Strong cultural forces tied to a belief in the inseparability of a nation and its literature have operated to marginalize emigre literature. Severe limitations on the distribution of literature within the USSR during most of the century brought about the development of separate, relatively independent Soviet and emigre literary institutions. Those in exile and their literary production were commonly depicted in opposition to the nation and literature at home, with one side portrayed as the genuine article and contrasted to the other. Resistance to marginalization was both rhetorical (assertions of the unity of Russian literature, or proclamations of a greater value for literature produced abroad) and practical (the participation of hundreds of writers, publishers, readers, and reviewers in the emigre literary institutions despite their separation from the linguistic and cultural center). This paper deals with both kinds of resistance.

Some scholars and Russian writers avoided the term “emigre literature” because of its marginalizing connotations. In the foreword to his 1956 book Russkaiia literatura v izgnanii, for example, Gleb Struve set forth his preference for the term “zarubezhnaia” over “emigrantskaia literatura” (“literature abroad” over “emigre literature”). Many who attended a 1981 conference on recent emigre literature held at the University of Southern California also eschewed the terms “emigre literature” and “emigre writer.” Behind the resistance to these seemingly benign epithets may be sensed a fear of erasure, a fear that literature marginalized by virtue of its dissociation from the Russian context would have a reduced chance of incorporation into the canon. This fear

1. This co-existence of competing literary institutions constitutes one of the most fascinating aspects of the study of twentieth-century Russian literary production. Although the co-existence of different literatures for different groups is a feature of developed national literatures, the coexistence of separate and competing institutions is unusual. See Robert Escarpit, Sociology of Literature. 2nd. ed. Trans. Ernest Pick (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1971). pp. 58-59.
3. See Olga Matich, with Michael Heim, eds. The Third Wave: Russian Literature in Emigration (Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis, 1984), for the proceedings of the conference.
has roots in the aforementioned belief in a nation-literature indivisibility, as well as in the very real difficulties faced by emigre writers.

One argument against treating emigre literature as a separate category rests on claims that the author’s place of residence should have no bearing on the value ascribed to his or her literary output. But assertions of the unity of Russian literature can cause one to ignore the fact that emigration compounded many of the difficulties of writing, reaching readers, and receiving recognition by critics and scholars that confront all writers. The specific pressures that faced Russian emigre writers in the twentieth century, and their responses to these pressures, constitute one important thread in the story of the development of Russian literature and in the ongoing formation of the canon.

Canon formation is in large part a function of what is written, what is disseminated, and what reaches and remains in the consciousness of culturally important decision makers. Writing, distribution, and reception are all influenced at least to some extent by the conditions in which they occur. For example, a writer’s selection of genre, style, and subject, determination of when the work is complete, and decision about whether or not to share the finished product with others are choices, and these choices are often made in light of the projected responses of other participants in the literary process. Extratextual concerns affect editors’ and readers’ choices as well. In principle the choices made by individual writers, publishers, and readers may seem almost limitless, but in practice these individuals are greatly constrained by the economic and political forces in their society, by the organization of the publishing industry, and by the conventions of the artistic community in which they participate. This selection process plays an important, albeit often hidden, role in the formation of literary traditions and canons. Factors that influence it must therefore be taken into account in descriptions of the literary process.

The development of twentieth-century Russian literature has been greatly influenced by the competition between Soviet and emigre literary institutions, the impeded communication between culture producers at home and abroad, and the blatant political control of many cultural decisions. Political restraints on the production and dissemination of cultural products in the Soviet Union caused much important twentieth-century Russian literature to be written outside of Russia and/or distributed primarily by Russian-language publishers in the West. The dramatic changes in Soviet political and literary institutions in the late 1980s and early 1990s, which made it possible for formerly banned works to be published and distributed in the Soviet Union, in some senses marked a reunification of the previously separate(d) Russian