Sergei Esenin and Nature

by

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Abstract

In this thesis my main concern is the poetry which deals with Nature in a direct manner. While analyzing Esenin's poems I will discuss such problems as:

1. The beginning of Sergei Esenin's poetic career.
2. The relationship between Esenin and the peasant poets, especially Kliuev.
3. The religious and the pantheistic aspects of Esenin's poetry.
4. The poetry of Esenin's last two years.
5. Esenin's craftsmanship and lexicology.

One of my main tasks in this paper is to examine the specific relationship between Esenin and Nature, by demonstrating that which is characteristic of his view of Nature. The old maple tree, the poplars, the cherry trees are almost as much part of his inner world as his fellow men. He conveys his aesthetic feelings towards things in Nature, including animals, through such attachment and love for them that his poetry is unique for its almost irrational passion. This gives Esenin's poetry an important dimension, which is at the same time the secret of his success as a poet.

The poem "Sorokoust" with its new themes represents the beginning of a new period in Esenin's poetic work. Esenin, as man and as poet, felt deeply the changes caused by the industrial revolution in the existing harmony between Man and
Nature. This was strongly reflected in the poetry of his last period.

In this thesis I shall not discuss such problems as Esenin's urban poetry, his period of association with the Imagists, or the poems written abroad.
I wish to express my sincere thanks and appreciation to Professor V. Revutsky for the time and help given without limits and for the warm and friendly assistance offered in the preparation of this study. I would also like to thank Professor I. Reid for her helpful suggestions and correcting of my English. I wish likewise to express my sincere thanks to all members of my committee for their help and understanding.
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Introduction

In literary criticism there is not much written about Sergei Esenin, especially if we take into account his enormous popularity in the Soviet Union as well as in the east European countries. At the time of his suicide in 1925 he was one of the most popular poets in the country. But soon after his death the public mention of him in literary reviews declined due to political pressure. This period of relative silence lasted till the early sixties when the official preparation began for the anniversary of his seventieth birthday in 1965, which was celebrated throughout the Soviet Union as a cultural event.

During the last ten years the number of scholarly works about Esenin has been steadily increasing. In the western world, unfortunately, he is still better known as the ex-husband of Isadora Duncan.

However, Nature as one of the central themes in Esenin's poetry has so far been neglected by the critics; mainly it has been analyzed sporadically, subordinated to other aspects of his work. The main task of this paper is to discuss some questions that seem relevant to this broad subject of Nature in Esenin's poetry. The organisation of this study is essentially based on the chronological development of his poetry beginning with his first attempts.

The character of Esenin as a poet cannot be properly understood without studying the role of the peasant poets in his formation. For that reason one chapter of this paper deals with the influence of Nikolai Kliuev on his early works.
The chapter on Esenin's emotional and aesthetic response to Nature attempts to show his profound love of and close ties with Nature.

The religious aspects of Esenin's poetry are included in this thesis since they are deeply rooted in his attitude to Nature.

Pantheism as an intuitive and emotional approach to Nature is a distinctive feature of the poet's early works. This has been discussed in a brief comparative study which contrasts Esenin with some British Romantics, notably to William Wordsworth and Lord Byron.

Perhaps the poems in which the poet rejected industrialization of Russia show best the deep sensitivity and his understanding of the harmony between man and Nature.

During the last two years of his life Esenin went through a serious crisis which left an indelible mark on his work. For that reason the poems of his last period are discussed in three groups, according to their different artistic tendencies and moods.

His craftsmanship, for the greatest part, is developed on the basis of his immediate experience with Nature. Moreover, many of his metaphors, similes and epithets are directly taken from Nature.

In writing this paper 2 major problem occurred regarding the limits of this topic, namely how to focus on Nature in his poetry as an integral part of his entire work, without becoming too diffused by other aspects of his poetry. For that reason sometimes these other themes have been discussed when it seemed necessary to give further understanding of our topic.
1. For a full explanation, see Chapter VIII Footnote No. 1, on page 78.
The Beginning of Sergei Esenin's Poetic Career

There is a long history of nature poetry in Russian literature: Alexander Pushkin, Aleksei Kol'tsov, Nikolai Nekrasov and others contributed considerably to this subject. Towards the end of the 19th Century, the theme more or less faded out of literary works. The now dominant school of symbolism stood in the way of any serious works concerned with the countryside. But with the Revolution of 1905 and the increasing migration from the countryside into the cities an interest in folklore and village life became fashionable in some circles in Petrograd and Moscow. In 1912 Nikolai Kliuev, a village poet, appeared on the literary scene and was favorably received by the critics and the public. In 1916, he contributed a great deal to the formation of a group of peasant poets, among whom was the young Sergei Esenin. After the October Revolution, the entire subject of nature, folklore and country life was treated more extensively and approached from new perspectives.

Esenin began to write under two direct influences -- popular rural poetry on the one hand and the Russian classics on the other. His early poems were based on his impressions of the village world, his native Konstantinovo, Spas-klepiky and the Oka River. The time before the October Revolution is usually considered to be the period during which the greater part of his formation as the poet took place.

In analysing this early period we will pay attention mainly to those qualities of his nature poetry which contributed most to the establishment
of his reputation. However, in order to gain insight into the development of his craftsmanship, a number of his less successful early works will be analysed briefly.

"The Night" (Noch')\(^1\) is a weak poem written in 1911-12; the form is very simple. Nature is pictured as sleeping and the lines are very plain, almost without imagery.

Тихо дремлет река.
Темный бор не шумит.
Соловей не поет,
И дергач\(^2\) не кричит.

(I, 326, 1911-1912)

Also, there is much repetition as, for example, in the third stanza:

Серебрится река.
Серебрится ручей.
Серебрится трава
Оранжевых степей.

(I, 326, 1911-1912)

The poet is learning his craft and one can feel the strain behind the lines.

"The Birch Tree" (Berioza)\(^3\) (written in 1913) is a better poem. In its use of ornament, "serebro," "kaima," "bakhroma," it is like traditional Russian poetry and similar to decorative folk poems. It conveys a mellow mood, a sense of stillness in nature.

Though written in 1910, "The Evening is Already Here" (Vot uzh vecher), is one of the better early poems. A young lad's feelings towards Nature are charmingly conveyed in simple language and imagery.

Я стою у дороги,
Приклонившись к иве.

(I, 65, 1910)
Here is a boy in a contemplative mood gazing at the moonlight reflected from the roof of his house and admiring the abundance of light as if it were something miraculous. "Rosa blestit," "pesn' solov'ia," "i beriozy stojat kak bol'shie svechki," "sonnyi storozh stuchit miortvoi kolotushkoi." The selection of sights and sounds successfully gives the impression of a peaceful night and, in particular, of the gentle flowing together of natural things bathed in moonlight.

Typical Eseninian Nature is active and often in motion: "Mesiats zapriagalsia v nashi sani"; "zarnitsa raspoiasala alyi poiasok zari."

One of the most interesting developments in Esenin's first period is the growth of his poetic awareness of Nature. This growing sensitivity can be seen in the following four poems. The four line poem, "Where the Cabbage Beds Are" (Tam, gde kapustnye griadki), written in 1910 can be considered as the first to show Esenin's real poetic gift:

Там, где капустные грядки
Красной водой поливает восход,
Кленочок маленький матке
Зеленое вмия сосет.

(I, 64, 1910)

The images are taken from Nature. A connection is shown between "kapustnye griadki" and "krasnoi vodoi polivaet voskhod" which is a universal phenomenon with an effect on the whole world. The phrase "klenionochek zelionoe vymia sosiot" is characteristic of Esenin. It is a good illustration
of his method of creating new images, in this case an image that reflects both the animal and the plant world. He adds meaning to the plant world by subtly imparting to its qualities usually attributed to animals.

The delightful neologism "klenionochek" strongly suggests the word "telionok" and this poetic transposition blends with the rest of the poem indicating the unity of things in Nature.

"The Echo of Winter Sounds" (Poiot zima aukaet) is another early poem (1910) in which we see how the poet relates that which is human to Nature.

The poem tells of winter as seen through the eyes of little sparrows. A strong wind roaring through the pine forest has brought them to the frozen windows. As a parallel, at this point, the poet introduces orphan children.

Воробышки игрище,
Как детки сиротливые,
Прикались у окна.

(I, 65, 1910)

The image of the orphans is strengthened by the use of children's language: "baiukaet," "vorobyshki," "ptashki malye." This choice of diction helps the intermingling of the human element with the element of Nature.

To see how this poem achieves its effect, we can take, for example, the image "sedye oblaka" which has a number of nuances: cold, snow, the fading of life, as well as all that is threatening to the lives of little sparrows. The meaning of the word "oblaka" is intensified by "sedye" which connotes gray hair, old age and the weakening of life. This blend of nuances is quite successful for the lyric power of the poem lies in the interweaving of the human elements and the elements of Nature.

Another example of Esenin's early work is "Do not Wander about the
Crimson Bushes" (Ne brodit' ne miat' v kustakh bagrianykh) (1915-1916). Here memories of a love affair mingle with extensively used images from Nature. The girl does not enter his dreams any more, "otosnilas' ty mne navsegda," and his memory of her is fading away with the sunset.

С алым соком ягоды на каме,
Нежная, красивая, была
На закат ты розовый похожа
И, как снег, лучиста и светла.

(I, 185, 1915-1916)

Her picture is dissolved into the manifestations and objects of Nature. A beautiful romance is not obliterated but takes on new forms.

Пусть порой мне шепчет синий вечер,
Что была твя песня и мечта,

(I, 186, 1915-1916)

There is no feeling of sorrow at his loss since, for Esenin, Nature seems to be the guardian of all that is beautiful in human life.
Footnotes

The Beginning of Sergei Esenin's Poetic Career

1. Sergei Esenin, Sobranie sochinenii (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1966) All quotations of Esenin's poetry and prose are taken from this edition and are indicated below the actual lines.

2. Crake.

3. I, 78, 1913.
II

Kliuev and Esenin

After finishing school in Spas-klepiky, Esenin went to Moscow, drawn there by ambition. As he immodestly put it, he hoped "to earn a bronze statue for himself." The first two years in Moscow were quite difficult for young Esenin; he did not have enough education or poetical skill to write the kind of poetry that would be recognized by his contemporaries. Another problem was the multiplicity of literary groups and movements at that time; he was not quite sure where to direct his talent.

Towards the end of 1915 he met the peasant poet, Kliuev, who was already recognized and well known in literary circles. They soon became friends and Esenin was taken under the wing of a poet six years his senior, artistically akin to him but more experienced and with connections in literary circles. Kliuev fully understood and valued Esenin's poetic world, that is, the life of the Russian countryside. In fact, Kliuev maintained that the peasantry would play a Messianic role in the future of Russia and this notion had a very important effect on the work of the young poet. It left him free to feel that he could achieve his literary ambitions without having to force his talent in any direction that might be far from his roots.

Nikolai Kliuev was self-educated, well read, with an extensive knowledge of Russian rural life and tradition. He belonged to the old sect, the "khlysty" 1, from which he gained insight into those spiritual tendencies of Russia that have been ignored throughout history and suppressed by governments. Kliuev exercised a significant influence on Esenin's work by
developing his awareness of these aspects of the rustic culture of Russia.

To write about this influence is a rather delicate task and, in order not to overemphasize Kliuev's role in Esenin's life, one should bear in mind that both poets were alike in their backgrounds, artistic influences (especially folklore and symbolism) and the subject matter of their works. Our concern here is limited to the theme of Nature in their poetry. In an extensive comparative study of the two poets, it would be important to consider in detail their similarities before they read each other's poetry.

However, the idiosyncrasies of their characters made each distinct from the other as a poet. Kliuev was a learned man with a definite set of values taken from the past. His vision of the future of Russia was an extension of the dreams and desires of bygone generations, in particular, those of the Old Believers. Emotionally and intellectually, he was deeply committed to the past, and with a unique vision of the ideal Russia. In public he displayed a good deal of modesty, but that was more the image he projected rather than a sincere feeling. In literary, political, or religious gatherings he was never spontaneous, always cautious and on guard, conspicuous in a subtle way.

His knowledge of cosmopolitan culture was acquired in a calculated fashion. He never allowed himself to be completely exposed to it. This attitude is illustrated in a letter to Esenin:

Говорю мой белый... ...Ведь ты знаешь, что мы с тобой кошмы в литературном огороде и только по милости нас терпят в нем и что в этом огороде есть немало ядовитых колючих кaktусов, изберать которых нам с тобой необходимо для здоровья как духовного, так и телесного...²

A carefully guarded, closed inner world was an obstacle to Kliuev's evolution
as a poet and the reason for his remaining within the limits of rustic culture.

In the period before the October Revolution, Kliuev lovingly and successfully evokes rural Russia, picturing all the requisites and activities of everyday country life and interweaving it spiritually with Nature. After 1917 his poetry has a few brilliant sparks such as the poems, "The Bronze Whale" (Mednyi kit) (1919), "The Village" (Derevnia) (1927) and the unfinished work, "The Remains after the Fire" (Pogorelschchina) published posthumously. Otherwise, it has too much rhetoric and not enough lyric power.

But Kliuev was a master of the Russian language. One of his most powerful artistic tools was metaphor taken from folklore, which he skillfully applies to his poetic material. Kliuev's influence on Esenin's poetry can be studied through a number of poetic borrowings, especially images: Kliuev: "sin' i gat'," "verby monashki"; Esenin: "sinaia gat'," "beriozy monashki." Sometimes the poetic transplant is not as obvious:

Kliuev:  Прослезиться у речки,  Погрустить у бугров...  Мы -- две белые свечки  Перед ликом лесов.

Esenin:  В этом голосе обкашенного луга  Слыщу я знакомый сердцу зов.  Ты зовешь меня, моя подруга,  Погрустить у сонных берегов.

(I, 221, 1916)

Esenin had a capacity for adapting elements of another poet's art to his own poetic world.

Kliuev:  Месцац -- ног оленей,  Тучка -- лисий хвост.  Полов привидений  Таежный погост.
The two stanzas quoted above have much in common: the rhyme, the rhythm and the images, changed slightly by Esenin to suit his own poetic purpose. If the stormy clouds are like lakes and if the moon is like a gull, then the gull can swim on waves of the lake. But what is more important, by using the phrase "pered vzorom," he links the turbulent state of Russia to this compound image. Kliuev's stanza is a beautiful pastoral scene with a touch of fairy tale mystery. Esenin's stanza attempts more.

There is also a resemblance between Kliuev's "Friendly Chat" (Besednyi naigrish) (1916), a poem in epic form, written during the First World War, and Esenin's "Heavenly Drummer" (Nebesnyi barabanshchik), written at the end of 1917 or the beginning of 1918.

**Kliuev:**
Солнце ж я за спесь, за непокорство
С ног разуя красные бахилы,
Желтый волос, ус ловкой косатый
Остриту на войлок шерстобитам;
С шее Солнца бобчатую гривну
Кобелю отдам на скерелок,
Подало я красного спесивца
На палати с бабой шелудневой —
Ровня ль будет соколу ворона?

**Esenin:**
Если это солнце
В загоре с ними, —
Мы его всей ратью
На штыках подымем.

Если этот месяц
Друг их чёрной силы,
Мы его в лазури
Камнями в заплолок.
Kliuev's verses are written in the manner of a popular bard and remain philosophically and psychologically in the epic tradition. Esenin's verses are more modern. Images from folk literature are given a new poetic form to match the new artistic material, Revolutionary Russia.

Whether Esenin was under the direct influence of Kliuev or folklore or both in this poem is of less interest than the fact that he had the ability to transcend traditional boundaries and relate traditional modes of expression to the psychology of his contemporaries.

It was typical of Esenin to develop or change a borrowed image:

Apart from several of Esenin's early poems, we cannot find a single poetic borrowing without his own artistic seal. Moreover, reading his poems gives one the strong impression that he was not aware of any influence upon him while writing these verses. So free and open was his approach to life and art, that he would give himself completely to an artistic work if it appealed to him. However, he had enough talent to assimilate another poet's art without losing his own artistic identity.
And it is true that, due to the circumstances of his upbringing, there was a great influence of rustic culture in his formation as a poet. Nevertheless, save for his opposition to industrialization during the period between 1920 and 1922, he did not have a discriminatory attitude towards urban culture.

Kliuev accepted city culture conditionally. To him it was tolerable only insofar as it did not interfere with his vision of the future or rural Russia. But Esenin was able to outgrow the peasant poets and, in fact, his creative impulses compelled him to part with Kliuev and seek new friends with a cultural background different from his own.
**Footnotes**

**Kliuev and Esenin**

1. This religious sect of Russian Orthodox Church originated in 17th century.


4. Ibid., p. 289.

5. Ibid., p. 344.


Esenin's Emotional and Aesthetic Response to Nature

Love and Beauty in Esenin's Poetry

Two themes dominate Esenin's poetry -- love and beauty, both deeply rooted in his experience of Nature. Certain biographical details may help to elucidate these aspects of his poetry. In memoirs written by his friends and family there are a number of passages which indicate how intimately the poet was bound to Nature.

His sister, Alexandra, wrote in the little biographical sketch of her brother how her parents, in order to have more land to plant potatoes, cut the "creeping cherry" in their garden. The incident had a sad and painful effect on the children. In connection with this incident she refers to her brother's "Letter to My Sister" (Pis'mo k sestre) (1924):

Отцу картофель нужен.
Нам был нужен сад.
И сад рубили,
Да, рубили, душа!
Об этом знает мокрая подушка
Немножко... Семь...
Иль восемь лет назад.

(III, 149, 1925)

From both the memoir and the poem we gather that tears were shed and that the incident stayed alive in their memory as if they had lost a fellow being very close to them.

Another poem, "The Maple Tree" (Klion) (1925) is a unique work: perhaps a tree has never been described elsewhere with such tender love. A childhood companion, one that stirred the poet's imagination, is growing old. The poem parallels his feelings as a child and as a man. On the one
And then the feelings of the grown-up man:

И, утратив скромность, одуревши в доску,
Как жену чужую, обнимал березку.

(III, 216, 1925)

In Vasilii Kachalov's reminiscences there is an interesting anecdote about Esenin. On coming home late one evening, Kachalov found the house full of guests and Esenin among them playing with the dog, Jim. The poet devoted most of his attention to the animal and their playing together all evening drew the attention of the assembled company. Several days later Esenin returned to read to Jim, in the presence of his master, "To Kachalov's Dog" (Sobake Kachalova) (1925). Many phrases used the previous night during the game with the dog were incorporated into the poem. Much of Esenin's poetry was created immediately after the inspiration occurred. This contributes greatly to the sincerity and directness of his art. Later in the same year, 1924, Kachalov went with a theatre troupe to Baku, where Esenin was in hospital. After hearing that Kachalov had come, the poet grew very restless and sent a messenger to inquire whether the dog Jim was with the group. Esenin said, "If the dog comes, my condition will improve immediately." He was waiting for Jim as one might wait for a good friend in a moment of need.
The theme of the poem "chet Kachalov's Dog" is a happy animal which everybody loves and treats kindly. In contrast to that love, the poet tells of his own grievances against human society. He opens his heart to Jim and wants to share the dog's feelings towards the world of Nature.

Дай, Джим, на счастье лапу мне,
Такую лапу не видал я сроду.
Давай с тобой полаем при луне
На тихую, бесшумную погоду.
Дай, Джим, на счастье лапу мне.

(III, 137, 1925)

He also wants to explain to Jim "чтo zhit' na svete stoit."

Finally, he confides to the dog the sorrow of a broken relationship:

Она придет, даю тебе поруку.
И без меня, в ее уставясь взгляд,
Ты за меня лизни ей нежно руку
За все, в чем был и не был виноват.

(III, 138, 1925)

The two themes, love and beauty, comprise human aspects of nature and have to be analyzed in broad perspective.

It would be a difficult task to distinguish Esenin the man from Esenin the artist. He never settled in one place. There was no routine to his life or work. Many of the poems were created at parties or in the company of other people and then set down on paper in a quiet corner or later in his living quarters, which were often in his friends' homes. He did not have a life of his own apart from his art. Whatever he was doing when he was not writing poetry seems to be related to his artistic needs. He did not make much of an effort to maintain his family life and deserted three wives. And yet the role of women in Esenin's life (as evidenced in his poetry) was very important. However, in terms of time and attachment
they can be compared to his poems. What was most important for him was the creative experience. The discovery of a woman was similar to the writing of a poem. Afterwards, there was always another poem to be created and sometimes another woman to be discovered.

However, Esenin saw his role and purpose in life as reaching people through his art.

Не каждый умеет петь,
Не каждому дано яблочком
Падать к чужим ногам.

(II, 99, 1920)

Not everyone can be a poet and divide his soul between poems, which are like gifts to those who read them.

Ваших душ бесценнную осень
Мне нравится в темноте освещать.

(II, 99, 1920)

He likes to "illuminate" the souls of the unfortunate men who never experienced spring in their souls.

By giving most of his life to poetry, he prevented himself from establishing conventional ties, such as a stable family life and steady friendship. For example, he left Kliuev after realizing that their relationship no longer stimulated his creativity. His artistic freedom and detachment from everyday life and his acceptance of the world with an open soul helped the high mobility of his emotions and interests, thus, he gave himself completely to each poem and that is what makes his poetry so personal and so electrifying.

One of his greatest loves was Russia itself and his conception of his "rodina" coincided with that of the countryside:
He also gives us scenes of happy rustic life in his descriptions of sky, meadows, peasants' huts, songs to an accordion accompaniment and ploughmen.

At one point he exclaims:

Если крикнёт рать святая:  
"Кинь ты Русь, живи в раю!"  
Я скажу: "Не надо рая,  
Дайте родину мою."

(I, 117, 1914)

No one since Esenin has written about Russia with such tender and sincere love.

The October Revolution called forth a new feeling and vision of Russia: "Pliashet pered vzorom buistvennaia Rus'." This is now the typical mood of Esenin's poems. If, at one time, he had identified his homeland with Nature "malinovo pole," now he identifies it with the Revolution whose stir reaches out in all directions and becomes a universal force. He turns against Kitezh and Radonezh and, in prophetic lines, promises the country of Inonija a new paradise -- "gde vladeet bozhestvo zhivykh."

The theme of beauty can be found to a greater or lesser extent in almost every poet's work. With Esenin the theme has special qualities and the beauty of the world of Nature and human beauty are often interwoven.

The manner of combining them is highly imaginative. Here is an example:

И пляшет сумрак в галочьей тревоге,  
Согнув луну в пастушеский рожок.

(I, 227, 1916)

With the words "pliashet" and "pastusheskii rozhok" Nature is poetically
transformed into dance and music. The falling of darkness is described as the dancing of twilight. The latter expression has a human connotation. With fairy-tale imagination, the poet tells how the twilight squeezes the moon into the shape of a shepherd's horn, which gives music for its dance, and artistically projects human activities onto natural forces.

Esenin's beauty is never cold:

Кудрявый сумрак за горой
Рукой машет белоснежной.

(I, 196, 1916)

And the two lines above imply a friendly visitor waving his hand.

He experienced Nature through an abundance of different emotions.

Опять я теплой грустью болен
От овсяного ветерка.

(I, 216, 1916)

We can imagine the poet coming back to his village from Moscow accustomed to the dull city smells and suddenly smelling "veterok sploj rzhi."

He does not tell us directly what a beautiful and infinitely pleasant feeling it creates in him; perhaps an average city poet would do that but, since it can be read between the lines, Esenin tells us something deeper, more personal, "ia  топлио grust'iu bolen." What helps to make his poetry so extraordinary is this capacity to omit meanings which the reader can divine on his own.

Я ты, как я, в печали моей требе,
Забыв, кто друг тебе и враг,
О розовом тоскуешь небе И голубых облачах.

(I, 184, 1915-1916)

His longing for "rozovoe nebo" and "golubye oblaka" also shows how deeply
the world of Nature was rooted in him.

Sometimes Esenin expresses tender feelings towards the objects of Nature:

Хороша ты, о белая гладь!
Греет кровь мою легкий мороз!
Так и хочется к телу прижать
Обнаженные груди берез.

(II, 28, 1917-1918)

At times he is simply entranced.

Весенний вечер. Синий час.
Ну как же не любить мне вас,
Как не любить мне вас, цветы?
Я с вами выпил бы на "ты".

(III, 73, 1924)

In Esenin's poetry animals are conceived of as an extension of the world of Nature, without distinctions between domestic and wild ones. Usually they are pictured in moments of suffering. For an illustration we can take the poem "The Fox" (Lisitsa) (1916). A poor animal is mortally wounded. The fading of its life is revealed through its heightened awareness, typical in such moments. There are many signs of imminent death: "razdrobennaea noga," "vystrel," "sochilas' tikho krov'." The elements of the natural scene are selected and presented in a sequential manner as if seen through the eyes of the dying animal, to indicate a gradual weakening of its life and the inevitability of its end. There is the animal's dizziness and feebleness of sight: "kolykhalasia v glazakh lesnaiatop'." The loss of strength makes the animal defenceless against the elements, notably against cold:

Из кустов косматый ветер вьетсярил
И рассыпал звонистую дробь.

(I, 198, 1916)
The resemblance of mist: "kak zhelna, nad neiu mgla metalas'" (semblance, since the wind would very likely have cleared the air) points out farther decline of the fox's eyesight. The scent which the animal used, at one time, as a guide to find food and to avoid danger now picks up the smell of death: "Pakhlo ineem i glinianym ugarom." There is no more strength in the animal or in Nature to hold onto life; death comes quietly without resistance: "A v oshchur sochilas' tikho krov'."

The artistic power of Esenin's imagination is deeply rooted in his intuition and emotions. The literary critic Alla Marchenko has pointed out an interesting example of the poet's intuition and close observation of Nature.

Maxim Gorky praised the poet particularly for his love of animals. "In my opinion he was the first in Russian literature to have written about animals with such skill and sincere love." Gorky even called him "That most gifted and most Russian of Poets."6

The poetry of Sergei Esenin leaves one with the profound impression that sunsets and sunrises, fields, lakes, sky, trees and animals with their innocent sufferings, are as much a part of his intimate world as his relations with his fellow men. Thus, he writes of objects and manifestations of Nature with the same warmth, kindness and love he shows in writing of human beings. Perhaps this is one of the most important aspects of his poetry.
In this way he brings Nature closer to man and men closer to each other and this may explain the perfect blending of human imagery and Nature imagery in his poetry.
Footnotes

Esenin's Emotional and Aesthetic Response to Nature

Love and Beauty in Esenin's Poetry

1. Vasilii Ivanovich Kachalov (1875-1948), a distinguished actor of the Moscow Art Theatre.

2. According to the legend, "The Shining city of Kitezh" descended uncorrupted to the bottom of a trans-Volga lake, at the time of the first Mongol invasion.

3. Radonezh (thirty miles northeast of Moscow), site of a well known monastery Sviataia Troitsa, founded by Sergei Radonezhskii.

4. Russian тв (ty) is equivalent to the old English "thou", and it is used among friends. Ви (vy) is a formal way of addressing, and stands for English "you". There is a custom in Russia for new friends to take a drink with linked hands and call each other "ty."


Sadness and Joy in Esenin's Poetry

Sadness is one of the strongest moods in Esenin's poetry, particularly in the last period of his life and much of it is conveyed through the imagery of Nature.

When autumn comes the leaves fall and, gradually, the green veil of the forest is replaced by a white cover. The succession of seasons brings a variety of changes: there is sadness and yet, at the same time, there is joy with one expression, one form of beauty replaced by another.

Зеленая прическа,
Девическая грудь,
О тонкая березка,
Что загляделась в пруд?

(II, 54, 1918)

In the description of "The Birch Tree" there is at first just a hint of sorrow— "Zagliadelas' v prud", and this sorrow becomes obvious in the third stanza:

Я полюбил печальный
Твой предосенний шум.

(II, 54, 1918)

The autumn also has an effect on human lives: the shepherd has to retreat from the meadows and forests:

И так, воздушные глубоко,
Сказал под звон ветвей:
"Прощай, моя глубина,
До новых журавлей".

(II, 55, 1918)

In the poem "My Stroll after the First Snow" (Ia po pervomu snegu bredu) (1917-1918) Esenin portrays how winter gives landscapes a new form
For Esenin the change from autumn to winter has infinitely greater poetic meaning than the coming of the other seasons; it gives him a closer look at death as an aspect of life. In his poetry he often uses the epithet "toska zhuravliniaia" in various collocations. In the fall the cranes fly south and in the spring they return. They follow the change in Nature and, for the poet, they are symbols of sadness, of parting. Of parting, that is, dying, which is part of living.

Esenin's sorrow originates in the destruction of life and its beauty. In one instance it is the killing of a mother swan by an eagle leaving the little ones unprotected. On another occasion, it is the harvesting of the wheat and the whole process of turning it into bread. Esenin does not see suffering as an isolated incident, but rather in broad perspective, as an act against the order of Nature. In the "Poem about Bread" (Pesn' o khlebe) (1921), the poet views human existence as based on the destruction of life and beauty.

(II, 103, 1921)

For the poet the stalks of grain are also flesh and man, by using the products of the harvest, assures his own survival but, at the same time,
sows in himself the seeds of mortality which ultimately lead to his self-destruction and death.

Because of this man is bound to die, and that is the very source of his misfortune.

Suffering is one of the aspects of life through which Esenin conceived the unity of man and Nature. His artistic achievement lay in his ability to convey sorrow through images of the cycles of Nature and not to treat it as an isolated and morbid experience. In the "Poem about the Dog" (Pesn' o sobake) (1915) the poet first describes the episode in which a peasant drowns the puppies, and then he focuses on the pain of the mother dog:

Associating her grief with "mesiats," "zviózdy," "siniuiu vys'" and "khólm" seems to be a way of diverting attention from the poor animal as
if to ease its pain. More than that, it illustrates Esenin's capacity to see and convey the beauty of the world beyond immediate sorrow.

Joy and sadness may be expressed simultaneously in his poetry:

И пускай со звонами плачут глухари,
Есть тоска веселая в алюых зари.

(I, 68, 1910)

or:

И дремлет Русь в тоске своей веселой,
Вцепивши руки в желтый кругосклон.

(I, 227, 1916)

Quite often in the same poem or even in the same line, Esenin expresses different poetic feelings and notions with a perfect blending which is a mark of his poetic craftsmanship.

Joy of life (with other overtones) rings through Esenin's early poetry, imparting youthfulness, optimism, and playfulness to his art.

На лазоревые ткани
Пролил пальцы багрянец,
В темной роще, по поляне,
Плачет смехом бубенец.

(I, 146, 1915)

The joyful movements of Nature at the coming of spring are vividly portrayed in the sprouting of branches and accompanied by the sleigh bell.

His rather unrestrained imagery becomes poetically convincing in:

Синее небо, цветная дуга,
Тихо стенные бегут берега,
Тянет ся дым, у малиновых сел
Свадьба ворон облегла чистокол.


Such surrealistic expressions as "malinovye siola" or "svad'ba voron"
are artistically strengthened by the melodiousness and the joyful tone of the poem.
Religious Overtones in Esenin's Poetry

In the early Esenin, his conception of religion coincides to a great extent with that of Nature and human beings. Relying heavily on such folkloric sources as popular legends and religious poems, he brings Christianity close to the earth. Striking examples are the poems "Mikola" and "Egorii" which differ little from popular stories. The protagonists of the Christian faith mostly dwell in forests and fields as if in their natural ambience:

Между сосен, между елок,
Меж берёз кудрявых бус,
Под венком, в кольце иголок,
Мне мерещится Иисус.

(I, 121, 1914)

Heaven is also here on earth:

Он зовет меня в дубровы,
Как во царстве небес,

(I, 121, 1914)

The objects of Nature are associated with religion: "v eliakh krylia kheruvima," "ivy krotkie monashki." On the other hand, Esenin's Christ and Saints are real human beings. In the poem "God Went to Try Man's Compassion" (She1 gospod'pytat' liudei v liubvi) (1914), God appears in the disguise of a poor old man in order to learn how humans behave towards those who are poor and suffering:

Подшел господь, скрывая скрбь и муку:
Видно, мол, сердца их не разбудишь...
И сказал старик, протягивая руку:
"На, покуй... маленько крепче "удешь."

(I, 109, 1914)
This interpretation of religion is innocent and reflects a lack of religious fear. God is a good old man who cares about the people. One of the best poems of this kind is "A Canon for Whitsunday Morning" (Troitsyno utro utrennii kanon) (1914). The atmosphere of the holiday is communicated through words referring to the rites, e.g.: "utrennii kanon," "obedniaia"; then through the blending of the church bell sounds with the white color of the birch grove: "V roshche po beriozkam belyi perezvon." The poet captures two elements, the religious and the natural one, and interweaves them into a single mood of festivity.

In the poem "I Will Face the World in the Guise of a Humble Monk" (Poidu v skuf'e smirennym inokom) (1914), the poet expresses a more intimate desire to encounter the elements of Nature and to share the lot of "bosiaki" (vagabond), at the same time carrying in his heart the religious notion of life.

Счастлив, кто в радости убогой,
Живя без друга и врача,
Пройдет проселочной дорогой,
Молись на конь и стога.

(I, 107, 1914)

There is a distinct difference in religious overtones, between the early Esenin and his work from 1917 to 1920. During the latter period his religious feelings were unstable. He greeted the February and October Revolutions enthusiastically. His artistic response was manifested in an attempt to see the world -- human lives and nature -- through the perspective of Russia's social upheaval but anticipating a new and more humane order, not only in his homeland but in the whole universe:
The poet showed special concern for "wooden" Russia: the Revolution has to purify rural culture and tradition, which would now play the main role in the life of the country. One of the chief political objectives of the Revolution was to smash the power and influence of the church. Esenin's poetic reaction to this was contradictory. There are poems, as for instance "Transfiguration" (Preobrazhenie) (1917), where the cosmic elements are extensively used to convey the foreseen cataclysmic changes.

"О веруй, небо вспомнится, 
Как лай, сверкнет волна. 
Над рощей оценится 
Златым шенком луна."

(II, 14, 1917)

In addition, he gives voice to a genuine religious interpretation of the Revolution:

"Зреет час преображенья, 
Он сойдет, наш светлый гость, 
Из распятого терпенья 
Вынуть выжженный гвоздь."

(II, 16, 1917)

In his work we also find a certain amount of blasphemy, a precursor of another tendency -- the forcing of a new revolutionary content into the old Christian images. The poem "Inoniia" (1918) is about the promised land created by the poet's imagination; it was supposed to replace the legendary "Kitezh grad." At the same time he blasts the old dreams: "Proklinaiu ia dykhanie kitezha" and the symbol of Christianity:
Towards the end of the poem he uses religious images, attempting to give them new content as if the old meaning had been destroyed by the blasphemy.

After 1920, Esenin seldom uses religious terminology.
Pantheism

Pantheism is a dominant trait in Esenin's poetry, particularly in his early period. His belief in the unity of man, Nature and the universe is based on intuition, emotion, and imagination. Though it lacks "rational" grounds, his conception is still philosophically sound. A comparison between him and some British romantics, especially William Wordsworth, may help to explain his approach. A classic example of pantheism is Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey." In this poem, Nature is good; its forms and sounds are beautiful; in it one can rest, meditate and think, inspired by the varied landscapes whose meaning goes beyond appearances; one can also safely show one's emotions without any risk of getting hurt.

For I have learned
To look on nature, not as in the hour
Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes
The still, sad music of humanity,
Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power
To chasten and subdue. And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things.¹

The tendency among romantic poets was to pour out their emotional response to natural phenomena; but their response is based, to a greater or lesser extent, on rational theories, such as materialism, paleontology, etc. Scientific discoveries had aesthetic meaning for them. For Wordsworth the "favored souls" were "chiefly those to whom the harmonious doors/Of
What makes Esenin utterly different from the western poets in general is the peculiarity of his ties with Nature. If we take as another illustration a few lines from Lord Byron's "Childe Harold":

All Heaven and Earth are still: from the high host
Of stars, to the lulled lake and mountain-coast,
All is concentrated in a life intense,
Where not a beam, nor air, nor leaf is lost,
But hath a part of Being, and a sense
Of that which is of all Creator and Defence.

Then stirs the feeling infinite, so felt
In solitude, where we are least alone;
A truth which through our being then does melt,
And purifies from self: it is a tone,
The soul and source of Music, which makes known
Eternal harmony, and sheds a charm
Like to the fabled Cytherea's zone,
Binding all things with beauty; -- 'twould disarm
The spectre Death, had he substantial power to harm,  

We find that it is the intellect behind these lines which combines the philosophy, aesthetics and sincere emotions into a beautiful vision of the world as a unity. And yet Byron is comparable to a man who grew up elsewhere and is just discovering his homeland, and joyfully describes its beauty. The way he sees and feels the natural scene is artistically remarkable but at the same time his response is without intimacy, without emotionally developed ties.

Arthur Beatty, in paraphrasing Wordsworth, says: "Poetry proceeds from feelings; but the only feelings which are aesthetic ones are those which have their origin in intellectual ideas; any other emotion, or feeling is not worthy of poetry."  

To apply such an extreme view to Esenin's poetry would probably mean its dismissal.

Obviously, it is a difficult task to explain him in terms of
western culture. His poetry is based on deep bonds with Nature which are, perhaps, as much biological as emotional and are often found among the Russian people. Cosmopolitan culture has often been prejudicial to the development of such feelings. What seems apparent to the Russian poet is that man does not have to sever his close ties with Nature in order to comprehend urban civilization; on the contrary, if preserved, they may be of the greatest assistance to the attainment of the finest human achievements.

For Esenin, living anywhere but in his native country meant weakening some of his ties with Nature and at the same time with the sources of life. This is reflected in many of his poems, especially in those of the last year of his life.

Receiving and forming images of the natural world was at the root of Esenin's artistic expression. (This question receives more attention in the last chapter). A special kind of perception emerges: this is imagination combined with the intuitive and emotional power to comprehend the entire life and scope of Nature. Men and beasts are seen as part of the grand design of Nature and the universe. And yet each object has a specific meaning and life of its own.

In describing the concrete objects of Nature, Esenin intuitively selects the universal manifestations of life. Artistically this is done by fusing different images or conveying different feelings simultaneously.

A single image is a more concrete means of poetic expression than a combination of two images, especially if the two reveal different poetic experiences. In any case, it would require deeper artistic delving in
order to find a common ground that unites them. Thus:

нины сжаты, рощи голы,
от воды туман и сырость.
колесом за сини горы
солнце тихое скатилось.

(II, 27, 1917, 1918)

This is a concrete description of autumn linked to universal laws and changes, namely to the movement of the sun. The poet draws a parallel between a wheel lost behind a mountain (which, for those who are travelling, means a period of waiting before they can recover it and continue their journey) and the sun moving into a position from which it cannot give out sufficient energy to foster the life of Nature. By relating these images the poet, on a deeper level, links the concrete and the universal. In this manner, his pantheistic vision penetrates beyond the immediacy of life.
Footnotes

Pantheism


Esenin's Poetic Response to the Industrialization of Russia

Esenin's reaction to the industrialization of Russia came quite suddenly with his heart-breaking poem "Sorokoust," written in 1920. He foresaw the effects of the industrialization that was just beginning to take place. An incident, which might have seemed rather insignificant to an ordinary man, occurred on his trip to the Caucasus. As his train passed through the plains of southern Russia, a young colt raced it for several kilometers; this cheered up all the passengers except the poet who, at first, had been frenetically shouting and encouraging the animal to keep up with the train and then, when the sight of it was lost, became very sad. This served as the basis for his poetic vision of the future. He begins the poem ominously with "Pogibel'nyi rozhok," which announces the forthcoming destruction of the countryside: "tot posiolok i eti luga," there is no hiding from the enemy with an iron belly. The village accordion spreads the sad melody while the animals run from the menace: 'Molchal'nik byk pochuial bedu nad polem.' Even the trees react differently. Then, in broad strokes, the poet presents the confrontation between the village on the one hand and, on the other, the new, more technical, approach to life and Nature,

О, электрический восход,
Ремней и труб глухая хватка,
Се изо древенчатый живот
Трясет стальная лихорадка!

(II, 91, 1920)

For the poet the result of the race between the train and colt symbolizes a change in the entire relationship between man and nature that has
existed since immemorial times. The poet's reaction is expressed in concrete examples of the problem, paralleling the universal effects in the background. On one level, man's emotional world is threatened and, on the deeper level, certain aspects of Nature may be completely destroyed.

МИЛЫЙ, МИЛЫЙ, СМЕШНОЙ ДУРАЛЕЙ,
Ну куда он, куда он гонится?
Неужель он не знает, что живых коней
Победила стальная конница?

(II, 93, 1920)

With much warmth and kindness he describes the illusory attempt of the poor animal which, in its innocence and animal pride, is fighting for supremacy over the fields. However, the outcome of the race cannot prevent the establishment of the new order. The role of the live horse in Nature and in human lives is going to be replaced by the "iron horse."

Esenin reacted intuitively and with his whole being against the destruction of any form of life. Besides being concerned with a change in the biological balance between man and Nature which was bound to grow with industrialization, the poet was also very keenly aware of the disturbance of aesthetic and emotional ties -- in this case, the bond between horse and man. In the past, not only had the horse been a beautiful animal whose speed and strength was always a source of admiration, but also many human adventures would have been impossible without its participation. Esenin was fully aware of the role played in human psychology by the horse and other objects of Nature.

By 1920 Soviet Russia had accomplished little in terms of industrialization. The government was just developing plans for it and supporters of the new ideas were beginning to think in new terms.
That is to say, they were viewing life in terms of future industrial development. With his keen perception, Liscnin was able to grasp the significance of the coming changes, but in his own way, with poetic concerns that most of his contemporaries were not aware of. The critics oversimplified and interpreted his attitude as opposition to the Soviet Government.

The poet's desire to dramatize this change in the conception of the world was perhaps chiefly due to his profound attachment to the pre-revolution harmony between man and Nature which had been the basis of his poetry. The new men dreamed of technical achievements: dams, factories, highways; they saw the countryside in practical terms through the kolkhoz and the tractor. The poet was afraid that disruption of the harmony of Nature and a change in human relationship with it would degrade and impoverish human beings. This is an eternal problem, but the circumstances under which the poet deals with it are rather rare in human history: there were cataclysmic changes in Russian society which simultaneously affected the relations of human beings to each other, and the relation of society as a whole towards Nature. It was only at a later time that the problem revealed itself fully and the poet was able to grasp its magnitude.

However, at that early period, the train was inconceivable in his poetic world.

Черт бы взял тебя, окаянный гость!
Наша песня с тобой не сживется.

(II, 93, 1930)

He feels himself to be a "Psalomshchik" (psalm-reader) singing "Alleluia" to his native country. The trees are described as standing in the shadow of forthcoming changes.
This gloomy vision of the countryside is extended to the Russian Muzhik.

In "Sorokoust" the poet laments the disappearance of the village world and forthcoming industrialization that is going to cripple Nature and destroy its meaning and longestablished image. Another poem, "Volchia gibel'", grows into a protest and a cry of hostility towards the city.

Full of despair the poet blames the city, the protagonist of the new fate of Russia. The conflict between the city and the village is reflected in the image of a wolf encircled by hunters who, at any moment, may put iron claws on its wounded and exhausted body. The poet identifies with the animal which, in its last moments of life, desperately charges at one of his enemies.

The wolf symbolizes the wild life and a certain type of freedom, which
the poet wants to save and preserve.

The most important aspect of Esenin's poetry is his vision of the intimate ties between Russian man and Nature that had developed from immemorial times. He presents that vision at a crucial period of Russian history, at the beginning of a new era that represents, among other things, a tremendous scientific and technological development which is bound to change man's environment significantly and will affect his psychology as well.

Esenin's concern was to save the long established relation of man to Nature; that is why he wanted to preserve "Tainstvennyi i drevnii mir" in the new Russia. In 1920, he sensed its disappearance and the coming alienation of man from Nature and his poetic reply to it was full of despair.

In this period (1921) he also wrote "Pugachov", usually called a historical drama. In spite of the fact that Esenin took the events of the story and also the characters from the past, the work is closely related to the poetic concerns expressed in his other poems of that time. The poet expected "Pugachov" to be considered his masterpiece and was bitterly disappointed when it was coolly received by the public. From the literary point of view, the work is quite interesting for its unusual combination of different artistic elements. It is historical drama, based on a typical epic theme, but written in lyric verse and, to a great extent, Nature is used to explain the events of the story and the actions of man.

The uprising occurs off-stage and is presented through several characters in whom the events are reflected. The poet purposely avoided
descriptions of actual fighting in order to attract the attention of the reader to some of the issues hidden behind the actual events that he felt to be important but less conspicuous. This was a surprise to the public, which expected to see the movements of the masses and the defeat of the Tsarist armies. As a result, the point that Esenin was trying to make was missed.

Alexander Pushkin in his novel Kapitanskaja Doch did not pay enough attention to the characters of the men who led the rebellion. Esenin went to another extreme; he completely ignored the leaders of the opposite side and concentrated on the human drama of the protagonists of the rebellion, their zest for life and superhuman effort to overcome all obstacles.

It is true that this work cannot measure up even to the most lenient requirements of historical drama. Thus, "Pugachov" should be regarded as a unique literary creation with both strong and weak points. Its most noticeable shortcoming is the attribution of imagist language and figures of speech to Eighteenth Century characters. Yet, despite the omission of the struggle between the two armies and the failure to present the opponents of Pugachov, Esenin gave this work a specific kind of unity. The characters are shown not on the main historic scene but either before the events, in preparation for them, or after the disaster, facing the consequences.

The actual poem begins with Pugachov's journey and his arrival at the Cossak village in the Urals. The sufferings of the oppressed population and the rumors of a possible revolt have attracted him to this region. From the beginning, it is noticeable that Pugachov feels and
speaks about men and their destiny in terms of Nature. He appeals to Nature for help in executing his plans:

О, помоги же, степная мгла, 
Грозно свершить мой замысел!

(II, 154, 1921)

In the same manner, some contemporary people (the more old-fashioned ones, of course) would say "God help me" at difficult moments of their lives. All of the characters speak the same language. Thus, when Pugachov asks the guard "Is that the right moment for the Muzhiks to attack the landlords?" he answers:

Видел ли ты, 
Как коса в дугу скачет, 
Ртом железным перекусывая ноги трав? 
Оттого что стоит трава на корячках, 
Под себя коренья подобрав. 
И никуда ей, траве, не скрыться 
От горячих зубов косы, 
Потому что не может она, как птица, 
Оторваться от земли в синь. 
Так и мы! Бросили ногами крови в избы, 
Что нам первый ряд подкошенной травы? 
Только лишь до нас не добрались бы, 
Только нам бы, 
Только о нашей 
Не скосили, как ромашке, головы. 
Но теперь как будто пробудились, 
И березами заплаканный наш тракт 
Окружает, как туман от сырости, 
Имя мертвого Петра.

(II, 155/6, 1921)

The local Cossacks had killed two officers while resisting an order to pursue a tribe of Kalmuks which fled towards Mongolia. They turn to Pugachov to be their leader and help them to continue the rebellion. Rumors were circulating among the peasants that Peter III, who had died not long ago in a power struggle with Catherine the Great, had come to
life again. According to the popular belief he was a kind ruler. In their folklore the Russian people usually sided with those who need protection or are defeated. In order to attract the Muzhiks to the cause, Pugachov accepted the advice of his friends to impersonate Peter.

In the monologue of the guard Karavaiev, the description of autumn subtly suggests a correlation between Nature and human destiny in the forthcoming events.

Perhaps we can consider this as the setting for the events that are to take place later. At any rate, this gives the tone and the atmosphere of the rest of the poem. In a symbolic passage, autumn is presented as a battle field after the fighting is over. Just as fallen leaves which the change of season has brought down cannot be revived and have no continuity,
SO the men fallen at each others' hand share the same destiny.

The character of Pugachov is unveiled in the conversation with the guard. On his return to the camp, after spying on the enemy's posts, he talks to Karavaiev:

Завтра ж к утру будет ясная погода,  
Сиям табуном просияет хмарь,  
Слушай, ведь я из простого рода  
И сердцем такой же степной дикарь!  
Я умею, на сутки и вёрсты не трогаться,  
Слушать бег ветра и твари шаг,  
Оттого, что в груди у меня, как в берлоге,  
Ворочается зверенем теплым душа.  
Мне нравится запах травы, холодом подожженной,  
И сентябрьского листолета протяжный свист.

(II, 167, 1921)

The characterization of Pugachov in such statements as "Serdtsem stepnoi dikar'" or "vorochaetsia zverionyshem tioplym dusha" reflects a profound knowledge and perception of Nature. To give us a better understanding of the above expressions, we have an interesting remark made by Esenin to his friend the painter, Ilia Ryzhenko:

Бывая в гостях у Рыженко, Есенин подолгу рылся в его объемистых папках, расставлял этюды на стульях, на подоконнике, на столе... Смотрел, начал головой и говорил:

-- У тебя, Илья, прямо собачья любовь к природе!  
-- Почему же собачья? -- удивлялся художник.  
-- Да как тебе сказать... Мне кажется, что по-настоящему любят и понимают природу только животные... И еще растения... А иные люди только притворяются, что любят,  
-- им уже нечем любить... Ты так, по-моему, не человек,  
а большая, умная и добная собака... И если тебя ласково погледеть, ты растергавешься и заплачешь собачьими слезами...1

Esenin also adds another aspect of the hero's personality: concern for his fellow man.
Here human beings are seen parallel to objects of Nature.

Pugachov is devoted to his rebels and their cause. He dismisses with disgust the possibility of giving up everything and going to the Turkish sultan. He feels bound to remain and fight.

Another character to whom the poet pays particular attention is the convict Khlopusha. The story is that he was offered his freedom if he would find Pugachov and deliver him into the hands of the government. But, instead of betraying him, he becomes one of his most faithful associates. On the basis of this story Esenin builds a powerful personality.

After three days of wandering, Khlopusha finds the camp. His first reaction is to turn to the stormy weather which followed him all the way and to question Nature as if to discover his destiny.

Then he tells of his urge to see the leader.

The poet beautifully describes Khlopusha's struggle with the elements.
Я три дня и три ночи б hugsдал по тропам,
В солнце рыл глазами удачу,
Ветер волосы мои, как солому, трепал
И цепами дожда обмолачивал.
Но озлобленное сердце никогда не заблудится,
Эту голову с шей сшибить не легко.

(II, 174, 1921)

Nature also helped him to survive and gave him strength, its beauty feeding his spirit:

Оренбургская заря красноречивой верблюдицей
Рассветное роняла мне в рот молоко.
И холодное коряевое вылак озвозь тьму
Принимал я, как хлеб, к истощенным венам.
Проведите, проведите меня к нему,
Я хочу видеть этого человека.

(II, 174, 1921)

Khlopusha's life story as a tramp and outlaw is, at the same time, the story of a superhuman effort for physical and moral survival. He rejects the government's offer and refuses to betray Pugachov because his life as an outlaw had not destroyed his moral feelings. He puts the common cause above his personal well-being.

Esenin bypasses the period of Pugachov's victories and power except for mentioning the siege of Orenburg and the fact that, at one point, a third of the country was in rebel hands. He describes at length the breakdown of morale among the rebels. A bad omen precedes the rumors of defeat.

Стоп, Зарубин!
Ты, наверное, не слышал.
Это видел не я...
Другие...
Многие...
Около Самары с пробитой башкой ольх,
Капая желтым мозгом,
Прихрамывает при дороге.
This is a symbolic vision of the forthcoming catastrophe. By introducing this episode Esenin delves deeper into the psychology of the Eighteenth Century. From time immemorial man has tried to understand Nature and to have it on his side. Correlating natural phenomena to a future event that involves human actions in an attempt to foresee the results ahead of time is an old Slavic custom which was described as far back as 'The Lay of Igor's Campaign':

The news of a terrible defeat of Pugachov's army is brought by a survivor, Chumukov:

Словою слепец, от ватаги своей отстав,
С гнусной и хриплой дрожью
В рваную шапку вороньего гнезда
Просит она на пропитанье
У проезжих и прохожих.
Но никто ей не бросит даже камня.
В испуге крестясь на звезду,
Все считают, что это страшное знамение,
Предвещдающие беду.
Что-то будет,
Что-то должно случиться.
Говорят, наступил глад и мор,
По сту раз на лету будет склевывать птица
Желудочное свое серебро.

(II, 179, 1921)
This description of the battlefield after the slaughter is one of the poet's most powerful lyric passages. It is seen through the eyes of the survivor, who, in nightmarish manner, describes the skeletons of his comrades moving in the fields of rye. He feels both sorrow and sincere regret that he is not lying there with the rest of the army.

The peasants receive the news and are uncertain whether to leave Pugachov for their farms or side with him in a desperate attempt to reverse the results of the battle. The Cossack Burnov bursts out with sudden zest for life:

Как же смерть?
Разве мысль эта в сердце поместится,
Когда в Пензенской губернии у меня есть свой дом?
Жалко солнышко мне, жалко месяц,
Жалко толпой над низким окном.
Только для живых ведь благословенны
Рощи, потоки, степи и зелень.
Слушай, плевать мне на всю вселенную,
Если завтра здесь не будет меня!
Я хочу жить, жить, жить,
Жить до страха и боли!
Хоть карманником, хоть золоторотцем,
Лишь бы видеть, как мыши от радости прыгают в поле,
Лишь бы слышать, как лягушки от восторга пойет в колодце.
Яблоневым цветом брызжется душа моя белая,
В синее пламя ветер глаза раздудул.
Ради бога научите меня,
Научите меня, и я что угодно сделая,
Сделаю что угодно, чтоб звенеть в человечьем саду!
These lines are particularly interesting since, in less than five years, the poet was to commit suicide.

A heightened awareness of life and its beauty is often felt by men facing violent or sudden death—if they are not overwhelmed by fear.

The Cossack Tavrogorov suggests to his comrades that they should capture and deliver Pugachov to the enemy, convincing everybody that it is their only chance of survival.

At first, Pugachov cannot understand why his associates have turned against him and tries to convince them to follow him to Asia where they can regain their strength and return with new forces. Only when he is bound and waiting to be delivered to his enemy does he fully realize his hopeless position.

The final lines of the poem sound like the last words of a dying man.

The culmination of Pugachov's tragedy is in these moments when he is waiting to be given up to his enemies by his own associates.
Such an ending to the poem is quite justifiable: for a strong and profound nature like Pugachov's, no torture by the enemy can exceed the suffering caused by the disappearance of his army and by betrayal by his associates.

This poem was written in the period when Esenin was preoccupied by the theme of the industrialization of Russia, a time between the creation of "Sorokoust" and "Volchia Gibel". He went back deep into history to find Pugachov, a revolutionary of the past, with whom the Communists would eagerly identify. The main characters of the poem personify those human qualities of the world "Tainstvennyi i drevnii" which the poet wanted to save. In elaborating to such an extent on the relation between the characters of the poem and Nature, he was trying to make his contemporaries aware of an important aspect of their heritage which was in danger of being destroyed.

There are other poems of this period which could give a broader picture of Esenin's artistic world. "O Land, you are my Land" (Storona ty moia storona) (1921) is a gloomy vision of the city, its lifeless and monstrous forms -- the street lamps shaped like heads without mouths; skeleton-like buildings but also a church tower with bells to remind the poet of a water mill and sacks of flour as a consolation in his nightmare -- something familiar and more pleasant from the village world.

Так немного теплей и безболней.
Посмотри: между скелетов домов,
Словно мельник, несет колокольня
Медные мешки колоколов.

(II, 105, 1921)

Not expecting any change or improvement in his own destiny, he reacts to city life with a hollow feeling. The poet is deeply disappointed in the
unhappiness which has settled on his existence.

"Друг мой, друг мой, прозревшие вежды
Закрывает одна лишь смерть".

(II, 105, 1921)

The poem 'Yes! I Have Made up My Mind' (Da! teper' reshenno) (1922/23) belongs to the cycle "Moscow the Tavern City." It gives an insight into the poet's bohemian way of life and shows the split between his early life with all its hopes and ideals and his association in the new milieu with desperate people who live without ideals.

He will not be returning to village life but nostalgically thinks of it.

Низкий дом без меня ссутулятся,
Старый пес мой давно исдох,
На московских изогнутых улицах
Умереть, знать, судил мне бог.

(II, 119, 1922/23)

In the new environment, he seeks friendship and understanding:

Шум и гам в этом логове жутком,*
Но всю ночь напролет, до зари,
Я читаю стихи проституткам
И с бандитами жарю спирт.

(II, 120, 1922/23)

He finds only disappointment, in common with people from the underworld.

"Я такой же, как вы, промазший,
Мне теперь не уйти назад".

(II, 120, 1922/23)

His disgust with the city is powerfully expressed by the contrast of "Logove Zhutkom" to the world of Nature.

* Italics mine, L.P.
He considers himself a lost man. His misfortune is that he is not able to return to his former ideals or to the countryside. And his new friends have only grief to share with him.
Footnotes

Esenin's Poetic Response to the Industrialization of Russia


Esenin is an elusive poet. His daring imagination penetrates beyond the casual lineaments of life and to the roots of human emotions. In some instances it is difficult to fully comprehend the meaning of a poem or group of poems without analyzing it in conjunction with his other works. Such is the case with poems in which the poet expresses concern about the disappearance of the old world, notably "Sorokoust", "Volchia gibel" and others.

After his trip abroad, Esenin's conception of Russia changed; naturally this was reflected in his work.

The industrial achievements of the western nations made a profound impression on him. He tasted the fruits of technology: flew in an airplane, drove a car on German and Belgian highways, stayed in first class hotels, crossed the Atlantic in luxurious ocean liners and saw the glitter of New York. All this convinced him of the usefulness of industrialization.

This is quite a strong reaction and represents a fundamental change in his attitude towards the countryside. However, his statement is general and to extract specific meaning from it, one has to take into account what he said on other occasions. In his autobiography dated 24-4-1924,
there is the paragraph:

What he dislikes in America is the neglect of art and the lack of inner culture. His outcry against poverty in Russia is now juxtaposed to technical development as a great possibility for human progress. But he sets one condition: if Russia has to sacrifice the type of human understanding and relationship that gave rise to Leo Tolstoy, Fiodor Dostoyevskii, Pushkin, Lermontov, etc., then the poet would prefer the poor huts to remain as they are. Nevertheless, he was concerned about the poverty of the Russian people and saw in industrialization a possibility to improve human conditions as well as a way to encourage rustic culture.

Earlier, Esenin had been opposed to the transformation of Russia since he did not anticipate the possibility of establishing a new and better harmony between man and Nature or men and Man.

The effect of the trip abroad was to alienate him from his "Tainstvennyi i drevnii" world. After seeing America Esenin became closer to Soviet reality. There are a number of poems which directly reflect his new experience. He made an attempt to form new poetic ideals: to see his "Rodina cherez kamennoe i Stal'noe"; to find some common ground with the
builders of Communism. He accepts the new epoch with Vladimir Ilich Lenin inspiring and guiding the country.

In the poem "Stanzas" (Stan′sy) (1924), Esenin tried to project a new image of himself as having a serious role in Soviet society.

Хочу я быть певцом
И гражданином,
Чтоб каждому,
Как гордость и пример,
Был настоящим,
А не сводным сыном --
В великих штатах СССР.

(III, 44, 1924)

He asks his readers not to be overconcerned about his drunken incidents and to pay more attention to his art: in his eyes are "prozrenii divnykh svet."

In Baku, Piotr Chagin showed him the workings of an oil refinery and explained its meaning for the future of the country. To Esenin, this was almost like a revelation and he was quite enthusiastic.

Нефть на воде --
Как одевало перо,
И вечер по небу
Рассыпал звездный куль.
Но я готов покляться
Чистым сердцем,
Что фонари
Прекрасней звезд в Баку,
Я полон душ об индустрийной мощи,
Я слышу голос человечных сил.
Довольно с нас
Небесных всех светил, --
Нам на земле
Устроить это проще.

(III, 46/7, 1924)

These lines surprised many readers and this is the farthest Esenin went in an unreserved acceptance of industrialization and the Soviet government.
It appeared as if he had finally found the basis for his art.

There are several other poems, based on his new ideal, such as "Letter to a Woman" (Pis'mo k zhenshchine) (1924) where he speaks apologetically of his bohemian past which, at one time, served as a refuge from the reality that he did not have the capacity to grasp.

Не знали вы,
Что я в сплошном дыму,
В развороченном бурей быте
С того и мучась, что не пойду --
Куда несет нас рок событий.
Я избегал паденья с кручи.
Теперь в Советской стороне
Я самый яростный полутник.

(III, 57, 1924)

But time helped him to evolve and to understand contemporary Russia.

The poem "Letter to my Grandfather" (Pis'mo dedu) (1924) is particularly interesting for the possible parallel with "Sorokoust," a poem that has been discussed at length earlier. In both cases he describes a train, thus we can see concretely how his attitude changed in the course of time.

While in Batum, the poet invites his grandfather to come to the warm south, although the distance is an obstacle which cannot be overcome other than by train. His grandfather does not have faith in such types of transportation, so the poet tries to convince him of its advantage over the horse.

Что за лошадь фаровоз!
Ее, наверное,
В Германии купили.

Чугунный рот ее
Привык к огню,
И дым над ней, как грива --
Черен, густ и четок.

(III, 57, 1924)
Такую 6 гриву
Нашему коню --
То сколько 6 вышло
Разных швабр и щеток!

Я знаю --
Время даже камень крошит...
И ты, старик,
Когда-нибудь поймешь,
Что, даже лучшую
Втретгая в сани лошадь,
В дилегию край
Лишь кости привезешь...

(III, 82, 1924)

At one time Esenin castigated the train as a symbol of industrialization; in this case, three years later, he poeticizes the same object. Such reversals are not rare in his work and are one of the reasons for more serious study of his art.

He is approaching his beloved countryside with a new conception of life and art, rejecting his former ideals and negating the vision that had been the basis of his early poetry.

(III, 156, 1925)

Esenin is fully aware of poverty as a major cause of human suffering in Russia. Here social concern prevails over the old poetic notions such
as "mir tainstvennyi," "mir drevnii." Moreover, the poet is turning
against that which has been, to a great extent, the basis of his poetry.
Now he wants to see an iron Russia.

This new direction in his work brought him close to the practical
revolutionaries of the time and led to the creation of several long
semi-epic poems with themes taken from the October Revolution or the Civil
War, such as "The Song about the Grand March" (Pesn' o velikom pokhode)
(1924), "Poem about 36" (Poema 36) (1924), "Ballad about Twenty Six" (Ballada
o dvadtsati shesti) (1924), etc. These poems have little to do with Nature.
and, for that reason, will not be analyzed in this paper.
Esenin at the Crossroads between Old and New Russia

In his last two years Esenin vacillates between old and new poetic ideals, unable to reconcile them. Some of his poems reflect an attempt to find an artistic modus vivendi between two extremes. Perhaps his own words would be the best illustration:

Остался в прошлом я одной ногой,
Стремясь догнать стальную рать,
Скольжу и падаю другую.

(III, 48, 1924)

In the poem "Rus' bespriutnaia" he writes with scorn about those who brag about the killing of Red soldiers. But he is sympathetic and fully understands those who reject the new Russia and remain in the past, condemned to a slow death.

Они несчастой рокью на корню
Оставшись догнавать и осыпаться.

(III, 48, 1924)

In another poem, "Soviet Russia" (Rus' sovetskaia) (1924), we find enthusiastic builders of the new Russia:

С горы идет крестьянский комсомол,
И под гармонку, напрявая рыно,
Поец агитки Бедного Демьяна,²
Веселым криком оглашая дол.

(III, 23, 1924)

Further, the poem "Disappearing Russia" (Rus' ukhodiashchaia) (1924) shows the poet's unhappiness about his role in the new Russia:

Какой скандал!
Какой большой скандал!
Я ощушился в ужом промежутке.
Ведь я мог дать
Не то, что дал,
Что мне давалось ради шутки.

(III, 52, 1924)

He is self-reproachful for not participating more actively in bringing
the "great idea" to realization. Avoiding Soviet reality left him behind
his age. But now love of Russia compels him to dwell more on the major
issues his country is facing -- an attitude frequently encountered in
Russian literature. However, two lines from the previous poem show how
deep is his grief at being neglected and ignored by his contemporaries:

Моя поэзия здесь больше не нужна,
Да я, пожалуй, сам я тоже здесь не нужен.

(III, 23, 1924)

His feeling of futility comes from the realization that the world
which he recreated in his poetry is rejected by the builders of the new
Russian society. At one time he had hoped that the values of "Dereviannaia
Rus" might be saved and would serve as a basis of the new society. In the
poem About Homeless Russia (Rus' bespriiutnaia) (1924), seeking a way
out of his bitter loneliness, he identifies with the sorrows of Oliver
Twist.

Мне вспомнилась
Печальная история --
История об Оливере Твисте.

(III, 53, 1924)

Further in the same poem he also identifies with the innocent sufferings
of orphan children (who were quite numerous after the Revolution and the
Civil War) and with the wounded, at times broken, but great voices of
Russian poetry: Pushkin, Lermontov, Kol'tsov, Nekrasov. It is painful for Esenin to see that his art has not been included in the building of the new Russia.

Esenin believed in the great future of his country and quietly, unprotestingly, prepared to suffer and wait for the new Russia to outgrow that which he can't "Prigolubit' i potselovat'." But he wanted the future Russia to use his poetry:

Но и тогда,
Когда во всей планете
Пройдет врага племен,
Исчезнет ложь и грусть, --
Я буду воспевать
Всем существом в поэте
Шестую часть земли
С названием кратким "Русь".

(III, 24, 1924)

This emerges like a confession, gathered from several poems in which Esenin exposed his inner self, the full spectrum of different and, at times, contradictory emotions: grief, regret, self-reproach, hope, love and devotion to his country. However, in spite of his yearning for the reconciliation of different poetic notions, there persisted, deep within him and his art, the division between the new and the old Russia.

Perhaps his most successful attempt towards reconciliation of these two opposing loyalties is to be found in the work Anna Snegina, a lyric-epic poem in five varied cantos, of simple structure and harmony of composition. The poem has two themes: revolution and love which have parallel development but subtle interconnection. In addition there is an unusual number of characters: the miller, Anna, Pron, the poet and the cohnin. The events take place in different settings: Padovo, Kruiska,
Petersburg and London. The poet shows remarkable artistic skill in organising varied material -- including events of historic magnitude -- yet always maintaining harmonic balance. Though Nature receives less emphasis than in previous works it is, nevertheless, an integral part of the poem.

"Село, значит, наше -- Радово,
Дворов, попытай, два ста.
Тому, кто его оглядывал,
Приятными наши места.
Богаты мы лесом и водой,
Есть пастбища, есть поля.
И по всему угодьи
Рассажены тополя.

(III, 273, 1925)

This calm, harmonious and, at the same time beautiful picture from the Russian countryside is not accompanied by the usually abundant flow of emotions. Nevertheless, there is warmth and closeness between the poet and this setting where much of the poem is developed.

In the beginning, Esenin, giving a sketchy description of a village before the Revolution, depicts problems which are developed throughout the poem in the course of time and events. He outlines the social situation by comparing Radovo -- a prosperous village, with Kriusha -- a poor one. But here Esenin emphasizes human nature as a source of conflict:

Но люди -- все грешные души,
У многих глаза -- что ключи,
С соседней деревни Криушу
Косились на нас мужики.

(III, 274, 1925)

The political insignificance of the village in Tsarist Russia is conveyed in two lines:
Esenin gives us these descriptions as something natural without indulging in social criticism. Later in the poem these elements are shown to have repercussions in times of war and revolution.

In rejecting the war, he used the type of argument frequently found in the language of his contemporaries:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Война мне всю душу изъеда.} \\
\text{За чей-то чудой интерес} \\
\text{Стрелял я в мне близкое тело} \\
\text{И грудью на брата лез.} \\
\text{Я понял, что я -- игрушка,} \\
\text{В тылу же кулиды да знать,} \\
\text{И, твердо простившись с пушками,} \\
\text{Решил лишь в стихах воевать.}
\end{align*}
\]

This narration is not very artistic; the most likely reason for such verbosity is that the poet never experienced war.

The February Revolution is described more vividly:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Свобода взметнулась неистово.} \\
\text{И в розово-сиренном огне} \\
\text{Тогда над страною калифтовал} \\
\text{Керенский на белом коне.}
\end{align*}
\]

The newly-created conditions are described very cleverly through the use of the image of fire whose pink flame and foul smell emphasize the unresolved situation. The figure of Kerenskii on the white horse points out the nominal change in Russian government.

The poet spent the time between the two Revolutions in his native village. On his way from the deserted army to the countryside he was
cheered by the trip and the sight of the village under moonlight.

Дорога довольно хорошая
Приятная, хладная звезда,
Луна золотою порошкою
Осыпала даль деревень.

(III, 276, 1925)

The landscapes seem to accommodate his inner delight. As he approaches the watermill -- a familiar place where his friend the miller lives -- Nature receives him in a friendly manner:

И вот я на мельнице...
Ельник
Осыпанны свечами свецийков.

(III, 277, 1925)

Watermills are usually situated in beautiful secluded areas and, for that reason, are often used as settings for fairy tales and romances. The harmony between the poet and the scene he describes flows into the meeting of the two friends:

От радости старый мельник
Не может сказать двух слов:
"Голубчик! Да ты ли?
Сергюха!
Озяб, чай? Поди, продрог?
Да ставь ты скорее, старуха,
На стол самовар и пирог!"

(III, 277, 1925)

This burst of joy and excitement, based on simple and profound human relations, plays a special role in the poem's composition; it serves as a contrast to hate, death, war and revolution and maintains the balance among the varied designs of the work. The poet, successively changing his focus between Nature and human relations, continues in the same mood:
His emotional response to the sight of the familiar place is not as vivacious as that of the miller towards the poet at the moment of their meeting. But there is an essential similarity which can be simply described as joy of life, while the lilac flower which brushes his face subtly suggests an intimacy between him and Nature and evokes memories of his early youth:

Когда-то у той вон калитки
Мне было шестнадцать лет
И девушка в белой накидке
Сказала мне ласково: "Нет!"
Далекие, милые были,
Тот образ во мне не угас...
Мы все в эти годы любили,
Но мало любили нас.

(III, 278, 1925)

Without bitterness for his unfulfilled love, he reminisces on Anna and her impact on him during his teens.

Nature is unveiled exclusively in relation to the miller, Anna and the poet who, together, form a solid unit in the lyric half of the poem. But the poet also plays the role in an epic design of the work and this simple device serves to connect the two parts. From the miller he goes to visit a peasant gathering of the poor neighbouring village, Kriusha. There, from the Siberian convict, Pron, we learn that the peasant vision of the Revolution is essentially based on taking the land from the landowners. The poet also reveals his hopes that the problems of Russian peasantry will be solved by Lenin:
"Скажи.
Кто такое Ленин?"
Я тихо ответил:
"Он -- вы".

(III, 284, 1925)

On another occasion he goes with Pron to the landowner, Snegina, to present the peasants' demand for land distribution. Even though vaguely, this again shows the poet's sympathy for the revolutionary side.

There is no elaboration of October events, only brief reactions of different characters. Pron's words are: "Ia s radossti chut' ne pomer" while the miller's wife says:

Пропал Разен, пропала...
Погибла кормилица Русь...

(III, 280, 1925)

The poet's own memory of the Revolution was also quite gloomy:

Не помню тогдаших событий,
Не знаю, что сделал Прон
Я быстро учился в Питер
Развеять тоску и сон.

Суровые, грозные годы!
Но разве всего описать?

(III, 296, 1925)

The tone of the epithets and the nature of the poet's mood reveal his lyric reaction to that period of Russian history, so full of human suffering. It is interesting to note that the peasants are not idealized in the traditional way but, rather, are portrayed with all their faults, as manifested during that dramatic period when the old regime had been destroyed and the communists were creating a new government. The poet describes grotesque scenes in which "chumazyi zbrod" plays "korovam tambovskii fokstrot" on seized pianos.
The peasants are also shown to lack political awareness at the crucial moment of history. They hate any government and any tax, and are completely obsessed with accumulating rubles. The figure of Pron's brother Labutia illustrates three negative characteristics:

У Прона был брат Лабутя,
Мужик — что твой пятый тук.

(III, 292, 1925)

It is not accidental that Labutia is the first to go to throw the Snegins out from their estate. This is important because it expresses one side of Esenin's experience and his understanding of the Revolution.

Two characters are distinct from the mass of peasants: the miller and the Siberian convict, Pron. The latter dreams of creating a commune in Kriusha. The poet has some respect for him, especially regarding his will-power and ability to act. The breath of the cold and harsh Siberian climate prevails in his character. He is portrayed objectively. For example, there is no warmth in the line about his death:

Узнай, что в двадцатом году
Расстрелян Оглюблин Прон.

(III, 297, 1925)

The description of the miller, however, is fuller. He is unveiled, on the one hand, in relation to his fellow man and, on the other, subtly reflected in the descriptions of Nature. For example, the poet's first reaction after their meeting speaks of the harmony between his friend and Nature: "Byl vecher zadumchivo chudnyi kak druz'hia ulybka v litse."

Further, when the miller tells about the generosity of Nature:

Сия летом грибов и пчёл
У нас хоть в Москве оглоблин.
there is a parallel to the same feature of his own character.

The miller does not participate in the peasant struggle for land; moreover, when Anna and her mother are driven out of their house, he takes them to his own home. It is a measure of Esenin's artistic skill that he depicts such a man as the intermediary between a landowner's daughter and a poet who appears to be on the muzhiks' side. Through a character who is neither a direct winner nor a loser in the Revolution, Esenin is able to convey human feelings of compassion and care for those who suffer. Moreover, in the total picture of the Revolution the miller serves to balance the negative characters and those unnecessary human sufferings that accompany any revolution.

The love theme is never developed and the contacts between Anna and the poet are dominated by memories of teenage love and are told in fragments intermingled with war and revolution. During their first meeting the dialogue is a warm recollection of the past. However, they are unable to connect the past and the present which could have brought them together again.

Сгущалась, туманилась даль... Не знаю, зачем я трогал Перчатки ее и шаль.

... ... ... ... ... ...

Луна хохотала, как клоун.
И в сердце хоть прямого нет,
По-стариному был я полон
Наплывом шестнадцати лет.

(III, 288, 1925)
The poet speaks of his former feelings in such a way that the same image conveys both phenomena of Nature and the stirrings of his emotions: "sgushchalas' tumanilas' dal'." The failure of his attempt to continue the romance is beautifully described with the moon treated, not in the usual way as an object of romantic inspiration, but humorously, as a clown.

Here again there is an object from the cosmos that has the same feelings as the poet. It is concretely shown that rapport is not reestablished between these two people; the image of the gloves and the shawl further indicates the distance between them and their inability to approach each other. On the one hand, instead of responsiveness to the living and present Anna, the poet's soul is filled with memories of her. Subjective reasons are the main obstacle to the renewal of their love. While Anna, during their first meeting, notices a change in the poet: "Kakoi vy tepor'ne takoi."

The second meeting establishes an even wider gap between them.

The death of Anna's husband is the reason for her insult to the poet:

Вы -- жалкий и низкий трусилка.  
Он умер...  
А вы вот здесь..."

(III, 291, 1925)

The third meeting at the miller's house ends in their parting forever. The Revolution leads Anna to England and Esenin goes to Petersburg.

None of their meetings were initiated by the poet's inclinations but were, rather, casual.

Except for the final letter, Anna's character remains sketchy and incomplete, overshadowed by the image of "devushka v beloi nakidke."

But the artistic raison d'être for Anna is quite justifiable since...
throughout the poem she serves, indirectly, to revive and to perpetuate the concept of teenage love -- pure, innocent, dominated by the joy of life, and entirely reflected in Nature.

The landscapes and the miller's greeting appear both at the beginning of the poem and in the last chapter. This strengthens the unity of the work and also emphasizes the idea that beauty of Nature and of human relations remains unchanged and can outlive hate and hostility among people.

In Esenin's earlier works dealing with the October Revolution, natural phenomena were used in poetic figurations to unveil historic events. In another example, the events and characters of Pugachov's uprising were so involved with Nature that, at times, they seemed to be guided by it. In Anna Snegina Nature is conveyed more subtly. Here, some individuals are close to it while others are not and, consequently, descriptions of Nature do not accompany all human activities and deeds. However, Nature can be so close to man as to weep at his sorrow:

Все лето провел я в охоте.
Забыл ее имя и лик.
Обиду мою
На болоте
Оплакал рыдалышник-кулик.

(III, 291, 1925)

The dominant feature of this poem is its profound humanism.

The poet does not attempt any political or historical justification of characters or events but concentrates on the natural and human aspects of his narrative. His skilful interjection of lyric episodes is an affirmation of the persistence of ordinary human emotions despite any national upheaval. The kindhearted miller, the thrilling image of the "devushka v beloi nakidke" and the lilac
flowers preserving the dreams and innocent love of sixteen year olds will outlive the human misery caused either by individuals or societies. Anna's letter from London confirms this optimism.

Я часто хочу на пристань
И, то ли на радость, то ль в страх,
Глазу средь судов воль пристальной
На красный советский флаг.
Теперь тем достибли силы.
Дорога моя ясна...
Но вы мне по-прежнему милы,
Как родина и как весна".

(III, 300, 1925)

Without bitterness for her ruined home and the sufferings which have driven her to a foreign land, Anna treasures her beautiful memories of the past, even though she is fully aware that events prohibit her return. Anna's ability to love her country in spite of her personal grief and losses is an indication of her profound nature. The portrayal of this emigrant's patriotic feelings demonstrates Esenin's breadth of understanding of the human heart. This work is his most serious endeavour to penetrate beyond political and class issues and to deal with the depths of human problems.

Esenin wrote Anna Snegina in 1925 while visiting the Caucasus at the suggestion of friends concerned about his severe fits of depression. According to biographical sources he wrote the poem during one harmonious and extremely creative period of his life.

It should be noted that the poem is somewhat autobiographical. The lyric hero can easily be identified with the poet himself and Anna is his neighbour landowner, Lidia Kashina. It is, however, important to notice that, throughout the poem, Esenin though dealing with a period of several years remains dominated by the cast of his mind at the time of the
poem's composition; for instance, the poem says that in 1917 he read Anna
his Poems about Tavern Russia (Stikhi pro kabatskiiu Rus') which were, in
fact, not written until 1922.

The work, on the whole, leaves a strong impression that, from
beginning to end, Esenin maintains a certain distance from the characters,
events and even Nature. This implies objectivity, suggests that the
meaning of the poem must be gathered from the entire composition and that
one should analyse each aspect of it in relation to the total work.
Footnotes

Esenin after His Trip Abroad

The Poet of Soviet Reality

1. In the autumn of 1921 Esenin met Isadora Duncan, the world-famous dancer. On the second of May 1922 they became husband and wife. In Moscow Isadora had founded a dancing school but, since the Soviet government could not provide the money she decided to give a series of dance recitals in Europe and America to collect the necessary funds. On May 10 of the same year the Esenins flew from Moscow to Berlin.

During the months spent abroad Esenin became more and more melancholy and the longing for his native land grew stronger in him. His health suffered from excessive drinking. Towards the end of their trip Esenin's mental condition was so bad that he had to be treated in one of the hospitals near Paris. Even though he left the hospital too soon, his health improved considerably. Both he and Isadora thought that his return to Russia might be better for him. They decided that he would leave immediately and Isadora would follow him a few weeks later. Esenin returned to Russia in the summer of 1923, but this ended his marriage to Isadora.

2. Dem'ian Bednyi, Russian poet, contemporary of Esenin.

3. After the February Revolution many peasant soldiers left the army, afraid that the land would be divided while they were away. Esenin did what many others around him were doing.

4. a) Esenin's letter to G. A. Benislavskaja quoted by V. Belousov, Sergei Esenin (Moskva: Sovietskaia Rossia, 1970), p. 163:

    Я скоро завалю Вас материалом. Так много и легко пишется в жизни очень редко. Это просто потому, что я один и сосредоточен в себе. Говорят, я очень похорошел. Вероятно, оттого, что я что-то увидел и успокоился...

b) Nikolai Verzhbitskii, Vstrechi s Eseninym (Tbilisi: Zaria Vostoka, 1961), p. 115:

    За пять месяцев пребывания на Кавказе Есенин написал тридцать три произведения: девять больших и малых поэм, двадцать три стихотворения и одну статью. Исключительно плодотворный период!
Final Years: Recollections of the Russia of his Early Youth

In the third group of poems from the last two years of his life Esenin continues his main artistic trend, which began before the Revolution, love of the Russian countryside:

И теперь, когда вот новым светом
И моей коснулась жизнь судьбы,
Все равно остался я поэтом
Золотой бревёначатой избы.

(III, 167, 1925)

Here we find the mature Esenin writing about Nature after having gained much experience in art as well as in his personal life.

In this chapter, the key issue is how Esenin, after leading a city life for many years, identifies with the countryside.

"Now I have to Keep my Sorrow" (Etoi grusti teper' ne rassypat') (1924) is typical of the way he now conceives of Nature. The poet complains about his incapacity to convey a happy notion of life. The abundance of joyful emotions that, at one time, used to fill his heart is now reduced to the impotence of not even being able to say a tender word without overtones of bitterness. So he presents Russian landscapes in a new guise:

И знакомы взору просторы
Уж не так под луной хорошо.
Буераки... пеньки... косогоры
Обпечалили русскую ширь.

Нездоровое, хилое, низкое,
Водянистая, серая гладь,
Это всё мне родное и близкое,
От чего так легко зарыдать.

Покосившаяся избенка,
Плач овцы, и вдали на ветру
Машет тонким хвостом лошадь,
Заглаженный в нелюсный пруд.

(III, 19, 1924)
As we have seen previously, throughout his poetry Esenin usually associated his emotions and his inner world with the Russian countryside. In this example, he dwells on "Bueraki"..."Pen'ki"..."Kosogory"; "vodianistaia, seraia glad'"," plach ovtsi," etc. This description of his "Rodina" is quite different from the land that, at one time, the poet would not have exchanged even for Paradise. Here, in an attempt to explain why the people drink, cry, and hope for better days, Esenin depicts the poverty of the Russian countryside. He calls for more harmony in human existence, namely to avoid wasting oneself in one's early years in happy laughter without paying attention to existing sorrows:

Потому никому не рассыпать
Эту грусть смехом ранних лет.
Отцвела моя белая липа,
Отвёжен соловьиный рассвет.

(III, 20, 1924)

The poet also describes his own position after the inspiration of the Russian countryside ceased to be a source of optimism in his creative life. Now he can write only about sorrow. Perhaps Esenin outgrew his own ideal. At any rate, it ceased to be an adequate source of inspiration but, rather, became emotionally exhausting.

"The Golden Grove Said What it had to Say" (Otgovorila roshcha zolotaia) (1924) further unveils the complexity of his artistic crisis. In describing the fall, he chooses those aspects which, at the same time, serve as a parallel to his own life. The autumn leaves are compared to his sad poems. The cranes are flying quietly without their usual sorrowful song. The poet stands in the middle of the barren fields remembering his joyous youthful days:
As if summarizing his life, the poet thinks without bitterness of his "wasted" years. The beautiful flame-like color of the "riabina's" (mountain ash) falling leaves is only an image of the fire which can neither warm nor burn the branches and the poet compares his artistic creativity to the behaviour of a tree in autumn: "Kak derevo roniaet tikho list'ia/ Tak i ia roniaiu grustnye slova." The intimate ties between Esenin and his work were always profound. It is known that an artist usually gains some sort of energy from his creations and this, in a way, helps to perpetuate further creativity. But in this case, the sorrowful poems do not have more effect on Esenin than the falling of the autumn leaves has on the trees. This indicates that the old subject matter of his poetry is near exhaustion:

But he concludes with a feeling of fulfilment, suggesting a parallel between the "riabina's gathered leaves" and his own collected poems.

In spite of the contrary views expressed at times, Esenin still loved his native fields. However, that love is now dominated by sad notes.

In the poem, "The Little House with Blue Shutters" (Nizkii dom s golubymi stavniami) (1924) he expressed a longing for his home and the countryside:
Then he adds to his old images a picture of dull and cloudy skies:

Принакрытые сереньким ситцем  
Этих северных бедных небес.

(III, 40, 1924)

Thus he combines the happy memories of the countryside of his youthful days with rather gloomy and melancholy moods of his last period. The poet complains about loss of enthusiasm for life. Yet, in spite of it, he does not want to sever his ties with the world. The sorrowful kindness of his soul will always give him the basis to comprehend life and art:

Восхищаться уж я не умею  
И пропасть не хотел бы в глушь,  
Но, наверно, навеки имею  
Нежность грустную русской души.

(III, 40, 1924)

He loves the cranes for their suffering:

Полюбил я седых куравлей  
С их курлыканием в тихие дали,  
Потому что в просторах полей  
Они съедных хлебов не видали.

(III, 40, 1924)

Through their eyes he sees a different aspect of Nature: a beauty --  
"Тол'ко видели берёз' да тсвет''; poverty -- "да ракитник кривой и  
безлистий"; then sufferings -- "да разбойные слушали свисты от которых  
легко умереть".

This note of compassion for his native countryside is frequently found in the poems of Esenin's last period:
In some instances, Esenin tried to revive the old images and feelings which at one time used to enchant him.

Мелколесье. Степь и дали.
Свет луны во все концы,
Вот опять вдруг зарышали
Разливные субенцы.

Неприглядная дорога,
Да любимая навек,
По которой ездил много
Воинский русский человек.

Ох вы, саши! Что за саши!
Звоны мерзлые осин.
У меня отец -- крестьянин,
Ну а я -- крестьянский сын.

Such happy memories make him realize how unfortunate his life as a poet has turned out to be:

Наплевать мне на известность
И на то, что я поэт.
Эту чаленькую местность
Не видал я много лет.

One year earlier, in "Letter from my Mother" (Pis'mo ot materi) (1924), he expressed indirectly a similar idea, namely, that the simple peasant life would have given him more happiness.
One of the peculiarities of Esenin's art, particularly in the last two years, is the tendency to convey ambivalent notions of life simultaneously in the same poem. In the first stanza of "The Blue Fog and the Snowy Expanse" (Sinii tuman snegovoe razdol'e) (1925), the last two lines are a typical example:

Сердцу приятно о тихой боли
Что-нибудь вспомнить из ранних лет.

This duality of his emotions prevails throughout the poem. The poet focuses attention on the crucial moment of his life -- his leaving home.

This fragment from the past, his departure into the world, is impregnated with images of Nature and memories of his home: innocent hopes and dreams about life. After many years, he again returns:

Now a different person, "Strannik gonimyi," he is aware of the impossibility of returning to his former way of life. The countryside
does not give him the same joy and optimism as before and he cannot become accustomed to city life. The idea of "utrachennaia iunost'," Esenin's frequent theme, also dominates this poem.

His "Tikhaia bol'' reminds him of his grandparents and the cemetery which seems to him the only place of reconciliation. His premonition of approaching death came true three months later:

Эту избу на крыльце с собакой
Словно я вижу в последний раз.

(III, 192, 1925)

Obviously, the poet was experiencing a deep emotional crisis which, nevertheless, did not diminish his artistic abilities; indeed, it imparted a dramatic element to his poetry.

The poem "Blue May" (Sinii mai) (1925) exemplifies one of Esenin's tendencies, in the last year of his life, to recreate the images typical of his early youth:

Синий май. Заревая теплень.
Не просветит кольцо у калитки.
Липкий запахом ветер полынь.
Спит черемуха в белой накидке.

Sounds, smells and colors appear again in the same form as in his early works.

В деревянные крылья окна
Вместе с рамами в тонкие шторы
Вдыхает взволнованная луна
На полу круговые узоры.

A modest way of life is conveyed with acute artistic awareness.

Наша горница хоть и мала,
Но чиста. Я с собой на досуге...
В этот вечер вся жизнь мне мила.
Как приятная память о друге.
The content of these stanzas differs little from his other poems written around the year 1916. However, two other stanzas unveil his difficult position as an artist. He does not have wishes that would exceed what life at one time offered him:

Только я в эту цветь, в эту гладь,
Под тальянку веселого мая,
Ничего не могу пожелать,
Всё, как есть, без конца принимая.

(III, 155, 1925)

Then he turns to reality and, with a tragic overtone, concludes:

Принимай, -- приди и явись,
Всё явись, в чем есть боль и отрада...
Мир тебе, ощумевшая жизнь.
Мир тебе, голубая прохлада.

(III, 155, 1925)

The peculiarity of Esenin's position derives from the fact that city life and the Revolution left an indelible mark on him. The new ideal, which has been discussed earlier in this paper, dominated his art only sporadically. On the other hand, due to changes which occurred after 1917 he was alienated from the life of the Russian countryside; also, the poet had acquired a new attitude to life. Thus, going back to the old themes which, by the way, he never abandoned, meant a retreat into reminiscences of his youth. The internal division of Esenin was manifested by two opposite worlds -- the old and the new. Giving his poetic talent to his past, that is to say to memories of his youth, created an emotional vacuum for the
other poetic self whose ideal of a new Russia was related to the concrete reality of his time. In analyzing his art, it seems essential to perceive these different ideals as if they had been created by two personalities.

With premonitions of approaching death and in a farewell mood Esenin wrote several letter-like poems to members of his family. And with similar warmth and intimacy in "We are Slipping Away" (Мы тёпер' уходим по ненаго) (1924), he addressed the Russian landscape:

Милые березовые чашки!  
Ты, земля! И вы, равнина пески!  
Перед этим сном уходящих  
Я не в силах скрыть моей тоски.

(III, 11, 1924)

In fact, he was saying farewell to different objects of Nature.

Мир осинам, что, раскинув ветви,  
Загляделись в розовую водь!  

(III, 11, 1924)

His leave-taking was without bitterness or regret; his memory went over different items which, at one time, had made his life so happy:

Счастлив тем, что целовал я женщин,  
Мял цветы, валялся на траве  
И зверь, как братьев наших меньших,  
Никогда не бил по голове.

(III, 12, 1924)

He is fully aware that, once he departs from this life, everything will be left behind him.

Знаю я, что в той стране не будет  
Этих нив, залатящихся во мгле.  
Оттого и дороги мне люди,  
Что живут со мною на земле.

(III, 12, 1924)
Poets, in general, occasionally write palinodes. In the case of Esenin, it is more than that. Analysing the poetry of his last two years in three separate groups is an attempt to find a suitable approach to explain the vacillation between two artistic credos. Such an analysis may also enhance the appreciation of his poetry and the peculiarity of his individuality. The first signs of an internal polarization appeared much earlier. His development before the year 1917 has a unity and steadiness but the Revolution opened a new chapter in his art and life. During the first two years, many of his poems were dedicated to the revolutionary cause. In spite of their vagueness of revolutionary content, here and there one can note his old ideal of the "peasant paradise" sporadically appearing in new disguise.

In the year 1920, he saw the threat of industrialization to the Russian countryside and responded critically to it. Temporarily, he abandoned revolutionary themes. The bohemian life which he was leading has its reflection in the cycle *Moscow the Tavern City* in which he completely ignored the crucial problems of the Revolution. The trip abroad in the years 1922/23 brought him closer to Soviet reality and he even tried to become a genuine revolutionary poet of his new country. This period, which lasted till the end of his life, is the most complex one. In earlier times it was possible to follow his development and changes chronologically.

During the last two years of his life, the poet vacillates between the two artistic credos although he made many attempts in his work towards internal reconciliation. All of this has been discussed at length. It is probably after his trip that he became convinced that, as a poet profoundly
attached to Russia in his life style as well as in his art, there was nothing abroad for him. Thus, divided in himself between the old and the new, he faced his country.

The last year of Esenin's life was very productive; nevertheless, comparatively little was produced with the Revolution as an inspiring force. Besides the poems of outstanding value, there are also works in which he became repetitious, especially in his sorrowful longing for the memories of his youth. It seems that, at the end of his life, there was nothing left from the old Russia and there was only an artistic vacuum in the poet. The ideal of Soviet Russia was not strong enough in him to absorb his personality fully in a new search for life and art.

Perhaps the crisis which Leo Tolstoy went through after finishing War and Peace might throw some light on Esenin's case although the endings of the lives of the two men are entirely different. Tolstoy overcame his crisis and, for that reason, his problem is better known. The hollowness which this great man experienced lasted for many years and came after a long period of creative work which seems to have exhausted much of his artistic vitality. This is extensively described in his confession:

Если бы пришла волшебница и предложила мне исполнить мои желания, я бы не знал, что сказать. Если есть у меня не желания, по привычки желаньных прежних, в пьяные минуты, то я в трезвые минуты знаю, что это — обман, что ничего желаь. Даже узнать истину я не мог желать, потому что я догадывался, в чем она состояла. Истина была то, что жизнь есть бессмыслица.

Я как будто жил-жил, шел-шел и пришел к пропасти и ясно увидал, что впереди ничего нет, кроме погибели. И остановиться нельзя, и назад нельзя, и закрыть глаза нельзя, чтобы не видать, что ничего нет впереди, кроме обмана жизни и счастья и настоящих страданий и настоящей смерти — полного уничтожения. (At that stage Tolstoi was close to death.) Жизнь мне остыла — какая-то непреодолимая
To that can be added an incident described in Henry Troyat's Biography:

"What's wrong, Lyovochka?"
"Nothing," he answered. "I don't have any matches. I got lost in the house."

Sonya was so startled that she had a coughing fit and stood there, gasping and wheezing. Afterward, her husband explained that when he came out of his study to go to his bedroom, he suddenly could not remember where he was. What were those walls? Where did those steps lead? Panic gripped him to the roots of his hair.

During the interim period, among other activities which did not have much to do with literature, Tolstoi created Anna Karenina which belongs to the same literary trend as War and Peace. However, there is a different artistic mood built around the figure of Levin.

Unlike Tolstoi, Esenin spoke and wrote little about his crisis. It was his poetry that received his confidences. These have already received general attention in this paper but, in order to present a more concrete view, we should focus again on three of his verses, taken from varied poems which show different stages of his suicidal mood; hollowness, premonition of death and requiem.
His creative forces led him to the abyss and then he expressed his inward tragedy in an art form. In addition Vladimir Shvaitser, in the article "Pesnia" gives an interesting description of the poet's internal division.

During Tolstoy's critical time, he was completely preoccupied by his crisis and was constantly searching for a new purpose in life and art. He became involved with diverse subjects such as philosophy, pedagogy and classical Greek. Esenin, however, worked at his art to the very end of his life. But he made several attempts to change his poetic world -- the poems of the last two years about Soviet Russia and "Persian melodies." But he always returned to his old themes, especially to that of parting which, in the last period, developed into the theme of farewell to youth and life. In some he dwelt on one of the most tragic ideas of life, namely, suicide.
His pride seems to have been an obstacle in confiding his internal struggle directly to anyone. He resented being pitied. V.I. Erlikh, in his book Provo na pesn', described one of Esenin's rare moments of confessing his despair.

Esenin did not overcome his crisis, while Tolstoi, after many years, built a new philosophy and new approach to art and his life became full and creative.

In his second period, he rejected his earlier literary work to which, at one time, he had devoted himself with so much integrity and passion.

Lev Shestov puts the peculiarity of the great writer's position in philosophical perspective:

...if Tolstoy thirty years ago had been shown his own most recent works, he would have repudiated them, as he now repudiates War and Peace, though then as today he has wanted one thing only -- to regulate his life by the "good." A repudiation against another repudiation. Which shall we accept? And, most important of all, would he have disavowed his What is Art?

Unfortunately, Esenin committed suicide at an early age and we cannot see the whole process of rebirth of a "new man" as in the case of
Tolstoy. It seems that similar phenomena existed in both men, namely, the potential for developing two different personalities, two different artists.

The transition from one artistic credo to another is followed by a deep crisis which often has tragic consequences, as in the case of Esenin. The manner in which Nikolai Gogol ended his life also illustrates, perhaps, though in a more obscure way, the existence of a similar problem to that of Tolstoy and Esenin.

The duality in the works of Tolstoy and Esenin should not be attributed so much to external causes as to the very nature of these individuals, to their ability to respond to life in two different ways.

It would be difficult to draw detailed parallels between the two artists since Tolstoy was a prose writer and, in his latter period, a great deal of his work was of a philosophical nature. Esenin, however, never abandoned his old artistic credo formed before the Revolution. Naturally, in the course of time, this credo underwent some changes, but the new approach to art and life inspired by Soviet Russia also existed and appeared in his poetry subsequently to the old one.

The comparison of Esenin to Tolstoy does not have such an ambitious goal as to try to resolve what was controversial in Esenin's art or the question of his personality which played a significant role in the complexity of his poetry and appears to be as valid an explanation as "external influences" such as revolutionary changes of Russia which, so far, have been used almost exclusively in analyzing him as man and artist. A parallel study of the circumstances of his life and the composition of his personality, could give more objective results.
If nothing else, this brief parallel between the two men shows how important a role his artistic work plays in the life of a true artist.
Footnotes

Final Years: Recollections of the Russia of his Early Youth


Esenin's Craftsmanship and Lexicology

One of the key problems in studying Esenin the poet is undoubtedly that of his artistic expression. Such major topics as, for instance, his pantheism or his being a peasant poet cannot be comprehended without an understanding of the source and significance of his artistry. We have already seen that the Russian countryside left an indelible mark on his work. Here we shall reexamine these effects but through the light of his imagination.

To the end of his life, Esenin's poetic expression remains deeply rooted in folklore. While developing his poetic sensibility, he was greatly influenced by Russian culture as a whole and, in particular, by Pushkin, Andrei Belyi, Alexander Blok, and Kliuev as well as the other peasant poets, old legends and folk art. His career can be divided into different periods according to outside influences and his own evolution. Nevertheless, there was only one poetic system that he developed continuously. In the preface to the collected poems of the year 1924, the poet revealed the fundamental issues of his art, namely its origin and formation.

В стихах моих читатель должен главным образом обращать внимание на лирическое чувство и ту образность, которая указала пути многим и многим молодым поэтам и бетлестрам. Не я выдумал этот образ, он был и есть основа русского духа и гляза, но я первый развязал его и положил основным камнем в своих стихах.

Он живет во мне органически так же, как мои страсти и чувства. Это моя особенность, и этому у меня можно учиться так же, как я могу учиться чему-нибудь другому у других.

(IV, 226, 1924)

From the folklore he took not only images but similes, epithets and other tropes and incorporated them in the basic structure of his poetry, always
displaying a great deal of creativity. The early poems were created in simple form with complete domination of simple metaphors and similes.

На бугре береза-свеча
В лунных перьях серебра.

(I, 73, 1911)

Теньюет синица
Меж лесных куdreй,
Темным елям сниться
Гомон косарей.

(I, 130, 1914)

И пускай со азовами плачут глухари,
Быть тоска веселая в альстях зари.

(I, 68, 1910)

Туча круглее в роще связала,
Закурился пахучий туман.

(I, 167, 1915)

Заколдован навидимой,
Дремлет лес под сказку сна.

(I, 84, 1914)

 Колокол дремваший
 Разбудил поля,
 Улынулась солнцу
 Сонная земля.

(I, 86, 1914)

 Улынулись сонные березки,
 Расстрепали шелковые косы.
 Шестнать зелень сеялки,
 И горят серебряные росы.

(I, 89, 1914)

 Клененочек маленький матю
 Зеленое вами сосет.

(I, 64, 1910)
His intellectual appreciation of the world is suffused with deep-felt emotion so that in deriving formal poetic expression of the world he sees the images, although sharply focussed and concrete, are transformed by the beauty of his poetic expression. Thus assisted by his superb imagination, he could harmonize the most distant and even opposite elements of the universe. In his poetic interpretation the earth is the center of the universe and unites all that has life and beauty. Esenin's keen perception of life and Nature ensures that his art never loses touch with reality.

A characteristic example is the poem "The Cow" (Korova):

Дрихлая, выпали зубы,
Свиток годов на рогах.
Вил ее выгонщик грубый
На перегонных полях.

(I, 172, 1915)

In the first stanza, well chosen details present a realistic basis for further development of the poem.

Сердце неласково к шуму,
Мыши скребут в уголке,
Думает грустную думу
О белоногом телке.

(I, 172, 1915)

For the poet, Nature is endowed with human faculties of feeling, smiling, whispering, dozing, dancing and even thinking. In this particular case, the bereaved mother cow sadly watches the skin of her white-legged calf flapping in the wind. One of the subtleties of the poem is that the actual act of killing is not described, only its results and effects.

Не дали матери съе,
Первая радость не впрок.
И на колу под осиной
Шкуру трепал ветерок.

(I, 172, 1915)
And the cow is left to wait for the same destiny that befell her calf.

The entire poem is written without compound metaphoric expressions, almost in elemental language and yet, lyrically, this is one of Esenin's most powerful verses. His capacity to select details that would best suit his poetic ideas contributes a great deal to his artistic skill. There are other poems written at that time with the same simplicity, such as: "Vkhate," "Pastukh," "Pesn' o sobake," "Lisitsa," etc. Later, when Esenin developed his more complex artistic devices fully, simplicity still remained a distinct mark of his poetry.

One of the basic principles of Esenin's art is that of placing the harmony and beauty of Nature, as well as the innate feelings of animals, in the foreground. Elsewhere, we find the oppressors: "Vygonshchik grubyi," "Khoziain khmuryi," who are, for the greatest part, indirectly involved through the sufferings usually of baby animals such as "shcheniata," "telok zherebionok" and so on. This gives his poems greater emotional impact. His frequent use of diminutives as, for example "beriozka," "snexzhok," "solnyshko" gives his descriptions of Nature an emotional aspect.

A good deal of his creativity was concentrated on the formation and development of the metaphor as his main form of poetic expression. Transplantation of expressions from one field of experience in order to say something in another field had been used extensively in Russian folklore. Even riddles are related to this metaphoric method, in so far as they are based on the likeness which often exists between things that appear unlike. Besides adopting the same artistic method, Esenin also included elements of folk imagery and wisdom in developing his own
poetry. As an illustration we can take the moon and sun, objects frequently referred to in folk literature to convey different shades of meaning reflected in the structure of the work. In Russian riddles the moon can have such figurative meanings as: "Vsadnik," "pastusheskii rozhok," "lad'ia," "iagnionok," "versha," "kon'," "pastukh." The poet goes further from these postulates: if the moon is a "vsadnik" then it can "roniat' povodia" (referring to moonbeams). In another context it becomes "vsadnik umyliy." As a "pastusheskii rozhok," the moon can create music: "Pliashet sumrak v galochki trevoge, sognuv lunu v pastusheskii rozhok." The sun perceived as a "vedro" can be filled with azure ("lazur'"'). During the Revolution the sun becomes a red calf and the poet creates the metaphor: "Nebo lizhet krasnogo telka." Thus Esenin derives metaphors from postulates usually taken from or based on folk art. During his creative life he went far beyond the limits of rustic culture. Nevertheless, throughout his career he remained a peasant poet in spite of his broad conception of life and Nature, the vastness of his images and the universal appeal of his lyricism.

When Esenin took part in the imagist movement it was primarily an attempt to gain artistic independence from the rustic culture, rather than a poetic experiment and search for a new form. Occasionally, between 1919-1922, he introduced in his verses metaphors that, neither in their components nor in their basis, derived from Russian tradition. A good example is the poem "Mare Ships" (Kobily korabli) (1919) which is based on the poet's personal experience: once, in the winter of 1919, he saw a dead horse on a Moscow street and crows feeding from its carcass. This small fragment from the countless horrors of the Civil War inspired the poet to write this
His poetic figurations are rootless: "Nebo tuchami izglodano," "Chornye parusa voronov," "Voslami otrublennykh рук." The words used in forming these metaphors did not have any connotations or symbolism beyond their usual meaning. This method of forming images led to mediocre results and the failure of his imagist work.

Esenin developed his similes in much the same fashion as he did metaphors, namely by deriving them from folk images and symbols. One of the major aspects of his creativity is manifested in the use of already existing units of artistic figuration in building new and often vast designs of life and Nature.

Тучи — как озёра,
Месяц — рылый гусь,
Пляшет перед взором
Вдвойственная Русь.

(I, 273, 1917)

In spite of the recklessness of his imagination, the tendency always to have concrete details in his broad pictures remained the distinguishing mark
of his poetry. In the stanza quoted above we find an example in "ryzhii gus'" — a bird frequently seen on the lakes around Riazan'.

Most of his similes were created on the basis of interpenetration between manifestations of Nature and man. He often refers to trees such as "iva," "riabina," "cheriomukha," "klion," "berioza," using their long established connotations to convey his own poetic ideas. In this manner he developed these images further; in each context, adding new shades of meaning or emotion. To illustrate, we can take the birch tree rising from Russian landscapes, slender in its silvery whiteness, with the folkloric connotation of a maiden. Through Esenin's poetisation this image developed into a sorrowful and mysterious fairy virgin who is sadly gazing at a pond; she has long silky hair through which moonlight runs like a comb.

In a different context the basic symbolism of the birch tree can acquire another meaning:

Не березик-белоличушки
Из-под голови подрублены,
Погибли соколья-друзнишки
Под татарскими насечками.

(I, 308, 1912)

In order to strengthen folkloric connotation of the birch tree the poet uses double nouns ("beriozki-belolichushki", "sokol'ia-druzhniki") typical of Russian popular poetry. In this case the image of innocence built around the birch tree is used to emphasize the savage killing of Russian soldiers by the Tatar intruders.

Esenin made comparisons between different manifestations of Nature whether motionless, e.g.: "mesiats kak syrnyi kusok"; "nebo solvno vymia" or, more frequently, in an active state which gave his similes
The poet's sensations played a distinct role in furnishing the early poems with freshness and animation. His descriptions of colors, sounds, scents are neither elemental nor abstract but always embodied in a natural form, as part of a single or, rather, combined expression of Nature: "beriozovoe moloko," "sedye oblaka," "zoloto solntsa," "glyi svet zari"; "zvon sosniaka," "shopot volny," "gomon kosarei"; "pakhnet smolistoi sosnoi," "pakhnet rykhlymi drachionami," "zapakh mioda ot nevinnykh ruk."

Nature phenomena, so frequently described as being in motion, make his descriptions dynamic and, at the same time, impart greater unity to the poem's different aspects. In such examples as "Zvon nadlomannoi osoki" or "i zvenit pridorozhnymi travami ot ozior vodianoj veterok," we see how appearance and sound are interwoven. Sound and color can blend in a single expression, e.g.: "v roshchakh po beriozкам belyi perezvon."

Esenin's language has a natural flow, the components of its metaphors are bound together and can communicate the full meaning only in this form. For example in "Listopad zlatit kholmy" color plays an organic part in the picture of autumn with golden leaves covering the hills; it adds precision and emphasizes the features of the season.

In order to emphasize his sensation and emotion the poet frequently employs epithets but always in accordance with the poetic idea. In his poetry color is used more than any other manifestation of Nature, often in the form of epithets, primarily to convey emotional qualities. This contributed to the intensity of his lyricism. "Tuman goluboi," "siniiaia viuga,"
During the last year of his life Esenin wrote a cycle of poems Persian Melodies (Persidskie motivy) (1925) with the theme of love developed in an exotic milieu. This cycle is completely different from the tragic overtones of jealousy, hopeless and unfulfilled love of Moscow the Tavern City. Here the poet describes harmonious relations where happiness comes from loving the other partner rather than from being loved, and resentment or vengeance do not come into the picture even in the case of betrayal.

И когда поэт идет к любимой,
А любимая с другим лежит на ложе,
Благодаря живительной хранимой,
Он ей в сердце не запустит ножик.

(III, 114, 1925)

In this cycle the exotic Persian landscape is often compared to the vastness of the Russian land:

"Отчето дуна так святит тускло
На сады и... они Хоросоня?
Сложно я ходу равниной русской
Под шуршащим пологом тумана", --

(III, 117, 1925)

In Persian Melodies the poet attained the height of his poetic skill. The oriental atmosphere is recreated with abundant references to many different colors. The epithets and images are numerous and vivid:

"Sinie tsvety Tegerana," "goluboi ogon'," "lebiakh'i ruki," "strana Ferdousi," "Laskovyi urus," "Zadumchivo prostye glaza"; "lepestkami roza
Esenin's verses are known for their melodiousness and many of his poems such as "The Maple Tree," "Letter to my Mother" (Pis'mo matori) (1924) have been successfully set to music. Persian Melodies, more than any other group of poems, are permeated with a constant flow of melody. Rhymes, which are otherwise rather scattered and unruly, here play an important role. The poem "Shagane" is a good example for its musical qualities and characteristic versification.

Шаганэ ты моя, Шаганэ!
Pотому, что я с севера, что ли,
Я готов рассказать тебе поле,
Про волнистую рожь при луне.
Шаганэ ты моя, Шаганэ.

Потому, что я с севера, что ли,
Что луна там огромней в сто раз,
Как бы ни был красив Шираз,
Он не лучше рязанских раздольей.
Pотому, что я с севера, что ли.

Я готов рассказать тебе поле.
Эти волосы взял я у ржи,
Если хочешь, на палец вяжи --
Я нисколько не чувствую боли.
Я готов рассказать тебе поле.

Про волнистую рожь при луне
По кудрям ты моим догадайся,
Дорогая, шути, улыбайся,
Не буди только память во мне
Про волнистую рожь при луне.

Шаганэ ты моя, Шаганэ!
Там, на севере, девушка тоже,
На тебя она страшно похожа,
Может, думает обо мне...
Шаганэ ты моя, Шаганэ.

(III, 98, 1924)

The first stanza binds the rest of the poem organically by the fact that
each of its lines begins and ends the other stanzas. This order is not adhered to in the first and last verses which both begin and end with the same line. In each stanza the rhyme pattern is the same. Thus in the third stanza we have "boli" from the fourth line which goes with "pole" of the first and the fifth lines; then "rzhi" from the second ties in with "viazhi" from the third line. This work undoubtedly represents the height of the author's poetic technique.

The development of Esenin's lexicon is closely related to his growth as a poet. In his early works he used dialectisms extensively. The milieu of his childhood (Konstantinovo and Spas-klepiki) where his early formation as a poet took place also had a great influence on his language. Later on in Petersburg, after some of his poems were published, he was influenced by Kliuev and encouraged by his use of the Olonets dialect to pay special attention to the local words of the Riazan' region, particularly to those that are almost forgotten. Here are some examples, mostly from his early works: "Kupyr̆," "pribaski," "dergach," "bochag," "brusnitsa," "boronok," "podtyk," "vят'," "ulogii," "shchipul'nik," "leshchuga," "dontse," "golitsa," "kholivo," "skuf̆a," "bavknut," "voi," "kvelyi," "elanki," "zav̆ialyi," "kivlivyi," "kolod," "korogod," "makhota," "povitel'," "popki," "grebat," "zadvashit'," "koshnitsa," "drachiona," "siverga," "piaterik," "rezan'," "shirak," "diozhka," "gasnitsa," "otchar','" "obzha," "kukan," "noiat,'" "podozocheh," "skriažha," "skrianut'," "kuliga," "sutemy," "sugar'е," "nastno," "na-umiax," "lekhi," "khrup," "kopytit.'

To that we should add Biblical and Church Slavonic expressions: "paskha," "spas," "bozhnitsa," "kanon," "Iordan," "drevo," "glava," "ochi," "chado."
After the Revolution and with his growing role as a national poet, the provincialisms gradually fade out of his vocabulary. Nevertheless, they will remain as a natural part of the language of some of his characters, such as, for instance, Pron's in Anna Snegina. In his poems with Revolutionary themes, Biblical symbols and expressions are used either blasphemously as in: "Ia krichu sniav s Khrista shtany"; "iazykom vylizhu na ikonakh ia/ Lik muchenikov i sviatykh"; or to indicate the missionary role of the Revolution in fulfilling the dreams of Christianity: "Novyi na kobyle edet k miru spas."

Esenin also used many crudities in his poems. Notable for this is the cycle Moscow the Tavern City from his imagist period: "Vydra, sterva, parshyvaia suka" (for women), "garmonist spirtom sifilis lechit."

The peculiarities of Esenin's language from the last two years can probably be seen best of all in Persian Melodies and Anna Snegina. In the first work we find great numbers of exotic expressions, which were used to evoke the atmosphere of the East: the blue flowers of Teheran; a shawl from Khorassan; a carpet from Shiraz; lovely Lallah; a song of Khayyam; the songs of Saadi; the song of Scheherezade; the pale blue land of Firdousi; the gardens and walls of Khorassan.

The language of Anna Snegina is particularly interesting for the fact that each character has a different way of expressing himself, according to his own personality. Harsh and uncompromising, Pron's character is shown through his words:

Тяжкие отродье!
Все к Снегиной!
Р-раз и aujourd!

(III, 289, 1925)
But the kind hearted miller speaks in a different manner:

"Голубчик! Вот радость! Сергуха! Охо, чай? Поди продрог?"

(III, 299, 1925)

Throughout the poem the author showed remarkable skill in maintaining the lexical style of each character according to his particular social and cultural level. But when the poet speaks he uses local words and colloquial phrases, but selectively, with taste and concern for a reader unfamiliar with them. "Doroga dovol'no khoroshia," "daiu sorokovku," "takoi otrvatitel'nyi malyi."

At the time of the creation of Anna Snegina there was a tendency among many Soviet writers to introduce freely as many unknown words as possible, without using any particular literary criterion. So Esenin employed many new expressions that were created during and after the October Revolution and were already becoming part of everyday language throughout the country: "lipa," "kalifstvoval," "seremiozhnaia rat'," "mortiry," "sorokovka," "kerenki," "desertir," "grazhdanin," "komissar," "kat'ka."

In using the local words he seemed to have selected those that derive from already familiar roots: "Pochitai," "priiatstvenny," "zhist'," "buldyzhnik," "shishka," "starshina" or idioms: "my delu uslovili shir'," "vazhnye ochen' ne lezem."

Thus, the lexicon of Esenin's last two years was close to the literary Russian language in vocabulary as well as in the manner of selecting and using newly "found" words.
Footnotes

Esenin's Craftsmanship and Lexicology

1. For the reader unfamiliar with them, the meaning of these words can be found either in the glossary of Sergei Esenin, Stikhi i poemy (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1965) or in E. M. Galkina-Fedoruk, O stile poezii Sergeia Esenina; Leksisheskii sostav stikhovtorenii Sergela Esenina (Moskva: Moskovskii universitet, 1965).

2. Ibid.
Conclusion

One of the basic principles of Esenin's art is that of the interpenetrations and interconnections between landscapes and humans. In the poet's own soul there are no boundaries separating man from Nature, as we have seen it in the previous chapters of this study. This influenced his poetry in more than one way. First of all it gave to his imagination great freedom and creative possibility. Secondly, as he was able to use landscapes as means of unveiling human characteristics, reciprocally he was able to attribute human qualities to Nature.

Esenin gives equal consideration to the plant and animal world and treats them as a single entity, relating freely one to the other: a little maple tree, "klenionochek," suckles its mother's udder. Also in the same prospective he views domestic and wild animals, for instance he gives equal poetic concern for the wolf as for the dog, or for the cow as for the fox. This shows the depth and sincerity of his conception of unity in Nature.

An unrestrained flow and fusion of different sensations gathered from the world of Nature and human society represents the basis of Esenin's pantheism.

The profound humanism and love for everything that has life and beauty dominates his entire work. In his poetic response to the industrialization of Russia he showed, perhaps, more than anywhere else in his work, sensitivity and depth of his love for Nature. His
passionate protest against the destruction of living Nature as evidenced in the works "Sorokoust" and "Volchia gibel'" is one of his finest poetic expressions.

In the course of Esenin's short life he witnessed cataclysmic changes in his country, the First World War, the Revolution and the Civil War. These events had an influence on his life and art. However, his basic conception of Nature prevails even in the poetry of his last period. The poem Anna Snegina from his last year is a good illustration. Here, besides descriptions of many characters and events, we find subtle but definite pantheistic approaches to life and Nature.

During the last two years of his life the idea of suicide was very much present in his work. For Esenin dying was an art, he saw it everywhere, in Nature, in human lives and in his own life as well; on this subject he wrote many poems. For Tolstoi dying was a nightmare against which he fought. Perhaps that was one of the reasons for his survival of his crisis.

Esenin's craftsmanship represents one of his finest achievements. Images are the most frequent and most important poetic device that he uses. These are brilliant projections, formed freely and spontaneously, endowed with life and reality always veiled by passionate poetic expression. The imaginative part of Esenin's expressions (the tropes), as a whole, are neither instruments of his thoughts nor external ornaments, but are organically bound to life by the poetic composition. However, they are of the greatest importance because they account for the essential beauty of his poetry. In his poetic figuration the
essential thought, the "meaning" of any poem, is not explicit but rather it is indirectly communicated by sensual images created as clusters of sounds, smells and visual projections in which range he was particularly colorful. In most instances only the images can approach the depth of his emotions and surpass the power of ordinary language.
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