



**THE LINGUOPOETICS OF RURAL MEMORY AND MORAL LANDSCAPE  
IN RUSSIAN PROSE**

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**ABSTRACT**

the present article examines rural memory as a linguopoetic and cultural category in Russian prose and argues that the image of the village in Russian literature should be interpreted not merely as a thematic or ethnographic layer, but as a complex semiotic system in which language, moral evaluation, cultural memory, and historical self-consciousness interact. The study is based on a comparative analysis of selected Russian prose texts associated with the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, with special attention to works by Valentin Rasputin, Viktor Astafyev, Guzel Yakhina, and Evgeny Vodolazkin, whose narratives reveal different yet interconnected models of representing land, labor, kinship, speech, and loss. Methodologically, the article combines linguostylistic analysis, narratology, semantic field analysis, discourse analysis, and the theory of cultural memory, which makes it possible to examine both lexical and syntactic organization and deeper symbolic mechanisms through which rural space becomes a bearer of ethical and civilizational meaning. The results show that rural memory in Russian prose is constructed through recurrent lexical clusters related to house, earth, water, bread, road, labor, and kinship; through a specific distribution of narrative voices; through temporal structures that connect biography with collective history; and through moral oppositions embedded in everyday speech. The discussion demonstrates that rural discourse in Russian prose remains productive because it condenses key questions of Russian literary anthropology: the relation between man and land, the fragility of communal solidarity, the ethics of memory, and the crisis of modernity. The article concludes that the linguopoetic study of rural memory provides an effective interdisciplinary model for Russian language and literature research, because it reveals how aesthetic form transforms social experience into durable cultural meaning and how linguistic choices shape literary representations of national identity, historical trauma, and moral continuity.

**KEYWORDS**

Russian prose, linguopoetics, rural memory, cultural identity, narrative ethics, moral landscape, stylistics, cultural memory, Russian literature, discourse analysis

## INTRODUCTION

In the history of Russian literature, rural space has never functioned as a neutral geographical background; rather, it has operated as a privileged zone of moral testing, historical memory, and linguistic density in which the fundamental categories of Russian cultural self-understanding are articulated with remarkable expressive force. From the classical nineteenth-century tradition to village prose, wartime prose, post-Soviet fiction, and recent historical novels, the village, the field, the riverbank, the family house, the road, the garden, and the cemetery have formed not simply a repertoire of motifs, but a durable semantic structure through which Russian prose reflects on belonging, continuity, labor, grief, authority, and the human relation to nature and history. This is why the scholarly study of rural themes in Russian literature cannot be limited to descriptive thematic criticism or sociological commentary alone; it requires a linguopoetic approach capable of showing how literary language organizes ethical and cultural meaning at the level of nomination, rhythm, point of view, syntactic arrangement, metaphorical transfer, and dialogic interaction. The relevance of such an approach is especially high today, when the crisis of identity in many societies has renewed interest in cultural memory, local worlds, ecological vulnerability, intergenerational transmission, and the forms through which literature preserves human experience against the flattening pressures of modernization and mass discourse. Russian prose is particularly valuable in this regard because its rural imagination is inseparable from questions of national history, communal life, historical rupture, and the ontological meaning of place. In major works of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, rurality is represented not as idyllic simplicity, but as a morally charged and semantically layered world where speech retains traces of collective memory and where the destruction of landscape is often inseparable from the erosion of ethical language. The theoretical premises of the present article emerge at the intersection of several influential traditions: Bakhtin's concept of dialogism and chronotope, which allows one to view literary space as ideologically saturated and temporally organized speech space; Lotman's semiotics of culture, according to which literary texts encode and transform broader cultural models; Halbwachs' and Assmann's theories of collective and cultural memory, which explain how communities preserve identity through symbolic forms and repeated narratives; and modern stylistics, which has demonstrated that meaning in fiction arises not only from what is told, but from how language directs perception, evaluation, and emotional framing. Despite extensive scholarship on village prose, ecological motifs, memory studies, and the moral function of Russian literature, a gap remains in research that would systematically connect rural representation with linguopoetic analysis across a comparative corpus of Russian prose texts from different periods of late Soviet and post-Soviet development. Too often, literary criticism discusses "the village" as a historical theme, while linguistics studies lexical or stylistic units in isolation from literary structure; meanwhile, the full scientific value lies precisely in their convergence. The purpose of this article is therefore to examine how rural memory is constructed linguopoetically in Russian prose and how language transforms rural space into moral landscape. The central research questions are as follows: which lexical and stylistic patterns are most consistently associated with the representation of rural memory in Russian prose; how do narrative voice and temporal structure participate in the moralization of landscape; in what way do speech forms, naming practices, and material details encode cultural identity; and why does rural discourse continue to function as a powerful form of literary reflection in conditions of historical change and social dislocation? The working hypothesis of the article is that in Russian prose rural memory becomes aesthetically and ideologically effective only

when landscape is verbalized not as scenery but as a value-bearing semiotic field in which domestic objects, natural elements, kinship vocabulary, and speech genres interact to produce an integrated moral worldview. Scientific novelty lies in the synthesis of linguostylistic, narratological, and memory-oriented approaches, which makes it possible to move beyond either purely formal description or purely thematic interpretation and to demonstrate that the semantics of land, home, labor, and loss in Russian prose are inseparable from specific textual strategies. The practical value of the study is twofold: first, it offers a replicable analytical model for research in Russian language and literature; second, it provides conceptual material for higher education courses in literary analysis, stylistics, discourse studies, and cultural linguistics, especially in interdisciplinary contexts where literature is studied not only as aesthetic heritage but also as a form of cultural knowledge. In this sense, the article treats rural memory as a key to understanding how Russian prose preserves and reworks civilizational experience in language, and how literature continues to function as a space where the ethical imagination of culture becomes visible in verbal form.

## Materials and Methods

The research material for this study consists of a purposively selected corpus of Russian prose texts in which rural space functions as a structurally and semantically central component of narration rather than as an incidental background. The corpus includes Valentin Rasputin's *Farewell to Matyora*, Viktor Astafyev's *The Tsar-Fish*, Guzel Yakhina's *Zuleikha Opens Her Eyes*, and Evgeny Vodolazkin's *Laurus*, supplemented by contextual references to the broader tradition of village prose and memory-centered Russian narrative. These texts were chosen on the basis of four criteria: first, each text foregrounds landscape, household, labor, or local community as a meaningful narrative environment; second, each text demonstrates a high degree of stylistic density in the verbalization of space and memory; third, each text links individual fate with collective history; and fourth, the selected works represent different temporal and ideological horizons, which makes comparison analytically productive. The methodological design is qualitative and interpretive, but it is organized through a rigorous multilayer procedure. At the first stage, the texts were read as narrative wholes in order to identify dominant spatial images, key episodes of memory activation, and recurrent verbal markers related to home, land, water, work, kinship, ritual, and death. At the second stage, a semantic field analysis was carried out in order to trace lexical clusters and oppositional pairs, such as house/ruin, river/road, earth/water, labor/idleness, kin/stranger, memory/forgetfulness, and sacred/profane. At the third stage, linguostylistic analysis focused on nomination, metaphor, epithet, rhythmical syntax, deictic organization, dialogic shifts, and the use of colloquial, dialectal, and culturally marked vocabulary. At the fourth stage, narratological analysis examined focalization, the distribution of narrative authority, temporal layering, retrospection, anticipatory framing, and the function of silence, ellipsis, and withheld information. At the fifth stage, the findings were interpreted through the theoretical lens of cultural memory, in order to determine how private speech and local detail become carriers of larger collective meanings. The article also employs elements of discourse analysis, particularly in relation to evaluative language and speech genres that encode hierarchy, intimacy, or alienation. In practical terms, the unit of analysis was not a single isolated word or sentence, but a functionally significant textual fragment in which language, narration, and imagery interacted to shape a model of rural experience. Special attention was given to recurring material lexemes, topographical markers, speech formulas, verbs of labor and motion, and symbolic objects such as bread, stove,

threshold, grave, boat, field, river, forest, and road. These elements were interpreted not as decorative details, but as nodes in a semantic network. The comparative method allowed the study to identify stable invariants across historically different texts while preserving sensitivity to authorial individuality. The validity of the approach lies in triangulation: lexical evidence was checked against narrative context, symbolic interpretation was grounded in textual recurrence rather than arbitrary intuition, and theoretical generalizations were derived from patterns observed across the corpus rather than from a single work. Such a methodology is especially appropriate for Russian prose, where the density of value-laden language often requires close reading, but where close reading alone is insufficient unless connected to cultural and discursive frameworks. By combining literary and linguistic procedures, the present study treats the text as a complex communicative organism in which artistic form, social memory, and moral orientation are inseparable.

## Results

The analysis revealed that rural memory in Russian prose is constructed through a set of stable but variably realized linguopoetic mechanisms that transform physical environment into moral landscape and private recollection into culturally resonant narrative meaning. The first major result concerns lexical organization: across the selected corpus, the most semantically productive lexemes belong to the fields of dwelling, land, water, labor, kinship, and threshold states. The house appears not merely as an object of architecture, but as a condensed sign of continuity, inheritance, vulnerability, and moral order; it is linguistically surrounded by words denoting warmth, enclosure, memory, ancestors, domestic rhythm, and ritualized daily practice. In Rasputin, the house is linked to the fate of Matyora itself, so that the destruction of place becomes inseparable from the destruction of speech habits, kinship memory, and ethical orientation. In Astafyev, natural space is lexically charged with ambivalence: river, forest, fish, fog, wind, and mud participate in a moral ecology where beauty and violence coexist, and where the human subject is judged not by abstract principles alone but by the manner in which he inhabits and names the natural world. In Yakhina, agrarian materiality—grain, stove, field, snow, body, hunger, smoke, tools—creates a language of endurance in which historical catastrophe is mediated through tactile and sensory detail. In Vodolazkin, though the text belongs to a broader spiritual and historical horizon, rural and premodern spatial markers organize a narrative of embodied memory, healing, pilgrimage, and the porous boundary between landscape and soul. The second result concerns narrative voice. In all the examined texts, rural memory is not transmitted through a fully neutral narrator; rather, it emerges through voices that are ethically inflected, temporally layered, and often positioned between witness and lament. This means that narration itself becomes a form of remembering. Even when the narrator is grammatically distanced, the syntactic rhythm and lexical selection frequently signal a deep participation in the values of the represented world. Such participation is visible in the use of evaluative epithets, in the slow accumulation of concrete detail, in repetitions that imitate oral recollection, and in temporal constructions that bind present perception to remembered past. In Rasputin especially, the prose frequently creates an effect of collective voice, where individual consciousness becomes inseparable from communal memory. This produces a specific chronotopic density: the village is not only a place where events happen, but a temporal reservoir where ancestors, rituals, and historical losses remain active within current perception. The third result is the centrality of material-symbolic objects. Bread, stove, threshold, cemetery, boat, tree, earth, and water function as mediating signs between everyday life and moral

abstraction. Bread signifies more than food; it invokes labor, scarcity, gratitude, and shared fate. The threshold is not only part of a house; it marks the border between belonging and displacement, the familiar and the alien. The river is not simply landscape; it is a carrier of time, threat, transit, and memory. The cemetery stabilizes kinship across generations and resists historical erasure. The recurrence of such objects across the corpus indicates that Russian prose preserves moral knowledge through concretized language rather than didactic formula. The fourth result concerns the semantic interaction between labor and dignity. Rural characters are frequently characterized through verbs of doing rather than through explicit psychological analysis. To work, carry, sow, reap, mend, heat, bury, wash, bake, row, or endure becomes a mode of identity construction. The language of labor in the examined texts performs a double function: it situates the character socially and also confers ethical measure. Characters alienated from meaningful labor are often linguistically associated with noise, superficiality, bureaucratic abstraction, or predatory force, whereas characters linked to careful, repetitive, bodily labor are represented through calmer syntax, greater sensory detail, and denser ties to place. The fifth result concerns speech forms and social intimacy. Dialogues in the selected texts often contain colloquial, dialectal, or culturally marked elements that do not merely localize the setting but establish a moral acoustics of community. Modes of address, diminutives, fragments of proverbial reasoning, incomplete sentences, and silence carry strong evaluative weight. Silence itself proves highly meaningful: pauses, omitted explanations, and restrained grief frequently reveal a speech ethics grounded in endurance rather than verbal excess. The sixth result concerns temporal structure. Rural memory in Russian prose is rarely linear; it moves through recurrence, return, interruption, and layered simultaneity. Memories are triggered by objects, sounds, seasonal cycles, or bodily routines, which means that time is organized experientially rather than chronologically. This nonlinear temporal design reinforces the idea that cultural memory survives through repeated contact with material and verbal forms. Finally, the analysis showed that rural landscape is consistently personified or semantically animated, but not in the simplistic sense of decorative nature writing. Rather, landscape functions as an interlocutor, witness, or judge. Fields remember footsteps, rivers absorb history, forests hide trauma, and abandoned dwellings speak through residue. As a result, the representation of rurality in Russian prose cannot be reduced to realism alone. It is a highly structured mode of moral world-making in which lexical patterning, symbolic materiality, narrative positioning, and temporal layering cooperate to produce a distinctive cultural poetics of memory.

## Discussion

The obtained results confirm that rural memory in Russian prose should be understood as a complex cultural and linguistic construct rather than as a secondary thematic component, and they allow several broader theoretical conclusions. First, the findings support Bakhtin's insight that literary space is inseparable from value and temporality, because the village in Russian prose functions as a chronotope in the full sense of the term: it condenses historical time, interpersonal relations, ethical conflict, and the material density of everyday life into a single representational field. Yet the present study adds that this chronotopic quality becomes visible only when one attends to the micro-level of language. The moral authority of rural space is not given automatically by subject matter; it is generated through lexical recurrence, syntactic pacing, and culturally resonant nomination. Second, the results deepen Lotman's semiotic understanding of literature by showing that rural texts encode culture not merely by reflecting stable norms, but by dramatizing the instability of those norms under conditions of

modernization, displacement, collectivization, war memory, ecological damage, and post-Soviet fragmentation. In this sense, rural prose is not a conservative archive frozen in nostalgia. It is a dynamic zone of semiotic conflict where old and new codes confront one another: oral and bureaucratic language, embodied labor and administrative abstraction, commemorative memory and historical amnesia, relational identity and instrumental rationality. Third, the study corroborates memory theory by demonstrating that cultural memory in literature is mediated less by explicit historical exposition than by recurrent forms, objects, and speech patterns. Halbwachs and Assmann were correct to emphasize the social frameworks of memory, but Russian prose shows with particular clarity that these frameworks survive through sensory and verbal concreteness. A remembered house, a named river, a customary gesture, or a repeated manner of address may carry more mnemonic force than direct ideological declaration. Literature thus preserves cultural memory by aesthetic condensation: it gathers diffuse historical experience into stable verbal symbols that remain transmissible across generations. Fourth, the results illuminate the ethical dimension of stylistics. Modern stylistics often focuses on textual effect, focalization, foregrounding, and readerly processing, but the present corpus indicates that in Russian prose style is inseparable from ethical anthropology. The choice between an abstract noun and a concrete image, between accelerated narrative summary and slowed descriptive attention, between bureaucratic terminology and bodily vocabulary, or between verbosity and silence is never merely technical. Such choices position the reader in relation to labor, grief, community, violence, and responsibility. A linguopoetic analysis of rural prose therefore contributes not only to literary theory but also to the philosophy of language, because it reveals how value becomes embedded in verbal form. Fifth, the discussion must address the frequent critical objection that rural discourse in Russian literature belongs to a dated cultural model and cannot adequately represent contemporary complexity. The evidence of this study suggests the opposite. Precisely because rural memory is structured by conflict, loss, ecological precarity, and broken continuity, it remains highly relevant to contemporary literary consciousness. In recent prose, the rural world is not idealized innocence; it is often fractured, traumatized, or historically burdened. Yet even in its broken forms it retains hermeneutic power, because it offers a vocabulary for discussing dependency, finitude, intergenerational obligation, and the material conditions of human life—topics that return with renewed urgency in periods of social acceleration and cultural uncertainty. The continuity between Rasputin and later writers is therefore not a continuity of ideology, but a continuity of existential attention. Sixth, the pedagogical implications are considerable. For university teaching, especially in contexts where language and literature are studied alongside broader cultural or professional disciplines, the analysis of rural memory offers an excellent model of interdisciplinary interpretation. It allows students to see that literature is not detached ornament but a mode of knowledge that organizes ecological awareness, historical consciousness, and ethical reasoning through language. In courses on Russian language, the topic can be used to teach semantic fields, stylistic variation, deixis, evaluative vocabulary, and discourse types. In courses on literature, it enables discussion of chronotope, narrative voice, symbolism, and the relation between text and cultural memory. In interdisciplinary settings, it opens dialogue with environmental humanities, anthropology, memory studies, and cultural geography. Seventh, from the standpoint of Russian philology, the study reinforces the idea that literary language remains one of the most reliable spaces for observing the interaction between national identity and linguistic creativity. Russian prose repeatedly returns to rural imagery not because it lacks modern subjects, but because the rural lexicon

provides a uniquely dense matrix of historical and ethical associations. Words related to land, bread, water, path, dwelling, and kinship have exceptionally high semantic capacity in the Russian cultural tradition. They can designate objects, emotions, rituals, social hierarchies, and metaphysical orientations at once. That is why their function in prose deserves continued systematic study. Finally, the comparison of the selected authors shows that rural memory is not monolithic. In one text it may appear as elegy, in another as testimony, in another as survival narrative, and in another as spiritual anthropology. What unites these variants is not a single ideology, but a common textual principle: the most profound meanings of history are disclosed through materially grounded speech. That principle explains why Russian prose remains a privileged field for linguopoetic research and why the village, far from being a marginal or exhausted motif, continues to serve as one of the most revealing laboratories of language, memory, and moral imagination.

## Conclusion

The conducted study makes it possible to conclude that rural memory in Russian prose constitutes a powerful and productive linguopoetic formation in which language performs the work of cultural preservation, ethical evaluation, and narrative world-building simultaneously. The examined texts demonstrate that rural space acquires literary significance not because it is picturesque or socially recognizable, but because it is verbalized as a morally charged semiotic environment where house, earth, river, bread, labor, kinship, silence, and seasonal rhythm become carriers of historical and anthropological meaning. The analysis has shown that the representation of rurality depends on several interconnected mechanisms: the concentration of lexemes belonging to specific semantic fields; the ethically marked organization of narrative voice; the symbolic function of material objects; the temporal layering of memory and present perception; and the use of speech forms that encode intimacy, dignity, endurance, or alienation. In this way, Russian prose transforms localized experience into broader reflections on community, loss, responsibility, continuity, and the fragility of human belonging. The article therefore confirms the initial hypothesis that rural memory functions most powerfully when landscape is textualized as moral landscape and when linguistic detail acts as the mediator between private life and collective history. From a theoretical point of view, the research contributes to the development of Russian language and literature studies by integrating stylistics, narratology, and cultural memory theory within a single analytical framework. From a practical point of view, it offers a research model applicable to literary scholarship and higher education, including advanced courses in Russian philology, discourse analysis, and interdisciplinary humanities. More broadly, the findings indicate that the study of Russian prose remains especially fruitful when literature is approached as a form of cultural thinking embodied in language. Rural memory, far from being a peripheral or outdated topic, continues to reveal the deep structures through which Russian literary consciousness negotiates identity, history, and moral experience. For this reason, further research may productively expand the corpus toward women's prose, regional prose, migrant narratives, and contemporary hybrid texts in order to trace how the linguopoetics of place changes under new historical conditions while preserving its fundamental connection to memory and value.

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