted to clarify the matter, Staniewski heard from the prison commander that he did not care who marched.

¹⁴ Sometimes there were psychopats in the columns, and this brought about a great havoc, in which the criminals attacked the politicals. See Matraś, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

in 1854¹⁵ describes this kind of mass penalty. All members of the convoy were lashed although it took all day to carry out the punishment. Particularly severe punishments awaited those who organized escapes. For the first one they were put to prison for a year, received 400 lashes and finally were sent to the army; for the second attempt there were 500 stick strokes and penal service in the army; for the third 20 years of hard labour and 4000 sticks. In the last case, in fact, the real sentence was death because it was hardly possible to survive this disciplinary action. However, even this was not the most severe punishment. Rufin Piotrowski in his *Memoirs from Siberia* describes in detail the execution of Father Sierociński, Drużdżałowski, Jabłoński, Szokalski and a Russian conspirator Medelin. They were all sentenced to 7000 sticks for organizing an “uprising” in Siberia. Their arms were tied to a rifle carried by 2 soldiers who were leading the convicts along 2 lines of soldiers. Each soldier held a rod with which he hit the convict. According to the rules, soldiers were not allowed to move the elbow too far from the side and to step forward. This limitation weakened the blows. The thickness of the rod was also defined by the rules. Three rods, of the kind used for the punishment, were to fill in the barrel, quite big, of the contemporary rifle. Father Sierociński managed to walk once between the two lines, during the second time he was being carried in a sled, the following 3000 blows fell on the dead body. The execution was being carried out till the order was fully performed.¹⁶

There were numerous other examples of such mindless cruelty in convicts' travel accounts. Stanisław Matraś in his *Trip through Russian Etapes* (p. 94) tells the story of a ten-year-old child who, persuaded by his mother, had set fire to the house of their hateful neighbour. The prisoner was given the regular uniform and was handcuffed, two armed soldiers escorted him to the court room, although just one could carry him in his arms. Even very old people

¹⁵ During his trip A. Giller made detailed notes, they were taken from him in Kazan. His *Podróż więźnia etapami do Syberii w roku 1854* was published in Leipzig in 1856. Part III of this work was lost in 1863.

¹⁶ R. Piotrowski, *Pamiętniki z pobytu na Syberii (Memoirs from Siberia)*, Poznań 1860–1861, vol. 3, pp. 23–31.

were sentenced to hard labour and marched to Siberia in chains.¹⁷ In the prison of Moscow, the iron cage constructed in the 18th century for Pugachov was on display.¹⁸ This was a peculiar object—the convict could not move in it at all, and he had had to stand during the entire trip from Siberia to Moscow.

Contrary to severe rules and cruel penalties on the part of the authorities, the convict convoy was treated with sympathy by local people along the road. Although Russian propaganda presented Poles as sinners threatening the Holy Orthodox Church and the Good Tsar, and though in western *guberniyas* and in Moscow the crowds reviled against them,¹⁹ they were treated warmly and sympathetically further on. In Kazan, as the Reverend Stanisław Matraś reminiscences, university students used to throw money and bread through the prison windows. Matraś wrote:

The Russians and Siberians who live along the Siberian highway have a beautiful custom which I must mention. When the convict party is approaching a village or town, a soldier starts to beat the drum. [...] Hearing the signal, the villagers are leaving their homes and are waiting with the alms for the prisoners. [...] Many times I saw the convicts load 2 or 3 wagons of bread in big and rich villages. In a word, I have to admit that Russians and Siberians living along the Siberian tract are very compassionate and understanding for the convicts and help them as they can.²⁰

Other authors of Siberian travel accounts are of the same opinion.²¹ The warm-heartedness of the local people did not manifest

¹⁷ Another priest, Onufry Syrwid, an old man of 60, marched with Matraś. He had been sentenced for 12 years of hard labour. See Matraś, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 82.

¹⁹ One of the prisoners in Matraś's column put some better clothes on when they were marching through Moscow. This provoked a characteristic remark of a Russian merchant: "Look! His Highness! General Garibaldi, son of a bitch has fallen into our hands" (*ibidem*, p. 67). Giller also quoted a characteristic example of tsarist propaganda at work: "What, asked a certain Russian, aren't the Poles revolting against us? The French will come and you'll probably join them and fight against us side by side trying to destruct the Holy Cross... If you are Christians, why are you revolting?" (*Podróż*, pp. 142–143).

²⁰ Matraś, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

²¹ There are a lot of examples quoted by Piotrowski who experienced this warm-heartedness when he had difficulties during his escape. He was put up in secluded houses, invited to dinners, and an unknown hunter saved his life when he was lost in a forest.

itself only on the way to Siberia, but also in Siberia. Obviously, only in the case of the forced settlers who were to live among Siberians. The fate of the people sentenced to hard labour or penal service in the army depended upon their guards and officers, who were sometimes human, sometimes cynical and cruel.

One should remember that most Russians living in Siberia were also convicts or convicts' descendants, that a great number of Russian liberals and revolutionists, who were all against autocracy, spent long years in exile. "All these noble-minded Russians, wrote Rufin Piotrowski, gladly meet Poles for whom they feel deep sympathy."²²

Ewa Felińska in her *Reminiscences from my Journey...* presents the characteristic scene of the arrival at her destination. In the river port she was met by a local official who gave her a tour round Berezovo so that she could choose a house where she would like to live and then he asked the house owners to look after her. Ewa Felińska reminisced:

The host and hostess were very kind and sympathetic. They looked after us and treated us not like paid servants, but like friends and helpers. With great care, they prepared a room for us and made it as comfortable as they could, which was very comfortable indeed.

When, after 3 years in Berezovo, she was sent to Saratov she could not help her sorrow:

When I was departing, I wished it was possible to find such simple, frank and kind people in another country and under different circumstances.²³

Obviously, not all forced settlers were received so warmly. If they had no financial means, they had to look for a job and try various occupations, for which, taking into account their social background, they were not prepared. In big towns and cities they often became private tutors of French and music, sometimes they managed to establish their own business:²⁴ in villages they earned their living as

²² Piotrowski, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, p. 8.

²³ Felińska, *op. cit.*, pp. 72, 328.

²⁴ J. I. Kraszewski's daughter and her husband were deported to Usal near Irkutsk in 1863. Their child died on the way. In Siberia twins were born, their mother made a living by baking and selling bread. After the death of her husband, she decided to return to Poland, but she died on the way in 1871. See W. Danek, *Józef Ignacy Kraszewski*, Warszawa 1976, pp. 234-235.

hunters, hired workers etc. Sometimes, if it was possible, they worked on their own farms.²⁵ Finally, there was a large group of Polish settlers who joined various scientific expeditions organized to investigate Siberia's natural resources, or to make researches into the culture and languages of its aboriginal population. In such a way a great deal of them succeeded in turning their banishment into the great adventure of their lives.²⁶ Polish convicts contributed significantly to the exploration of Siberia, and to Russian geography, geology, ethnology and history.²⁷

The most severe punishment was *katorga* (hard labour). The treatment of the convicts depended upon the caprice of their warders. They were subjected to slave work and mercilessly exploited. The convicts worked over 11 hours a day and received only 3 roubles and 2 poods of flour (about 15 pounds) per month. They were supposed not only to live on this, but also to buy their clothes.²⁸ All of them waited for mercy, that is, for changing their sentence to colonization. For many this dream never came true.

In the above reconstruction of the trip to Siberia, based on travel accounts, especially on Matraś's *Trip through Russian Etapes*,²⁹ Ewa Felińska's *Reminiscences from my Journey...*,³⁰ Agaton Giller's *A Prisoner's Trip to Siberia*, and Rufin Piotrowski's *Memoirs from Siberia*, we have not taken into account the evolution of the deporta-

²⁵ Piotrowski (*op. cit.*, vol. 3, p. 3) reminiscences that near Semipalatinsk there were one or two entire Polish villages. Giller (*Opisanie*, vol. 1, p. 59) writes about another village, Vierkh Chiti, where 4 Poles established and ran a farm.

²⁶ This was the way of Giller; E. Żmijewski travelled through the steppes of Kuytun (*Sceny z życia koczującego – The Scenes from Nomadic Life*, Warszawa 1859) and J. Kowalewski travelled in Mongolia and China.

²⁷ Among the outstanding explorers of Siberia the following should be mentioned: Józef Kowalewski, Benedykt Dybowski, Aleksander Czekanowski, Jan Czerski, Edward Piekarski, Waclaw Sieroszewski, Bronisław Piłsudski, and many others.

²⁸ Piotrowski, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 207.

²⁹ The oft-quoted *Podróż* by Matraś is not very well known by the historians of Siberian deportations.

³⁰ E. Felińska undoubtedly did not know that she owed her transfer from Berezovo to Saratov to a desperate act of her daughter who threw herself under the wheels of the carriage of Tsar Nicolas II shouting: "Your Majesty, save my mother." See S. Chołoniowski, *Opis podróży kijowskiej odbytej w 1840 (The Account of my Trip to Kiev in 1840)*, Lwów 1886.

tion system as a tsarist state institution. We have only described the state which existed between 1831 and 1863, that is, between the November and January uprisings in Poland, when *zsyłka* became a mass phenomenon. The trip to Siberia in a wagon, known as *kibitka*, the image very vivid in Polish literature, was, as a matter of fact, an exception. The real trip to Siberia was most often an incessant march, not infrequently, of 3000 to 4000 miles.

Who were the people who set out for this journey? Polish conspirators, insurgents captured during the uprisings, peasants and petty nobility forcedly recruited to the army, but also crowds of casual people. During the uprisings and the subsequent repressions, whole Polish families were being sent to Siberia from Lithuania, Podolia and Volynia. A complaint of revengeful neighbours or peasants was enough to sent people beyond the Urals.³¹ Maksymilian Jatowt in his *Memoirs* presents the circumstances under which he was arrested.

It was in 1846. I was barely nineteen and had just left school. One day, in the Vilno Hotel in Warsaw, sitting at the table with the hotel's proprietress and her cousin Nowakowski, I was telling the story of Mr Karpiński from Lublin, Gross, Szymanowski and others who had all been sent to Siberia and whom I had seen off, with tears in my eyes, on the left bank of the Vistula. I was also talking about certain details concerning the arrestment of the court executive officers Zarzycki and Nowakowski, who had been cruelly beaten by Russian soldiers for alleged connections with Father Ściegienny. As we were talking about all this, a young, elegant man came to our table. He was introduced to me as Brzeżański, a good boy whose father had emigrated from Poland, and who would help me to become *en facon*. [...] Brzeżański was very kind to me. He liked me a great deal. [...] In a word, he visited me all too often, loved me a lot and very cleverly made me lose my money. Finally, it was high time to say good-bye. I told Brzeżański that I was leaving Warsaw and going home to the country, perhaps that very evening. I came to my hotel room, lay down on the sofa and started reading a paper. Suddenly, the door opened and some modest looking civilians, with suspicious physiognomies entered the room under the orders of the police inspector Grass, a favourite of Paszkiewicz. All this happened in a wink. I turned round and noticed that the same thing had happened to Nowakowski.³²

Jatowt was charged with "bad influence on others," "ill will," and "the plan to escape abroad." He was sentenced to penal service in

³¹ Matraś, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

³² J. Gordon [M. Jatowt], *Moskwa. Pamiętniki Polaka z Korony, obywatela Stanów Zjednoczonych (Moscow. Memoirs of a Pole from the Kingdom of Poland, a Citizen of the United States)*, Paris 1861, pp. 7-9.

the army, but he managed to escape at the beginning of his trip and got first to the Austrian part of Poland, and then to Silesia where, in Mikołów, in the Wężyks family estate, he was given a passport and money by Cyprian Norwid. In Paris, under Norwid's name, he worked in Prince Czartoryski's chancellery. He was to transmit Czartoryski's secret documents to the Russian Embassy, where he also returned Norwid's passport. In 1848, while trying to get to the vicinity of Poznań, he had to cross the Russian border and was then captured and sent to the army in the Urals. When he was transferred to the Crimea, he escaped and ended up in the United States, where he became an American citizen. During the January uprising he came back to Europe where he eventually settled in the Austrian part of Poland.

Not all details from Jatowt's biography are clear and sufficiently confirmed in historiography—he was an adventurer and megalomaniac. However, it is unquestionable that he was a prisoner and fugitive twice. Escapes are another interesting aspect of travels in Siberia. In the end of the 18th century Maurycy August Beniowski's *Pamiętniki (Memoirs)* were very popular in Europe. They were mostly devoted to the author's 2 escapes—the first unsuccessful one from Kazan, and the second one, with a group of other convicts aboard the ship "Saint Peter and Saint Paul," from Bolsheretsko in Kamchatka, along the shores of Japan and China, to Macau. Jatowt's 2 escapes described in his *Memoirs*³³ point to certain affinities of the 2 characters. The rigid system of the tsarist deportations created the chance of escape for dare-devils who did not care about adversities. As is usually the case in such situations, one never knows what is true and what is fiction in their accounts. The fact that both Beniowski and Jatowt were unaccountable, that it was impossible to foresee their plans was their great advantage.

However, even this hermetic and stable system was not without leaks. It could be overcome through perspicacious planning and

³³ Apart from the quoted *Pamiętniki* which tell the story of his escape in 1848, M. Jatowt wrote: *Soldat. Nowe pamiętniki (A Soldier. New Memoirs)*, Brussels–Leipzig 1864; „Zapiski z powstania 1863–1864” (Notes from the Uprising of 1863–1864), *Mrówka*, 1869, and later separately as *Obrázky z Galicji (Pictures from Galicia)*, Sanok 1869; *Podróże po szerokim świecie (Memoirs from Travels in the Large World)*, Lipsk 1871.

precise action. This was the very method chosen by Rufin Piotrowski. He prepared his escape down to the smallest detail. He worked in Tara in an alcohol distillery. It is important to remember that he had been sentenced to hard labour, so he was under stricter control than the settlers. He arrived in Siberia in 1844, and escaped in 1846 through Irkutsk, Great Ustiug, Archangel, St Petersburg, Riga to Konigsberg. First of all, he realized that a group escape could not be successful, then he prepared several possible routes. The first one led from Tara near Irkutsk to Okhotsk, from where there was a chance of getting by sea to North America; the second might lead southwards through the plains of Khirgizia to Bucharria, and then through Persia to India or Turkey; the third route ran southwestwards to the Urals and then to the Caspian Sea and the Circassians; the fourth along the Volga to the Urals and then along the Don to the Black Sea. The above four routes seemed unworkable, so Piotrowski chose the fifth one leading westwards to Tobolsk and across the Pechora to Sweden. However, even the last plan turned out to be unfeasible. Travelling westwards, he kept changing his itinerary according to circumstances. His only chance in this bold undertaking was to disappear in a crowd, to become just like his surroundings. Hence Piotrowski, who made his trip mostly on foot, transformed himself into a petty merchant on his way to the market in the nearest town, or into a *bohomolets*, that is, a pious pilgrim on his way to the Solovetski monasteries on the White Sea, and finally into a pedlar buying pig hairs for a rich dealer. In this way, he reached Latvia and decided to cross the Prussian border near Mitava. He crossed it in the apparently most improbable place—almost in front of the windows of a watchman's cabin.

His once popular *Memoirs from Siberia* are nowadays quite forgotten, although their value, not only documentary, but also literary, makes them one of the best memoirs of the 19th century. Immediately after their publication in Polish, they were translated into English, Danish, German, Dutch, Swedish, French and Russian (Norrköping 1863), and became very popular throughout Europe. The appreciation the book enjoyed might be illustrated by the Norwegian writer's, Knut Hamsun's, declaration that it was the most important book he had ever read.³⁴

³⁴ Kuczyński, *op. cit.*, p. 270.

3

Life in Siberia etched enduring memories in the convicts' minds. It was the land of their sufferings, but after regaining freedom, they were filled with specific nostalgia for Siberia. Karol Baliński, sentenced to death in 1839 and then sent to Ishim instead, wrote in 1849:

After all Siberian nature is not without charm. As everywhere else, God spread out beauty over that land. Everything there is immense—vast as the steppe of Ishim, as the so-called hungry steppe. In winter it looks like an infinite sea of ice with a hurricane passing over it from time to time—white as a ghost, and as a ghost terrible. And it grows larger and larger, mightier and mightier, spreads its arms wider and wider till it reaches the wooden town and makes a dash at it blustering and roaring and finally covers all its streets with the snow. In the old days I used to watch all that without seeing anything. You know that it is possible to watch without actually seeing. I could not notice anything because between my eyes and Siberia there were my country, my brothers, my school friends and prison mates.³⁵

A similar lyrical apostrophe is to be found in Rufin Piotrowski's *Memoirs*:

Oh Siberia, the land of winds and ice, of tears and complaints, why do I think and dream of you so often? After all, neither fetters nor mines can tempt me, and your gold is not alluring for me. For some time you were my grave, and for thousands of my compatriots you are the eternal grave. [...] This is already our third generation who leaves their bones in your vast wilderness, and a great number of us did not even bequeath any recollection (vol. 3, p. 1).

Among the paradoxes of the human psyche there is this very phenomenon that great suffering and painful experiences, which leave permanent imprints in the human memory, are later accompanied in reminiscences by a sense of their greatness. The characteristic statement of Agaton Giller that “beyond Lake Baykal the traveller is freer than in Europe,”³⁶ is undoubtedly an example of such a paradox.

This feeling of freedom was created by vast open spaces, ominous but beautiful nature, and finally by the warm-heartedness of the Siberians. It was also unusual to meet so many ethnic groups, such a great variety of cultures, regions and customs of the native peoples. All that made European clichés fall to pieces, and pointed to their limitations and hypocrisy. Ewa Felińska, looking from this very

³⁵ K. Baliński, *Pisma (Works)*, Poznań 1849, pp. XV–XVI.

³⁶ Giller, *Pamiętniki*, p. 58.

perspective, found in Siberia "the best understood freedom of life,"³⁷ and Józef Kowalewski fulfilled his spiritual needs studying the culture of the Buriats:

The trip across the Urals places in front of your eyes lofty images which cannot be rendered in words. Nature, wild nature unveils here all her beauties. I walked today for 20 miles from 2 a.m., the most beautiful hours of early morning, and enjoyed splendid views. I really regret not being a poet or a painter. I felt so unusually enthusiastic that I lost the sense of distance. Our wagon rolled over ravines and steep slopes for over 60 miles. On the highest summit I shook the European dust off my shoes. Farewell my friends! I am in Asia, a real Asian.³⁸

Romanticism was born out of the protest against the main directions of European civilization, which were, for the generation of romantics, defined by the recent historical events: the French Revolution and the long period of Napoleonic wars. The above-mentioned ambivalence in the reactions of our Polish convicts has its sources in the feeling of oppression with Europe. The very mechanism of deportations to Siberia was a morbid creation of European civilization. Europe, not Siberia, was to be blamed for the fact that vast steppes of Asia became the land of misery.

In the first half of the 19th century memoirs and travel accounts from Siberia created two contradictory pictures of Siberia. One was made up of all tragedies and anguish of the exiles and assumed the shape of hell on earth, the other one, a colourful mosaic, reveals the difficult beauty of severe nature, the variety of local peoples and their cultures. Later on, literature recorded in the public consciousness only the first of these two versions. However, in the memoirs and travel accounts of the exiles there are two distinct Siberias: one infernal and the other truly admirable. The latter one can be found in the Polish contribution to the scientific exploration of Siberia.

These two attitudes were characteristic of Polish travels to Siberia from their very beginning. Poles were in Siberia long before the partition of Poland. According to historians, Polish travels to Siberia, except the first one, were all compulsory.³⁹ Old travel accounts

³⁷ Felińska, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

³⁸ J. Kowalewski, „Wyjątki z listów” (Excerpts from Letters), *Tygodnik Petersburski*, 1830, no. 18. See also Kuczyński, *op. cit.*, p. 220.

³⁹ Sometimes Poles who were under the threat of arrest left for Siberia voluntarily. This enabled them to avoid the hardships of the regular march to Siberia, and also to travel freely around Siberia, such a solution was chosen by W. Sieroszewski among others.

were written either by prisoners of war, or by people kidnapped from border towns and villages during Muscovite raids into our territories. Only the very first account from 1215, which implies the participation of a Pole, is different in character. This is the report of the legation sent by Pope Innocent IV to the ruler of Mongolia called Guyack. A Franciscan Giovanni de Plano Carpini was commissioned with this legacy. In Breslau Benedictus, called the Pole, joined the party.⁴⁰ The story and report itself was reminded by Michał Wiszniewski in his *History of Polish Literature*.⁴¹ This fact can be assumed to be the beginning of the historical reflection on Polish presence in Asia. This reflection developed during the Romantic period and was somehow parallel to the rapid growth of the travel account's popularity. Later it appeared in numerous editions of old and new memoirs, travel books, and also in the first attempts at synthetic works.⁴²

The report of Carpini's mission, presented at European royal courts, was focused not so much on the journey, but rather on the description of Guyack's capital, his army and political plans. It is difficult to call this report a travel account, but it is the earliest presentation of mysterious and sinister Asia.

The next Polish account from Siberia, *Kronika Polaka (A Pole's Chronicle)*, comes from the 16th century and is an anonymous text, probably written by a Pole who escaped from a Muscovite prison to Khan Kutchum in Siberia.⁴³ After the khan's defeat in 1598, the anonymous author returned to Moscow where he wrote his relation.

In the 17th century, during the Polish-Muscovite wars a great number of Poles were taken prisoner and the number of accounts significantly increased. The first Pole who left a description of Siberia and her peoples was Adam Kamiński-Dłużyk. He was taken prisoner on the Basia river and then sent beyond the Urals. His "Diariusz więźnia moskiewskiego miast i miejsc" (A Muscovite Pri-

⁴⁰ Janik, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

⁴¹ *Historia literatury polskiej*, Kraków 1928, vol. 2, pp. 208–233.

⁴² Giller was motivated by such intentions. Between 1855 and 1858, and in 1860 he travelled beyond Lake Baykal and collected materials about Polish exiles. He checked a lot of names not only of exiles and convicts, but also of officials in Russian administration.

⁴³ See Kuczyński, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

soner's Account of Towns and Places)⁴⁴ was published in 1874 in the collection *Warta* and was not known by the Romantics. His work gives the earliest description of villages, customs and beliefs of the Khanty and Mansi. For ethnologists his work is an important early source which makes it possible to reconstruct the original state of the culture of Siberian peoples before the growing immigration from Europe.⁴⁵ Kamieński-Dłużyk came across the Tartars and other ethnic groups in Siberia when he reached distant areas up to the Sea of Okhotsk.

In the beginning of the 18th century Ludwik Sienicki, Colonel of the Royal army, collected his reminiscences from Siberia. He and his brother General Sienicki were captured by the Russians in 1707. Ludwik Sienicki was sent to Tobolsk and later to Yakutsk where he stayed till 1722. After coming back to Poland he published his reminiscences in 1754 in Wilno. His book was entitled in the manner which was characteristic of that epoch: *Dokument osobliwego miłosierdzia boskiego cudownie z kalwińskiej sekty pewnego sługę i chwalcę swego do Kościoła Chrystusowego pociągający z wykładem niektórych kontrowersji zachodzących między nauką Kościoła Powszechnego Katolickiego, a podaniem wymyślonym rozumem ludzkim luterskiej, kalwińskiej, greckiej i innych w tej księdze wyrażonych i namienionych sekt, i z wspomnieniem o mniej znanych Moskiewskiego Państwa krainach w pogańskich błędach jeszcze zostających, dla duchownego pożytku ludzi w różnych sektach od jedności Powszechnego Kościoła odpadłych, częścią z uporu, częścią z niewiadomości żyjących, w druku pierwszy raz wychodzący* (*The Document of God's Peculiar Mercy which Miraculously Saved a God's Servant and Praiser from the Calvinistic Sect and Returned Him to the Church of Christ, together with a Lecture on Certain Controversies between the Teachings of the Holy Catholic Church and the Inventions Created by the Members of the Lutheran, Calvinist, Greek and Other Sects Mentioned in the Present Book, and with Memoirs from the Less Known Lands of the Muscovite State which Still Persist in Pagan Errors. All This Published for the First*

⁴⁴ „Diariusz” was found by Father A. Maryański in Głębnice. See Kuczyński, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

⁴⁵ Great ravages were brought about to Siberia when the Russian Orthodox Church started to convert the natives, especially those connected with the religion of shamans. There were several mass suicides at that time.

Time in Print for the Moral Benefit of People Living, Partly out of Obstinacy, Partly out of Ignorance, in Various Sects outside the Universal Church). Despite the title the book does not belong to devotional literature, it was probably meant to protect the author from being suspected of advocating paganism. The exclusive and presumptuous culture of the Polish nobility, through the publication of *Dokument...*, came directly to contact with another world in which it could hardly believe.

Sienicki traveled along the track of the Siberian exiles which was being established at that time. Through Perm and Vierkhoturie he reached Tobolsk, Ilimsk and Yakutsk. On the way he met the Khants and Samoyeds (Nentsy), then the Buriats and Yakuts. He also mentioned the Koriaks and Chukchis and Kamchatkadals.

From Kamiński-Dłużyk's *Diary* we know that he did not travel alone but with 30 other fellow-sufferers. Ludwik Sienicki also marched in a similar way. However, the groups were not very large. The massive Polish columns of exiles heading for Siberia started only in 1768 after the defeat of the Confederation of Bar. By order of Catherine II, 10000 Poles were sent to Siberia at that time. They were branded like criminals by cutting off their ears or noses,⁴⁶ and, like their successors, they went to Siberia on foot. The *etape* buildings were not ready at that time. Those 10000 exiles were partly sent to Siberian garrisons, and partly were forced to settle in Siberia. Most of them remained in Siberia for life. They assimilated to Siberians and adopted their customs. As Rufin Piotrowski over-generalizes: "All of them, without any exceptions, adopted the Orthodox religion and Siberian customs, in a word, they became Siberians."⁴⁷ Wandering beyond Lake Baykal, Agaton Giller met one of those old exiles. This is what he wrote about him:

There is another Pole living here, I cannot recall his name, who was sent here for an unknown reason last century. He is now over 100 years old and became a real Siberian.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ People remembered about the cruelties of Kretchnikov. Piotrowski wrote: "Didn't Kretchnikov cut noses and ears off, didn't he skin or cut off arms? Didn't he cut out navels to fasten them to trees, and didn't he then drive his unfortunate victims until, heartily laughed at, they threw out all their intestines and fell dead? I really believe all these stories!" (*Pamiętniki*, vol. 3, p. 3).

⁴⁷ *L.c.*

⁴⁸ Giller. *Opisanie*. vol. 1. p. 3.

The memory of those first exiles on the massive scale was very vivid among the Poles in Siberia and in Poland in the first half of the 19th century. It was a part of the legend or myth created in romantic literature. It manifested itself in works of Mickiewicz, Słowacki and other romantics.

There is only one important relation coming from the circles of the Confederation of Bar. Its author, Karol Lubicz Chojecki, was taken prisoner by the Russians in Kraków during the defense and siege of the Wawel Hill Castle. He was incorporated into the Russian army corps stationed in Omsk. As a Russian soldier he took part in suppressing Pugatchov's revolt and then was sent to fight against the rebellious Tartars on the Sea of Azov. He managed to escape from there to Poland. His *Pamięć dzieł polskich, podróż i niepomyślny sukces Polaków* (*The Memory of Polish Works, a Journey and the Adverse Success of the Poles*) was published in Warsaw in 1789 and could have been the beginning of the Siberian legend in Polish literature. Chojecki's work is also important from another point of view: the author made its subject the account of sufferings and national tragedies and thus started a specific literary form devoted to the martyrdom of the Polish nation. This form was to appear later in other Siberian memoirs and travel accounts.

Maurycy Beniowski's *Memoirs*, written in French and popular throughout Europe, also originated in the circles of the Confederation of Bar, but their character is quite different. Polish translation was published in Warsaw in 1787 after Poland had lost independence. Beniowski's *Memoirs* can be easily classified as an example of the convention *les aventures prodigues* which was very popular in the 18th century, and in which the reader's attention is focused solely on the uniqueness of the main hero's adventures. The tragedy of the Confederation of Bar did not have an optimistic denouement and Beniowski's case, through its exceptionality, contradicted the public feelings.

The publication of *Dziennik podróży Józefa Kopcia przez całą wzdłuż Azję, lotem do portu Ochocka, Oceanem przez Wyspy Kurylskie do Niższej Kamczatki, a stamtąd na powrót do tegoż portu na psach i jeleniach* (*Józef Kopeć's Trip across Asia to the Port of Okhotsk, across the Ocean to the Kuryl Islands and to Lower Kamchatka, and from there to the Same Port with a Team of Deer and Dogs*) was a

great event in the Romantic era. Józef Kopec, a general in the National Rising of 1794, was incorporated into the tsarist army after the second partition of Poland. At the news of the Rising, he managed to move his soldiers from around Kiev and joined Kościuszko. Injured during the battle of Maciejowice he was taken prisoner. He was pronounced a deserter, deprived of his name and secretly sent to Kamchatka as a nameless prisoner. He was released by Tsar Paul I in 1797 and came back to Poland where he died in 1827. His *Dziennik* was written around 1810. Before it was published as a whole, a fragment, entitled "Customs in Kamchatka," had been published in the periodical *Gazeta Literacka*.⁴⁹

Mickiewicz, enchanted by Józef Kopec's *Dziennik*, devoted to this work two lectures (XIII and XXIV) in Collège de France,⁵⁰ seeing in it the beginning of Polish literature about Siberia. Kopec certainly was not a great stylist, but his book is very consistent, simple and honest. He was primarily interested in Siberian nature, native population and immigrants, he made notes of the names of the Polish exiles he met and described a great deal of towns and villages. We may say that there is no definite subject of his *Diary*, there is rather a great mess of subject matter. In general, however, he created a very true picture of those unusual lands. Let us quote as an example just one of his characteristic descriptions:

We had to go through the woods and marshes from Irkutsk to Tobolsk for about 2000 miles. Bridges are still built here of round tree trunks, the cart jolted mercilessly along the road. Later I entered a vast open space called the steppe of Barabin. Views are incomparably beautiful here, the soil is very rich, almost entirely covered with red grass and white salt which is deposited in the ground. Villages are scarce but very rich. Their inhabitants are exiles and their offspring. There are countless lakes and rivers full of fish, the lakes are surrounded by poplars which look as if planted here by a human hand. There are a lot of flowers and sweet smelling herbs. The lakes are the home of various species of birds; the most common is the bird very much like our swan—they are black, spotted birds with big throats. They swim in long lines in large flocks and joining their feet they drive fish to the bank. Then, fluttering their wings and screeching very loudly, they swallow the fish at waterside. There are also a lot of white pewits which sometimes may turn night into day. Their wings are of unusual size.

⁴⁹ J. Kopec, „Obyczaje kamczackie,” *Gazeta Literacka*, 1821, no. 6. *Dziennik podróży* was published by an outstanding historian and traveller Edward Raczyński.

⁵⁰ A. Mickiewicz, *Literatura słowiańska (Slavonic Literature)*, [in:] *Dziela*, vol. 10, Warszawa 1955, pp. 284–303.

From this point it is possible to see very high hills decorated by nature with trees. There are old graves scattered here and there and sometimes one might find in them quite large pieces of ivory, big statues and a great deal of old weapons. However, nobody knows anything about local history and traditions.⁵¹

During his long trip Kopeć met the Tartars, Buriats, Evenki, Yakuts, Ainas, Kamchatkdals, Koriaks and Chukchas. He gave their short characteristics. He was interested in the ways they found food, in their clothes, shaman rituals, and finally in the rules of the trade between Russian merchants and the natives.

General Kopeć's concise, snapshot-like descriptions make up a very rich, informative picture of Siberia. In comparison to all our previous relations, this is the fullest and most valuable image.

Almost at the same time as General Kopeć, Faustyn Ciecierski, a Dominican from Wilno, travelled in Siberia. He opens a long list of Polish conspirators driven along Siberian tracks. Just after the fall of the 1794 National Rising of Kościuszko, the Union of Polish Patriots was founded in Lithuania. It was soon discovered by the tsarist authorities. In 1797 arrests were made and Faustyn Ciecierski was sent through the *etapes* of Tobolsk, Tomsk and Irkutsk to a mining village called Gorna Kantora. His sentence was forced labour, but after some time it was changed to forced colonization. This was how Ciecierski's work, published in Lwów in 1865 by August Bielowski, entitled: *Pamiętnik księdza Ciecierskiego, przeora dominikanów wileńskich, zawierający jego i towarzyszków jego przygody doznane w Sybirze w latach 1797–1801* (*The Memoirs of Father Ciecierski, the Head of the Dominicans of Wilno, Containing His and His Comrades' Adventures in Siberia between 1797 and 1801*) came to being.

Ciecierski's *Memoirs*, just like Karol Lubicz Chojecki's *Memory*, is focused on the fate of Poles deported to Siberia. Ciecierski is a keen observer, delineates vivid portraits not only of his fellow sufferers, but also of tsarist officials, settlers and natives. It may be well to stress that Ciecierski gave the description of the work conditions in Siberian mines at that time, which is one of very few ones in Siberian memoirs and travel accounts.

Transl. by Zofia Lesińska

⁵¹ J. Kopeć. *Dziennik podróży*. Wrocław 1837, p. 166.