

Symposium

Writing and Thinking Russophone Exile after 2022 in the French and German Contexts: Circulation, Reception, and Belonging

Grenoble Alpes University

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24 February 2022 marked a turning point not only in recent political history but also in the history of the Russophone literary field. The large-scale emigration of writers, journalists, and cultural actors, together with the impossibility of free expression within Russia's official literary sphere, led to a rapid transformation of the publishing infrastructure. New publishing houses in exile were established, including Freedom Letters (Latvia), Vidim Books (Slovakia), Fresh Verlag (Germany), Éditions Tourgueneff (France), shell(f) (Serbia), Papier-Mâché (Georgia), Meduza (Riga), Tamizdat Project (United States), and Hyperboreus (Stockholm), among others. New models of distribution also emerged, alongside alternative forms of publishing and transnational communities of authors and readers.

In the main centres of the new Russophone diaspora — Berlin, Paris, Tbilisi, Yerevan, Istanbul, and Tel Aviv — Russian-language bookstores have opened or expanded their activities, becoming important spaces for cultural life and public discussion. Annual book fairs dedicated to uncensored literature are now held in Prague, Paris, and Berlin. This publishing ecosystem, which emerged largely spontaneously, is commonly referred to as the “new tamizdat” (Achechova 2024). Yet this term is itself problematic. During the Soviet period, *tamizdat* referred to texts that crossed the state border to be published abroad while their authors remained inside the country. Today, the “new tamizdat” includes both works by authors who continue to live in Russia and publish abroad anonymously or under pseudonyms, and works by writers who have emigrated. This terminological tension is not merely a historical or typological issue. Rather, it points to a new configuration of the literary field, in which the boundaries between “those who left” and “those who stayed”, between internal censorship and external freedom, and between émigré literature and “metropolitan” literature have become fluid and permeable, without becoming any less contested.

These structural transformations of the literary field have also affected the poetics and reception of Russophone texts abroad, particularly in France and Germany, two countries where migrant literature occupies a prominent place for historical, material, and institutional reasons. The French and German contexts represent distinct host environments, each with its own history of engagement with Russophone culture, its own institutional support structures, and its own readers' expectations. Berlin, a palimpsest city shaped to a large extent by successive experiences of exile, and Paris, with its long tradition of the “Russian Montparnasse”, provide different conditions for the construction of authorial posture (in

Jérôme Meizoz's sense of the term). Host contexts may therefore shape literary discourse itself, creating implicit expectations regarding political positioning, generic forms, and translatability. How do writers construct their authorial posture while negotiating between literary autonomy and the expectations of the publishing market?

This authorial posture is also embodied in the texts themselves, where the personal experience of emigration occupies a central place. Autofiction has emerged as one of the genres best suited to narrating the experience of exile, alongside works based on diaries and testimonies by people who have left Russia (Muraveva 2026). The personal experience of emigration lies at the heart of works such as *Winter Without Snow* (2024) by Alexei Voinov and *The Devil's Wheel* (2024) by Vasily Zorky. The identity crisis experienced against the backdrop of war has likewise become a major theme, as in Maria Stepanova's *The Disappearing Act* (2024) and Larissa Muraveva's *Written in West Berlin* (2025), as has the questioning of linguistic belonging, explored in Pavel Arsenev's *Russian as a Non-Mother Tongue* (2024) and Dinara Rasuleva's *Su* (2023), *Traumagotchi* (2025), and *Lostlingual* (2025).

Autofiction in exile is also practiced by Russian-speaking Ukrainian writers, who depict the experience of displacement in the context of war, including Zhenya Berezhnaya's *(Not) About War* (2024) and Evgenia Ursu's *The Train to Bali* (2026). Similar concerns run through works by Belarusian authors, such as Tatsiana Zamirovskaya's *Eurydice, Check If You Turned Off the Gas* and Pavel Antipov's *Arriving Somewhere, Doing Something, and Leaving*, among others. Exile also becomes the object of a meticulous collection of testimonies, shifting the focus from individual experience to that of others. In the project that gave rise to the book *Exodus-22* (2025), Linor Goralik collected the voices of people who left Russia during the first days following the outbreak of the war. Gathered in March 2022 in Tbilisi, Yerevan, Istanbul, and Israel, these testimonies form a polyphonic narrative. At the same time, there has been growing interest in biofiction, narratives centered on real historical figures through whose lives authors explore their own experience of exile. Polina Barskova's *The Sibyls, or The Book of Wondrous Transformations* (2025) is an emblematic example.

Yet the very existence of this literature, regardless of genre, is challenged by the question of its legitimacy. Having emerged outside stable institutional frameworks, the texts of the "new tamizdat" belong neither to Russia's official literary field nor to the literary spaces of their host countries. In this uncertain context, the field has developed its own channels of legitimation, which can be divided into two broad categories: institutional and digital.

Institutional forms reproduce the classical model of the literary field. These include book fairs—among them the Prague Book Tour (held since 2024), the Berlin Bebelplatz Book Fair (since 2025), and the Paris book fair Bazaroff (first organised in 2025); bookshops that have become important cultural centres for the diaspora—understood here as both those who left after 2022 and those who had already settled abroad—including Babel Books Berlin, Babel Tel Aviv, Librairie du Globe in Paris, Poltory Komnaty in Istanbul, and Interbok in Stockholm; and the Dar Literary Prize, established to support emerging voices in contemporary Russophone literature and to promote them internationally by funding

translations into English, German, and French — a prize that has itself been the subject of considerable controversy (Aude 2026). These channels, however, only partially contribute to establishing the “new tamizdat” as an autonomous literary field and to increasing its visibility beyond the Russophone diaspora.

According to Yasha Klots, director of the Tamizdat Project in New York, fewer than 4% of works belonging to the “new tamizdat” have been translated into other languages (Kimova 2026). This figure is itself symptomatic of a structural asymmetry between literary production in exile and its international reception. Such an asymmetry may help explain the fragmentation of the field. Alongside the reproduction of traditional forms of literary legitimation, compensatory digital models have emerged. Communities of readers have formed around creative writing schools and book clubs; online samizdat initiatives, small publishing houses specialising in digital books, and open-access applications providing access to “new tamizdat” texts have also appeared. Rather than simply reproducing institutional models of legitimation, these initiatives circumvent their barriers, raising the question of whether alternative forms of literary authority are emerging within the “new tamizdat” itself.

This institutional fragmentation is mirrored by another equally significant divide: the language of writing. The “new tamizdat” is far from homogeneous, either generically or linguistically. Since 2022, the choice of language has become one of the most politically and poetically charged challenges facing Russophone authors. Some continue to write in Russian, presenting this choice as a form of resistance to the state's appropriation of the language. Others adopt the language of their host country. Karina Papp, for example, wrote her first autofiction, *Zungenbrecher* (2025), in German, explaining in the afterword to the Russian edition (published by shell(f) in 2026) that this linguistic shift was prompted by the constraints of censorship. Others embrace a translingual position (De Bansi 2024; Kellman 2000), including Dinara Rasuleva, Inna Krasnoper, and Eugene Ostashevsky.

The choice of language is therefore closely connected to the broader issue of decolonial writing. For some authors whose identities have been historically marginalised and for whom Russian is associated with an imperial legacy, exile creates an opportunity to rethink linguistic belonging. Writing thus becomes not only a testimony to exile but also a means of dismantling imperial narratives (Tlostanova 2017; Etkind 2011; Moore 2001). This is the path taken, for example, by Egana Jabbarova in her trilogy *My dreadful body* (2023), *Dua for the Unfaithful* (2024), and *Terra Nullius* (2025).

This development has also found institutional expression in the recent creation of the PEN Languages of Russia, an independent association of anti-authoritarian and anti-war writers working in the various languages of the Russian Federation. Explicitly committed to “abolishing the hegemony of the Russian language” and ensuring that other languages “have the right to be heard on an equal footing”, the organisation demonstrates that the question of Russia’s minority languages has become a distinct issue within literature in exile, one that cannot be reduced to the study of Russophone writing alone.

In response to this dual fragmentation — both institutional and linguistic — this symposium starts from the assumption that the study of this literature (prose, drama, and poetry) requires a twofold

theoretical approach. On the one hand, it calls for a critical dialogue with the established scholarship on Russian literature in exile. On the other, it requires a selective and reflexive engagement with migration studies, post-migration theory, and comparative literature.

First, the emergence of this literature raises a number of methodological questions because contemporary emigration operates differently from earlier waves of Russian emigration. This is particularly evident in the German context, where the admission of Jewish immigrants from the former Soviet Union under the *Kontingentflüchtlinge* programme contributed to the expansion of Russophone communities between 1990 and 2005. Writers such as Olga Grjasnowa, Lena Gorelik, and Dmitrij Kapitelman arrived in Germany as part of this migration. Today, the “islands” of the European diasporic archipelago are connected less by a “memory of common origins” (Rubins 2021) than by social media, the permeability and partial accessibility of digital publishing, the forms of digital samizdat discussed above, and often by an explicit refusal to identify with “Russian culture”. Where continuity with earlier émigré traditions exists, it is selective, reflexive, and frequently contentious. By contrast, the first waves of Russian emigration built their cultural institutions around the preservation of the Russian language, the literary canon, and national identity as ends in themselves. The rich scholarly tradition devoted to these earlier émigré communities provides an essential historiographical and methodological framework, but it cannot simply be transferred to the post-2022 situation, which is shaped not only by armed conflict but also by societies transformed by new information and communication technologies.

Then, this symposium seeks to examine the analytical framework offered by migration studies and the terminology it employs — beginning with the concept of exile itself, whose meaning differs in the French and German contexts, as suggested by the comparison between Berlin and Paris outlined above. To what extent do Russian authors understand their own experience in terms of exile? Can the concept of postmigration, developed in the context of European societies with long histories of migration (Geiser 2015; Schramm et al. 2019; Gaonkar et al. 2021; Cramer, Schmidt and Thiemann 2023), adequately address the literary dimensions of a situation marked by acute political crisis, in which writing in exile emerges from a sense of existential urgency? In order to examine the contexts of literary production and reception in France and Germany, it seems particularly relevant to consider “the idea of a postmigrant society that does not limit its analysis to postmigrant individuals alone, but rather understands society as a whole to have been shaped by migration, including its contemporary forms such as political refugees and temporary migration, and this at the political, legal, and social levels” (Coste and Kopf 2026).

Particular attention will be given to works by Russophone authors whose writings have been translated into French, German, and/or English.

Topics

1. Methodological questions: the applicability of (post)migration studies to post-2022 Russophone literature; the relevance and limitations of existing categories (exile, diaspora, (post)migration); the

specificity of a literature produced in a context of war, censorship, and political repression.

2. *Poetics and politics*: the generic diversity of Russophone literature in exile (poetry, autofiction, biofiction, testimonial literature, diaries, essays, etc.); the particular place of Russophone theatre in exile and the questions of language and transmission raised by the immediacy of theatrical performance; the relationship between ethics and aesthetics; the construction of authorial posture; the “new tamizdat” and the tradition of Russian émigré literature: continuity or rupture?

3. *Language, multilingualism, and translingual writing*: language choice as a poetic and political act; translingual writing; abandoning the so-called “mother tongue” and postmonolingual positions (Yildiz 2012); translation and self-translation; relationships between the language of origin and the language of the host country.

4. *Reception and host contexts*: institutional and publishing expectations in host countries; the emergence of new literary prizes and transnational platforms for literary recognition; the formation of literary posture (Jérôme Meizoz; Gisèle Sapiro) between literary autonomy and market expectations; the visibility and invisibility of Russophone literature in exile; asymmetries in international reception.

5. *Publishing infrastructure, literary fields, and digital networks*: reconfigurations of the Russophone literary field after 2022; new publishing and distribution models; the “new tamizdat”; the role of digital environments in the production and circulation of texts; online communities and digital samizdat.

6. *Decolonial writing and postcolonial studies*: Russian as a language marked by an imperial legacy; rewriting imperial narratives; subaltern voices and non-Russian identities in Russophone literature in exile; dialogue with postcolonial and decolonial approaches to the post-Soviet space.

7. *Writing trauma*: literary representations of emigration from the perspective of trauma studies; vulnerability and the construction of the vulnerable subject; the relationship between aesthetics and ethics in the reception of literary texts dealing with trauma; the boundary between literature and testimony.

Working languages: English and French.

Abstract: please send an abstract of no more than 500 words, together with a provisional title and a short biographical note (maximum 200 words), by 15 October 2026 to:
exilrussophone2027@gmail.com.

Selected papers may be considered for publication following the symposium.

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