

A CROSS-CULTURAL STUDY OF RURAL AND URBAN LANDSCAPES IN RUSSIAN AND BRITISH POETRY OF THE ROMANTIC AGE

Michele Russo and Mariantonietta Fiore
(*University of Foggia, Italy*)

Abstract

In this paper we mean to highlight the different depictions of rural and urban landscapes in the Romantic Age from a linguistic perspective in, respectively, Great Britain and Russia. The methodological approach of our analysis will consider Sapir's (2007) cross-cultural theories on the relationships between languages and cultures and, more in particular, Bakhtin's (1979) theories of stylization as, generally speaking, they lend themselves to interlinguistic and inter-textual comparison between the two areas.

Firstly, we will look at Wordsworth's and Clare's idyllic depictions of the British countryside in 'The Solitary Reaper' (1807) and 'The Harvest Morning' (1820). We then examine some Russian lines from Pushkin's 'Mednyj vsadnik' ('The Bronze Horseman') of 1833, a narrative poem recounting the flooding in Saint Petersburg in 1824. In particular, we will dwell on the lexis referring to the description of the Russian urban landscape and on the semantic value of nature as a destructive force. The methodological approach of this part of the work will employ Propp's (2003) theories about the supernatural elements of nature and their effects on man.

The paper, therefore, will underscore the contrasting aspects of rural and urban landscapes in the British and the Russian contexts by carrying out a contrastive linguistic analysis.

1. Introduction

Agricultural systems affect and 'forge' rural landscapes, as a result of plant cover in wide areas and anthropic activities. The production of food and fibres (i.e. primary goods and commodities) is vital to society and plays a major role in shaping the rural landscape. The protection and preservation of the landscape is, at the same time, of the utmost importance, as its anthropic 'modelling' exerts a significant influence on the

* *Pubblicazione realizzata con un contributo sui fondi del 5x1000 dell'IRPEF a favore dell'Università di Foggia, in memoria di Gianluca Montel (Published with a contribution from 5 x 1000 IRPEF funds in favour of the University of Foggia, in memory of Gianluca Montel).* Mariantonietta Fiore is responsible for the abstract and Section 1. Michele Russo is responsible for Sections 2, 3 and 4. Section 5 is a joint effort.

human quality of life, a multidimensional concept which includes emotional, relational, and social well-being. Rural landscapes represent the environment where many people live. The rooted cultural values and heritage of landscapes add their aesthetical *quid pluris*, thus enhancing the sense of well-being that they convey.

Set against this anthropological-agricultural background, our paper will focus on pastoral elements and their linguistic realization in British Romantic poetry. Given that the mutual influence between the rural landscape and the emerging urban landscape became more and more marked in Europe in the Romantic Age, we will discuss how poetry enhanced people's sensibility to the landscape and its relationship with the newly-born urban context in the decidedly different geographic and linguistic environment of Russia in the Romantic period. The anthropic changes to the landscape produced positive effects on people's ontological sphere in the British context. However, it was not the same in Russia, where the urban landscape was affected by the changes that humans introduced into their surrounding environment, the countryside.

The landscape is subject to both natural and human activities and interventions and can be considered a historical and cultural good for humanity, being endowed with aesthetic, environmental and heritage qualities. Each stakeholder affects the landscape and can influence farmers' needs and actions. We start from the claim made by Hauser *et al.* (2016), i.e. that farmers act as land managers and custodians of the rural landscape, thus becoming crucial actors, as they transform the landscape according to their personal needs and responses to external forces. Garrod *et al.* (2006) identify the landscape as one of the elements of the countryside's capital, whilst Tempesta (2014) correlates the landscape with people's need for culture and heritage. In this regard, the exterior aspect of the landscape plays an important role in human and social well-being; it is endowed with cultural, social and environmental values, within a holistic context (Jorgensen 2011).

Nowadays, the shape of rural landscapes is being redrawn, with visible effects on their configuration (Burnside 2015; Domon 2011). In the past, composite sets of techniques aimed at improving the quality of life and gave rise to charming landscapes (Agnoletti 2014). Moreover, it is not easy to define the landscape, as there are different descriptive approaches: the landscape as the land surface, or as part of the environment, or its visual aspect. Another reason why evaluating the landscape is complex is because the multiple dynamics and activities can shape it positively or negatively (Osti and Cicero 2018). The need to appreciate and recognize the variety of possible disciplinary approaches to landscape aesthetics is decisive and depends on different correlated epistemologies (Jorgensen 2011).

The European Landscape Convention and the European Common Agricultural Policies (CAP) 2014-2020 (European Commission-COM 2011) have recognized the rural landscape as a cultural product, highlighting and promoting a landscape-based approach as a new paradigm for a developmental model that can harmoniously integrate social, economic and environmental factors in space and time (Agnoletti 2014; OECD 2017). Landscapes and their representations in art are appreciated through human perceptions; they have always represented an important scenario which individuals have depicted by using the languages of art and literature. Indeed, landscapes can be considered as the stratification of footprints left by different civilizations (Agnoletti

2014), whose poetry has captured their communicative essence in a remarkable, complex mosaic.

The natural landscape has been turned, therefore, into a rural and, later, an anthropic landscape, where human manipulation has imprinted irreversible changes (Paul 2011), leading to new linguistic formulations and poetic diction. In fact, there have been significant changes in the ways the modified landscape has been interpreted from a linguistic stance. Through their use of language and their styles of writing, many *literati* have underscored the dangers caused by the radical alterations to nature. The introduction of new machines and the excessive exploitation of the land have shaped the 'layout' of the landscape but, at the same time, as Bresnihan (2013) observes, they have almost exhausted its natural resources, with the consequent spoilage of different areas, later used for grazing. Even the use of animals on farms to carry out the new agricultural techniques drew the poets' attention, seen as cruel methods applied by farmers to achieve their own goals (Washington 2014). Poets, using their figurative language, recognized the importance of the landscape as a source of food and, from a metaphorical point of view, as a socio-cultural symbol. The landscape was considered the *locus amoenus* where the harmonic balances of nature coexisted, albeit endangered by anthropic actions for the sake of an increase in production and in crop turnover.

Starting from these considerations, our work will focus on the mythicization of the rural landscape by two of the outstanding poets of the British Romantic period, Wordsworth and Clare, who expressed, as Harrison (2017) affirms, their concern with the destruction of nature. Moreover, owing to increased industrialization and the ever-growing mutual influence between the rural landscape and the urban landscape, our work will analyse how poetry exerted an influence on people's sensibility to the landscape and the relationship of the latter with the urban context in a completely different geographical setting – Saint Petersburg, Russia – in the Romantic period. The manipulation of the landscape had markedly different effects if we compare the British context with the Russian context: it was conceived as a consequence of the Industrial Revolution in Britain to meet the new technological requirements, whereas it had devastating effects on the Russian areas. In the light of this, our study will focus on the terminology used in poetry to depict the rural and urban landscapes, respectively in Great Britain and Russia.

2. Methodology

We start by analysing Wordsworth's 'The Solitary Reaper' (1807) and Clare's 'The Harvest Morning' (1820), which emphasize the idyllic depiction of the British countryside, while the effects of modernization and its noxious changes in the landscape are examined in Pushkin's 'Mednyj vsadnik'¹ ('The Bronze Horseman'). Its portrayal of the flood in Saint Petersburg exemplifies the fragile link between the city's urban landscape and its surrounding rural environment. The poet's semantic choices in describing the effects of the manipulation of nature on the emerging urban context disclose a threatening depiction of nature. On the Russian 'side', our analysis will focus on Push-

¹ Hereafter, the transliteration of the Russian words will follow the Anglo-Saxon transliteration system.

kin's work alone since, being a prose poem written in a historically important time for Russia, it embodies the socio-cultural background of the country in the 19th century. It is, therefore, an 'encyclopedic' masterpiece of Russian poetry, which sums up the main issues of the time. There have been previous comparative studies on Pushkin and British Romantic poets, such as Coleridge and Byron, concerning their similar gloomy view of nature (Volkova 2015; Wu 2018). However, cross-cultural and contrastive studies comparing Wordsworth's and Clare's Arcadian representations of nature and Pushkin's menacing depiction of it seem to be limited.

In our transition from the English setting to the Russian one, our methodological approach will consider Sapir's (2007) cross-cultural theories on the relationships between languages and cultures, and, more in particular, Bakhtin's (1979) theories of stylization as a means of carrying out an interlinguistic and intercultural analysis of two different geographical areas. According to Bakhtin, this theory accounts for the 'osmotic process' between two different cultural worlds, and is applied to our study to draw a contrastive and comparative analysis between the English context and the Russian context.

We will focus, in particular, on the sentences in English and Russian that lend themselves to a juxtaposition, thus enabling a discussion about the similarities and differences in the terminology employed by the English and Russian poets, to express similar ideological visions concerning different types of rural landscapes.

In order to pinpoint the supernatural elements of the natural disaster, the methodological approach of this part of the work will employ Propp's (2003) theories on fables and their symbols. In particular, Propp singles out the elements that are usually concealed behind the beauties of nature, disclosing their dangerous powers. In the light of this symbolic interpretation of nature and of the rural environment in general, Propp's concepts will be adopted to 'unearth' the lexis used to describe the deepest and most mysterious powers of nature, as well as the different images of nature in people's beliefs.

3. The English context

A perusal of Wordsworth's works reveals the poet's 'worship' of natural elements and the tautological presence of the itinerant poetic 'I'². Among the various poems devoted to nature, 'Three years she grew in sun and shower' (1800) shows the strength and the wonders of nature which, despite the changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution, still preserves its magic and the power to feed the poet's spirit. The poet depicts nature by means of semantically opposite lexis to emphasize nature's vital forces, as in "sun" and "shower", "earth" and "heaven", "law" and "impulse" (Wordsworth 2018: 168)³. The couplings of these terms testify to the constant battle between opposite natural elements, which enhances the vitality and the ever-changing aspects of the world.

Wordsworth addresses this poem to a certain Lucy, a girl who died young and who reminds him of his daughter who had died even younger. His nostalgia for the girl is

² In this regard, Nicholson (2015: 638) claims that "During the Romantic period, it is a historical contingency that the lyric 'I' preoccupied British poets more strongly than it had in previous parts of the eighteenth century, which in the main adopted a neoclassical focus that more explicitly rooted lyric in history and celebrated epic, epistolary, and occasional verse forms".

³ All subsequent quotations from *The Collected Poems of William Wordsworth* will refer to this edition.

amplified through the quintessential meaning of the words, insofar as it involves the vital aspect of the natural background characterized by the four natural elements: water, earth, air and fire. Each of the four elements is typified by particular lexical expressions in the text. The regenerative symbol of water, for instance, can be seen in lines such as “Three years she grew in sun and shower”, “She shall be sportive as the fawn / That wild with glee across the lawn / Or up the mountain springs”. The reference to water emphasizes its ‘reviving’ effects on the girl, the reinvigorating power of nature’s ‘lymph’. The earthly elements that appear in the following lines, like “The Girl in rock and plain / In earth and heaven, in glade and bower” and “While she and I together live / Here in this happy dell”, stand for the vital power of the soil and man’s protective shelter.

There are numerous references to air, such as “In earth and heaven”, “The floating clouds their state shall lend / To her, for her the willow bend”, “And hers shall be the breathing balm”, “Nor shall she fail to see / Even in the motions of the storm / A beauty that shall mould her form / By silent sympathy”, which show the ceaseless movement of the surrounding elements. Fire is recalled by the “sun” in the title, and by “[The Girl] / Shall feel an overseeing power / To kindle or restrain”. The combination of the natural elements belonging to the different ‘spheres’ of the universe evokes an unspoilt and joyful setting, where humans are one of the manifold living beings that inhabit it⁴.

The frequent references to the airy world emphasize its sublime features and remind us, as Hamilton (2003: 221) observes, that “the sublime is free-floating, that it supervenes precisely when reference to the world fails but a sense of affinity persists”. Through his words the poet denotes the cycle of nature and, although the numerous airy elements might suggest an ethereal world, Wordsworth returns everything to its original worldly state. Earthly components prevail over abstract ones, but the ‘balance’ that the poet sets between the lower and the upper levels of the world makes its harmonic dimension within reach of the ordinary person. The final stanza of the poem underlines the material aspect of human life; the use of such words as “work”, “race”, “died”, “heath” and “scene” refers to the ‘terrestrial composition’ of the natural environment. Lucy’s death marks the end of an itinerary, as “the work was done”, and her return to the ‘bowels’ of the earth is part of a magical process where death is the beginning of a new vital cycle which is fed, in turn, by the constant interaction between the earthly dimension and the ethereal dimension.

The pastoral setting that stands out in ‘Three years she grew in sun and shower’, in particular in its final part, turns into a scene of agricultural life in the well-known ballad ‘The Solitary Reaper’ (1807). Rather than attempting an in-depth analysis of the poem, which was the object of criticism for years, we intend to single out the idyllic elements of the rustic landscape that it portrays and, afterwards, make a contrastive comparison with the gloom of the Romantic Russian landscape, from a semantic and linguistic perspective. The prevailing *leitmotif* of the poem is the woman’s song and the pleasure with which she carries out the work of reaping the harvest. It is described as an act of joy and communion with nature: “Whate’er the theme, the Maiden sung / As if her song could have no ending”. The rustic vocabulary of the poem emphasizes the

⁴ As White (2015: 312-313) observes about Wordsworth’s and Clare’s poetry, “Clare and Wordsworth frequently refer to ‘spots’ of remembered childhood pleasure and delight, often embodied through an experience called ‘joy’”.

toil of the woman who “cuts, and binds the grain”; however, her bond with the field makes the hard labour an essential moment for the human life cycle, in that it provides people with the resources they need. The pleasure that she expresses in this moment of ‘cooperation’ with nature overcomes “Some natural sorrow, loss, or pain, / That has been”, and the act of collecting and binding the sheaves serves the purpose of satisfying her necessities. The manual labour which consists in preparing the sheaves marks humanity’s first anthropic effects, with the consequent ‘re-designing’ and ‘modelling’ of the countryside. The harmonic combination between the lexis connected with farm life, like “sickle” and “field”, and the words of the natural world, like “Cuckoo-bird”, “seas” and “hill”, outlines a rustic landscape where humanity discovers a pantheistic symbiosis with the environment⁵. The young woman, who is the protagonist of the text, is described as a heroic figure that somehow recalls the statuary beauty of a classical icon. In this sense, Wordsworth’s language is a priceless document of the transition from the vocabulary of the eighteenth century, with its neoclassical and Enlightenment-imbued overtones, to a modern poetic diction thoroughly aware of the Rousseauian episteme⁶.

Likewise, in Clare’s poems the image of the field allows for the eternal exchange between the peasants and their world and, therefore, constant communication between humankind and the rural landscape⁷. In his lines he portrays the farmer’s life, characterized by “difficult work occasionally interrupted by brief periods of leisure” (Adams 2008: 372). The combination of the hard work in the countryside and the enjoyment of nature is described in ‘The Harvest Morning’ (1820). The language used in this poem generates a *crescendo* in the awareness of the heavy aspects of rural life, from the “Loud-striking village clock” (Clare 2006: 97) to the numerous elements of the farmers’ routine, like “horses”, “barn”, “labour sweat and toils”, “mower”, “waggon”, “rake”⁸. Despite the heat of the day, the poet praises all aspects of country life and blames the bards for neglecting it: “O Rural Life! what charms thy meanness hide; / What sweet descriptions bards disdain to sing”. The symbolism conveyed by the agricultural tools evokes the close link with nature. The tools become part of the natural background, they are natural objects whose

⁵ The symbiosis between man and nature increased in the Romantic period owing to the greater consideration that lower-class people started to enjoy. Poetry often focused on them and, in general, this made people more sensitive to the needs of the poor and to the importance of a close link between humankind and nature. This greater attention to the poor prompted some people to devote themselves to poetry and celebrate the discovered communion with nature. As Paul (2011: 23) writes, “Wordsworth’s celebration of the poor encouraged a number of lower class poets to emerge from the anonymity of their condition and express themselves in poetry during the Romantic period”.

⁶ Miller (2018: 813) observes that “he [Wordsworth] takes diction as his chief concern in a more general comparison of poetry to prose”. As regards Wordsworth’s influence on language, Stewart (2018: 613) states: “There can be little doubt that Wordsworth sincerely hoped that his poetry would act to reform the reading of his culture in a way that would persist. It proved a popular view [...] in a period deeply troubled by poetry’s relationship with the literary market”.

⁷ As Mason (2015: 98) suggests, “Clare accesses, and is keen to communicate, a cosmic and nondualist reading of kinship inclusive of all things”. As regards Romantic tensions, Lörke (2013: 12) writes that the “tension is between the one and the many, the universal and the individual, the nation and the person, between meaning and endless deferral of the signified, between wholeness and fragmentation. In Romantic philosophy, this tension often seems to be resolved by synthesis, but it still remains intact in the way boundaries and their crossings are depicted in literary texts”.

⁸ All subsequent quotations from *Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery* will refer to this edition.

employment reveals the delight in rural life. As Adams (2008: 371) claims, “For Clare, natural objects are meaningful in themselves and as part of a specific local context”.

Although they represent a specific local context, the peasants’ everyday objects, as material expressions of a rustic and ‘down-to-earth’ vocabulary, are the means by which people can establish communicative interaction with the natural backdrop, thus blurring the borders encircling the agricultural spaces as areas of toil. Clare reveals the pleasures of agricultural life, which seem to overcome the isolation created by the barriers of the enclosures: “Pleas’d would I wonder where these charms reside; / Of rural sports and beauties would I sing; / Those beauties, Wealth, which you in vain deride, / Beauties of richest bloom, superior to your pride”. In his lines, the poet retraces the boundaries of the fields, in order to reconsider the points of contact between the traditional image of the agricultural world and the changes caused by the introduction of new farming technologies. In his analysis of the plurality of human and natural elements in Clare’s pastoral landscape, Albernaz (2016: 193) claims that “There are multiple worlds here, but the boundaries between them are permeable and uncertain – for, in a sense, there is nothing but betweenness all the way down. Every world is also the space or spacing between worlds; we are never contained solely in one enclosed world”⁹. This lack of ‘impermeability’ preserves the magical balance between humanity



Figure 1. John Constable. “Hampstead Heath, the view of the valley and working peasants” (1820)

⁹ In this regard, in his analysis of Wordsworth’s and Clare’s poetry, Harrison (2001: 458) claims that the former represents “[...] the nature of the Romantic subject as an unfinished project of endless longing”. Such an open landscape becomes suitable for the Romantic exiled poet and increases his sense of displacement and homelessness.

and nature and marks, as in Wordsworth, humankind's passage into a more 'concrete' and accessible language, which unveils nature's hidden dimensions.

4. The Russian context: a contrastive analysis

Russian Romanticism, exemplified by Pushkin, expresses the same fears as British Romanticism about the effects of humanity's actions on natural harmony (Wang 2019: 62). The work that best illustrates the disruption of the natural equilibrium due to human interference with the natural rules of the world is Pushkin's 'Mednyj vsadnik' ('The Bronze Horseman')¹⁰. This famous poem describes the destructive effects of the flooding in Saint Petersburg in 1824 by showing the changes generated by the construction of the new Russian capital city, in a particular rural area of northern Russia. His poem first dwells on the beauties of the urban setting of the 'Northern Venice' and the threats of nature to which those beauties are subject. Peter the Great's 'imposition' of such an urban landscape on the unspoiled area lying around the mouth of the Neva creates a contrast between two very different images of the Russian environment. On the one hand, the fluvial scenery, presented at the beginning of the poem, recalls the pantheistic perspective of the British Romantic poets, in a landscape prior to anthropic 'modelling'. On the other hand, the majesty of the monuments and the palaces of the city is threatened by the destruction of their surrounding environment, since its anthropic manipulation results in frequent flooding.

Before continuing with the comparison between Pushkin and the British poets, it is worth noticing that the former's lexis, like Wordsworth's, refers to the four natural elements. The opening lines of Pushkin's poem read as follows: "Na beregu pustynnykh voln" (Pushkin 2013: 32)¹¹, "a wave-swept shore, remote, forlorn" (Dewey 1998: 3)¹². The poet mentions the physical features of the river by stressing its width, for example when he writes "Pred nim shiroko / Reka neslasya", "Broad and chartless / The river ran", often dwelling on the watery and marshy nature of the lands around the mouth of the Neva: "Po mshistym, topkim beregam", "against the marshy green / Of moss-grown banks". As regards the earthly elements, he hints at the 'dark' woods around the river, by using such words as "les" / "forests", "lesov" / "forest" and "izby" / "log huts". Earthly components are mostly represented by the wood prior to the construction of the city, and by the materials used to build the magnificent palaces of Saint Petersburg, like "Beregovoj yeyo granit" / "granite banks", "chugunnyj" / "railings" and "mednykh" / "brass". The poet offers a sumptuous view of the city, as in the following lines: "I yasny spyaschie gromady / Pustynnykh ulits, i svetla / Admiraltejskaya igla", "in the nearly / Deserted streets huge buildings clearly / Loom up, asleep; and solar fire / Plays on the Admiralty spire". Fire is symbolized by the weak sunrays, eternally 'unknown' to the woods around the river, since they are always blurred by the mist: "I les, nevedomyj lucham / V tumane spryatannogo solntsa", "forests which had never seen / The mist-

¹⁰ For further information about Pushkin's life, see Binyon 2002.

¹¹ All subsequent quotations from *Pikovaya dama, Mednyj vsadnik, Tsygany. Queen of Spades, Bronze Horseman, The Gypsies* will refer to this edition.

¹² All subsequent quotations from the English translation of Pushkin's poem will refer to this edition.

veiled sun's illumination". Moreover, when he describes the night life, he mentions the "punsha plamen goluboj", "rum punch, flaming blue again". The most frightening and destructive element is represented by the freezing air of the North. Pushkin writes: "Lyublyu zimy tvoej zhestokoj / Nedvizhnyj vozdukh i moroz", "I love your winter, harsh and bracing: / the still air resonant with frost". When the lines stress the menacing atmosphere that precedes the flooding, the poet, whose language conveys his increasing emotional involvement, emphasizes the strength of the wind: "Nad omrachyonnym Petrogradom / Dyshal noyabr osennim khlodom", "November's chilly breath pervaded / The city's streets, as daylight faded".

Pushkin's words, as can be seen in the above-mentioned lines, make the atmosphere in Saint Petersburg ever more threatening, as opposed to the motherly depiction that Wordsworth presents in 'Three years she grew in sun and flower'. Unlike Pushkin, Wordsworth praises the beautiful qualities of nature, especially when the poet deals with the birth of Lucy: "Then nature said, 'A lovelier flower / On earth was never sown'". Nature is the source of life, even paying tribute to the sweet qualities of the girl, whereas the misty hues of the landscape that precedes the construction of the Northern city turns abruptly into a sad page of Russian history in Pushkin's verses:

Pleskaya shumnoyu volnoj /	Dull waves mouthed malice as they ran /
V kraja svoej ogrady strojnoj, /	To break against ornate defences: /
Neva metalas, kak bolnoj /	Nevá was tossing, like a man /
V svoej postele bespokojnoj. /	Confined to bed with fevered senses. /
Uzh bylo pozdno i temno; /	Now it was late, and dark: fierce rains /
Serdito bilsya dozhd v okno, /	Beat churlishly on window panes, /
I veter dul, pechalno voya. /	While mournfully the wind lamented. /
V to vremya iz gostej domoj /	Just at this time a young man came /
Prishyol Evgenij molodoj... /	Back home from seeing friends. His name? /
[...] On takzhe dumal, chto pogoda /	Yevgeny [...] /
Ne unimalas; chto reka /	He also thought that clearly /
Vsyo pribyvvala; chto yedva li /	The weather, turning worse, had kept /
S Nevy mostov uzhe ne snyali /	The river rising in proportion. /
I chto s Parashej budet on /	All bridges would, as a precaution, /
Dni na dva, na tri razluchen	Have been removed, so he'd not see /
	Parasha for some days, maybe

If the natural elements appear as separated before the flooding, they converge to create a synaesthetic nightmarish atmosphere during the cataclysm, as the words Pushkin uses to introduce the reader to the scene address all human senses. The opening lines of Wordsworth's poem and the first part of 'Mednyj vsadnik' contain semantically contrasting references to the surrounding environment. The river is 'struggling' against the fury of the Northern Sea, which is trying to invade the city. With the imminent catastrophe, Yevgeny, the fictitious protagonist of the Russian poem, is worried about his separation from Parasha, the girl he loves, owing to the destruction of the bridges that connected the different sections of Saint Petersburg. In the above-quoted lines, nature is preparing its vengeance against human ambition to manipulate it. Pushkin foreshadows the hero's inevitable loss of his Parasha, while the British poet dreams of taking Lucy to the 'four' corners of nature: "And with me / The Girl in rock and plain, / In earth

and heaven, in glade and bower, / Shall feel an overseeing power". Wordsworth's poem celebrates the deferential attitude of the natural elements towards the young woman, even when they are 'animated' by a storm, as we can see in the lines that we quoted in the previous section: "The floating clouds their state shall lend / To her, for her the willow bend, / Nor shall she fail to see / Even in the motions of the storm / A beauty that shall mould her form / By silent sympathy". The linguistic items that Pushkin employs to represent the dreary night before the flooding are in contrast with Wordsworth's peace-evoking lexis:

<p>I grustno bylo / Emu v tu noch, i on zhelal, / Chtob veter vyl ne tak unylo / I chtoby dozhd v okno stuchal / Ne tak serdito... / [...] I vot / Redeet mгла nastnoy nochi / I blednyj den uz nastae... / Uzhasnyj den!</p>	<p>And deep depression / Assailed him, and he wished the wind / Would not howl with such dull expression, / The rain not rage so as it dinned / Upon the window... / [...] And when / The harsh night's sombre tints had faded, / Day's pallid light returned again... / That awful day!</p>
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The climax of the poem coincides with the use of anthropomorphic lexis in order to describe the features of the fluvial landscape, or seascape, which 'hurls' itself at the city in a fury. Nature takes its revenge and destroys what had been for years the symbol of Russian power, thus levelling, with the monochromatic effect of the water, the distinction between the original landscape and the marks of anthropic action¹³. A contrastive analysis of the vocabulary used by Pushkin and the two British poets accounts for their different portrayals of the landscape. Pushkin writes:

<p>Neva vsyu noch / Rvalasya k moryu protiv buri, / Ne odolev ikh bujnoy duri... / I sporit stalo ej nevmoch... [...] No siloj vetrov ot zaliva / Peregrazhdennaya Neva / Obratno shla, gnevna, burlyva, / I zatoplyala ostrova, / Pogoda pusche svirepela, / Neva vzdualas i revela, / Kotlom klokocha i klubyas, / I vdrug, kak zver ostervenyas, / Na gorod kinulas. / [...] Osada! pristup! zlye volny, / Kak vory, lezut v okna</p>	<p>Nevá all night / Had pressed towards the sea, engaging / The savage tempest, wildly raging... / And had to give way to its might... / [...] But bottled up by gale winds squalling / In from the Gulf, Nevá turned back, / And in retreat, with rage appalling / To see, swamped islands in her track. / The tempest blustered unabated; / Nevá swelled up and roared, frustrated - / A seething, effervescent brew - / Then with a wild beast's frenzy threw / Herself upon the city. [...] Assault! Alarm! Fierce waves are breaking / Like thieves into the houses</p>
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¹³ As for the levelling action of the seascape and the transnational character of Saint Petersburg's cityscape, see Russo 2015.



Figure 2. Fedor Yakovlevich Alekseev's painting of the St. Petersburg flood in 1824

The vehemence of Pushkin's language stands against the depictions outlined by Wordsworth and Clare, whose portrayals of rural landscapes contain words that refer to the tranquillity with which they recollect their emotions¹⁴. Similarly to the poems already analysed, Clare, in other works including 'Approach of Spring' (1820) and 'Summer' (1820), and Wordsworth, in 'To the Daisy' (1807) and 'To the Same Flower' (1807), employ particular lexical items to describe the natural background of their (uni)verses, namely the poetic universe that emerges, which is summed up in the following table:

'Approach of Spring'	'Summer'	'To The Daisy'	'To the Same Flowers'
sweet	sweet, sweetens	sweet	sweet
gay, glad	glad	gladly, gay	glad
lovely, tender	sultry	pleasure, passions	pleasures
eternal	eternity	all seasons	long
flower	flower	daisy, violets, rose	celandine, primrose, flower
winged leaves	wreath, slow- opening leaf	holly	coronet

Table 1. Clare's and Wordsworth's poetic lexis relating to nature

¹⁴ Wesling (2016: 208) defines Pushkin as "Russia's Shakespeare", claiming that "Pushkin gave the first sustained example of a flexible, resourceful Russian literary language".

The nouns and adjectives used by the two British poets evoke a close connection between the most pleasant aspects of nature and the human senses that they reawaken. The image that they portray shows, as Hamilton (2003: 221) suggests, “a universal kinship to which, romantically, our self-consciousness ought always to aspire”. Nature ‘rewards’ peasants who aim, through their effort and toil, at utilizing the natural resources, and offers them a shelter where they can delight in their joyful relationship with it. The words used by the poets conjure up feelings of pleasure and rejoicing, their never-ending intensity being ensured by the repeated rhythms of nature and its consoling attitude towards man. On the contrary, the Russian poet creates a relationship between humankind and nature in accordance with the unforeseeable behaviour of the latter. The description of the flooding of Saint Petersburg reproduces the hellish environment that follows man’s ‘original sin’ and the punishment its inhabitants are doomed to. Table 2 further shows the antonymous lexis adopted by Pushkin and the two British poets in some of the passages previously analysed, and underscores the differences between the British and the Russian landscapes:

Pushkin	Wordsworth	Clare
vstavali volny [...] i zlilis (immense waves raging)	sympathy bright day gentle breezes	what rifled charms tender greens new-laid hedges
vozmuschyonnoyu Nevoyu (Neva’s blind force)	love beauty cheerful	Hope’s smiles speckled cuckoo-flowers the meadow-sweet taunts
nasytyas razrushenem (with no more heart for devastation)	chaunt reposing bands the silence of the seas	many a flower unfolds its charms to view
naglym bujstvom utomyas (weary of brutality)	the music in my heart	

Table 2. The antonymous lexis employed by Pushkin and the two British poets to describe the landscape

As some critics have observed, Pushkin absorbed English Romanticism through the ‘dark visions’ of other English poets such as Coleridge and Byron, whose view of nature was less idyllic¹⁵. However, our decision to make a comparative analysis with Wordsworth and Clare is determined by our desire to emphasize the contrast between English and Russian sensibilities. Such an approach shows humankind’s different reactions to the effects that anthropic changes had on the rural landscape and how the latter, in turn, affected the cityscape in other parts of Europe, like Russia. This approach lends itself to a contrastive analysis and to the explication of Bakhtin’s principle of the intercultural and interlinguistic process of stylization. According to Bakhtin, the ‘stylizer’, who represents the ‘source culture’, employs, in the writing process, the ‘stylized’

¹⁵ For further information about Byron’s and Coleridge’s influences on Romantic Russian sensibility, see Burwick (2018) and Volkova (2015).

language, namely the language of the ‘target culture’, and adapts it to his/her cultural world (Bakhtin 1979). The Russian poet, who was deeply influenced by Wordsworth and his sonnets (Ober and Ober 2003), imports into the cold lands of Northern Russia the most mysterious aspects of the British landscape¹⁶. In the light of this hermeneutic perspective, Pushkin adopts, as a ‘stylizer’, the restless and vivid language of the British Romantic poets, who represent the ‘stylized’ context, by ‘importing’ it into his linguistic and cultural ambience.

In addition, if we consider Sapir’s (2007) cross-cultural theories, which state that cultures and languages are not always closely connected and can ‘emigrate’ to different areas, no matter what their area of origin is, Pushkin carries out a process of cultural translation. He absorbs the pastoral elements of the British Romantic poets, employing them to provide an apparently delightful depiction of the rural environment in the surroundings of Saint Petersburg. By ‘filtering’ the stylized elements of the British world in the Russian setting, Pushkin turns them into the lugubrious components of his threatening scenario.

As for the exceptional violence of the flooding, it is opportune to conclude by remarking that Pushkin’s personification of the natural elements, which he refers to by means of a metaphorical language, recalls the interpretative models of nature in fairy tales. Wordsworth’s and Clare’s motherly representation of nature takes on opposite features in the stereotype of the fantastic, owing to the dangers it conceals behind its beauty. In this regard, Propp’s theorizations of natural components and their harmful manipulation could be applied to Pushkin’s poem. In his analysis of the role of water in fairy tales, he reveals the presence of sinister and supernatural elements in nature which, when evoked, serve evil purposes against invasive human action (Propp 2003). Propp illustrates a pattern according to which the fantastic creature’s attack (embodying nature’s revenge) against humanity is followed by a return to normal life, but the threat is always there. Likewise, the swelling of the sea in ‘Mednyj vsadnik’ seems to be caused by a monstrous being, whose fury and rage cause death and destruction, and who goes away as soon as the landscape returns to its pre-existent order and regains its original shape. The destructive action of nature aims at balancing the coexistence of different elements. As a result, the river is endowed with the task of restoring the natural environment to its original condition. Pushkin even compares the Nevá to a thief: “Tak zlodej, / S svirepoj shajkoyu svoej / V selo vorvavshis, lomit, rezhet, / Krushit i grabit”, “A mob / of savage cut-throats smash and rob / Their way through some ill-fated village / With no less vigour”. Having ‘reset’ the order and the configuration of the previous landscape, the Nevá retreats and, like a looter, returns to its own place, satisfied with having, once again, defended the rules of nature. Propp’s stereotypical model highlights nature’s hostile aspects; it is employed, therefore, to represent the dangers lying behind it when its equilibrium is manoeuvred by artificial forces.

¹⁶ As Ober and Ober (2003) claim, Pushkin read Wordsworth’s works and drew inspiration from the British poet’s sonnets. For further details about the influence of British Romantic tradition on Pushkin, see Mudrick (1975-1976) and Golburt (2016).

5. Conclusion

Starting with the importance of preserving the rural landscape in modern agricultural techniques, the present analysis traces back the landscape tradition to the Romantic episteme. The vital interaction between the soil and human beings has always been the point of conjunction within the complex natural chain. In this context, Romantic poets in Europe used different linguistic codes to highlight the importance of the rural landscape, this being a macro-element of mutual exchange between humankind and the environment. The linguistic-semantic opposition adopted by the British and Russian poets analysed in this work responded to the same purpose, warning against any improper human action aimed at a utilitarian and materialistic usage of the landscape. And yet, even some economists of the time, such as Arthur Young, were aware of the dangers brought about by progress and expressed their concern about the misuse of the land¹⁷.

This study illustrates the route which, starting from the optimistic view of the British poets, led to an awareness of the changes to the landscape and the damage connected to them¹⁸. Clare's and Wordsworth's poems contain the idyllic notes characteristic of their periods, although they expressed, with their cryptic language, their worries about the human effects on the landscape and the contradictions of the revolutionary threats of their time¹⁹. On the other hand, by considering Sapir's cross-cultural theories on the relationships between languages and cultures, and employing the intercultural and interlinguistic approach of Bakhtin's theory of stylization, we have analysed Pushkin's 'Mednyj vsadnik', which contrasts with the English view and stresses humankind's increasing intrusion into the balance of nature. Propp's theories of the supernatural in fables have been applied to describe the threatening powers of nature in the Russian city, Saint Petersburg, and to disclose the different images of nature in people's beliefs.

The poets of the British and the Russian traditions called for a more 'collaborative' interaction between humanity and nature, with the former invited to use natural resources in a more conscientious way. The contrastive analysis allows us to point out that, despite the differences in perception of the natural landscape by two different poetic traditions, already by the turn of the 19th century the discourses of far-seeing poets and men of letters had alerted humankind to the necessity of preserving the environment and the natural configuration of the rural landscape.

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¹⁷ As for the issue of the misuse of the land, see also Bresnihan 2013 and Coletta 1995.

¹⁸ For a thorough analysis of British Romanticism, see Thomson 2018.

¹⁹ As for the revolutionary aspects of British Romanticism, see Wu 2018 and Kantor 2018.

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