

## New poetics and Russian prose of the early 21st century

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The past two decades in Russian literature were marked by several distinctive shifts that reflect transformations in Russia's state ideology, its internal and foreign policies, and, in the end, its conflicting social divide. As researchers, we witness the return to less scandalizing and experimental ways of writing, the reintroduction of "big" historical themes accentuated by "small" personal stories, and the ever-strengthening demarcation between "liberal" and "patriotic" camps of writers, which became even more apparent after February 2022. In order to grasp the variety of study subjects in a more synthetic way, we chose the *new* or *existential poetics* as formulated by Peter Zajac and René Bílik in the volume *Poetika textu a poetika udalosti* (Poetics of the text and the poetics of the event, 2018) as our key methodological framework, because it allows to maximize the scope of the research material and the tools used for its study. For this issue of WORLD LITERATURE STUDIES, our intention was to collect studies that would reflect and understand contemporary Russian prose as broadly as possible and, at the same time, to present a specific "sideways glance" at the subject matter by considering research perspectives of the post-socialist cultural contexts. As a result, we have before us texts of a broader synthesizing and methodologically varied character, focusing on trends and patterns of the contemporary literary process, as well as studies more narrowly focused on specific authors and their key works of the last two decades. The following texts reflect changes in literary paradigms and the emergence of the memory-centered writings, approach traditional categories such as "space" or "plot" within the concepts of poetics, (re)interpret the ways of forming images of the Self and the Other, and consider the reception of Russian prose in the new political context. The selection of authors (Maria Stepanova, Ludmila Ulitskaya, Evgenii/Eugene Vodolazkin, Vladimir Sorokin among them) reflects their weight (figuratively speaking) in the contemporary literary process, above all the fact that almost all of them, as this issue attests, are actively translated, read, and reflected upon beyond Russia's borders (in some cases even more than in "domestic" established literary criticism). Moreover, it should be noted that most of the authors analyzed in this issue have taken a clear anti-war position.

In today's conflicting times, the topic itself may seem "inappropriate", but perhaps it is precisely in such times that it is important to talk about literature and culture that bring (or at least try to bring) humanness to the contemporary warmongering Russian social context.

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The Cyrillic transliteration method follows the Library of Congress system (without diacritics). Exceptions have been made in the case of established transliteration variants of names and in the case of transliteration variants used in the cited sources and English translations of the analyzed books.