

Valerii Pereleshin's Queer Self-Translation

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Abstract: Valerii Pereleshin has been considered an anomaly in Russophone letters: a gay Russian émigré poet, he lived half his life in Rio de Janeiro, writing poetry that he then self-published, dabbling in Portuguese in the 1980s. He had a carefully cultivated readership among the Russian diaspora scattered worldwide after the Bolshevik revolution, a readership that he mostly lost after he finally came out in print with his 1976 collection of poems, *Ariel*. Its rejection coincided with some significant developments in Pereleshin's life: a new friendship with Winston Leyland, a leading publisher of gay male literature in the United States, and a chance meeting with young Brazilian man, Humberto Passos, who became one of Pereleshin's great loves and encouraged a new passion for writing in Portuguese. All while the gay rights movement in Brazil under a disintegrating military dictatorship that offered an opening for Pereleshin's increasingly public gay writings in both languages. It is an accepted narrative that Pereleshin never engaged with a broader gay literary establishment. This article undermines that narrative by tracing Pereleshin's burgeoning queer sensibility through an analysis of his "To the Green Eyed Boy," an unpublished poem originally written in Russian, then later rewritten by Pereleshin in Portuguese so it could be yet further translated into English and finally published by Leyland. Pereleshin's journey between Russian and Portuguese raises questions of self-translation and how queerness is encoded in new originals and new languages, cementing Pereleshin's place as one of the most important gay writers of the past century.

In late 1977, *Christopher Street* published "A Hidden Masterpiece: Valery Pereleshin's *Ariel*," in which the author, Simon Karlinsky, introduced Pereleshin to the world as one of its pre-eminent unknown gay writers (reprinted in Karlinsky 2013). The article set in motion the narrative that came to define Pereleshin: a lonely gay poet in Brazil, in love with an unattainable man who nonetheless served as his muse, writing in a Russian so carefully wrought that it would be almost impossible for his work to be translated into English. That narrative assumes that Pereleshin remained isolated, by choice, throughout his literary career, but it is a mistaken assumption. Starting in the later 1970s Pereleshin made connections with Brazilian and global gay society, facilitated in part by Karlinsky himself, but also through Pereleshin's own connections, relationships, and need to be

I wish to thank Olga Bakich for her support of my research on Pereleshin, whom she knew personally. Dr. Bakich has always patiently answered my many questions (which often have required her to search through hundreds of pages of letters) and also provided insight into Pereleshin's frame of mind when he began writing in Portuguese. Likewise, I am grateful to Winston Leyland for speaking with me about his time in Brazil.

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recognized as an important gay writer (Leyland, 2025a; Bakich 2015, 218). To reach his new readership, Pereleshin had to both translate his own poetry and have it translated by others.

In fact, Pereleshin was an experienced translator: he had long been translating poetry from Chinese into Russian, for example, and enjoyed playing with the possibilities offered by new and different languages (Bakich 2015, 229). Pereleshin also had a didactic purpose: his translations of Mikhail Kuzmin, Anatoly Shteiger, and Fernando Pessoa were intended to broaden the audience for the world's gay literature. Likewise, Pereleshin selected some of his Russian-language poems for translation into English and inclusion in gay literary anthologies; these poems served as entry points into a new global gay liberation movement.

Pereleshin's self-translations from Russian into Portuguese served a different purpose, however, even as the choice of language makes clear that he was reaching out to a Brazilian readership. The translations recast and reinvented the Russian originals so as to highlight the physicality of his homosexuality. They were, in effect, new works: Pereleshin commented in letters to his correspondents that his new Portuguese versions were "not translations, but parallel poems" (Bakich 2015, 242). Parallel poems of parallel lives: in Brazil he was always translating his life between two languages and two realities, existing astride the conflicts between his Russian-language poetic and spiritual self and his Portuguese-language physical reality, between his family (his mother and often his younger brother, Victor) and his infatuations with young men he would meet during his daily life.

Writing more suggestive works in Portuguese was not an obvious outcome of Pereleshin's artistic and personal journey. In his earlier years in China, Pereleshin had studied to join the Russian Orthodox Church hierarchy, partially to wrestle with, and extinguish, his queer desires. His poems from the 1970s onward are the culmination of a long struggle to accept his homosexuality, when he formulated his idea of "spiritual lefthandedness" ("dukhovnaia levshizna"), a euphemism that emphasizes the idea that being gay is as natural a variant as any other (Bakich 2015, 214). (Still, "left-handed" in Portuguese can mean demonic and deviant, a short distance to "queer.")

In hindsight, where Pereleshin found himself in 1974 was at a certain personal inflection point in a lifetime of change. Born in Irkutsk in 1913, Valerii Pereleshin (the pseudonym of Valerii Frantsevich Salatko-Petrishche) was buffeted by the century's turmoil: the Russian Revolution, the First World War, the Second World War, the Chinese Civil War and Revolution, and, finally, the Cold War. In Brazil he experienced the demise of democracy in 1964 by military coup and its restoration seven years before he died, in 1992. In the early 1980s he witnessed the beginnings of the AIDS epidemic even as gay liberation worldwide was steadily progressing. His status as exile since early childhood meant that he constructed his Russian-language identity in emigration; living almost forty years in Brazil created the psychological space for a gay male physicality. It was Brazil itself that changed Pereleshin, as he openly admitted in a 1974 interview (Li and Sylvester 2005). No wonder that stepping off the boat in Rio de Janeiro in 1953 and then

witnessing his first Carnival was such a shock (Beaudoin 2022, 68-69).

However, the yearly Carnival, with all its excess and transgression, gives us a clue to understanding Pereleshin's reinvention through self-translation: it was breathtaking to witness the transformation of Rio's populace from machismo to gender-bending. That transformation serves as a template for considering Pereleshin's self-translations, with their emphatic sexual details, in a new framework. Pereleshin is in fact engaging in poetic drag: reliving and recreating events from his past, immediate or distant, in a language (Portuguese) that gave him the opportunity to explore who he felt he was—or, perhaps more accurately, had become—in such a way as to be an add-on, a surplus, to his sexually impoverished Russian-language existence. More flamboyant, more gay, more lustful. Even choosing to write his name in Portuguese as “Valério Pereliéchin,” instead of keeping his name transliterated as he did in other languages, hints at drag and disguise. In his poetic drag, Pereleshin's new originals mask their Doppelgänger, staging different interpretations of his world and of its queer experiences, providing new rhetorical positions and new understandings.

Pereleshin came out to his readership with the publication of *Ariel*, his ninth collection of poetry, in 1976. Written between 1972-75, it was inspired by a random correspondence initiated by Evgenii Vitkovskii, a university student in Moscow. Pereleshin fell in love with Vitkovskii from a distance, flattered by the younger man's attention; no matter that Vitkovskii was married and had a son.¹ Pereleshin had invented a spiritual lover whose very existence created poetry, one who was intended to be a partner in the superiority of art over heterosexual procreation; it was the artistic connection between the two that provided the fodder for the cycle's sonnets (Chernetsky 2003, 62-63). *Ariel's* poetic arc begins with the intensity of Pereleshin's desire for the young Russian, framed in the same-sex lore of Ancient Greece, and continues to document, diary-like, the bitterness Pereleshin feels when Vitkovskii rebuffs his lyrical advances. Jilted by his muse, Pereleshin then writes sonnets dedicated to the Brazilian men who satisfy the void Vitkovskii's rejection causes. It is a startling and deeply personal journey that is filled with hope and heartbreak—and ends in resignation. *Ariel* is explicitly homoerotic, but at the same time it remains cautious, never becoming too overt; it reveals the split in Pereleshin's life between his Russian artistic constraints and the sexuality of his Brazilian existence (Chernetsky 2003, 65).

Ariel's open queerness enraged and disgusted Pereleshin's émigré readers, who were left to wonder what had made Pereleshin gay. Was it those Brazilian boys, whose sensuality and availability made him lose sight of the purity of Russian culture (Bakich 2015, 217)? Even his own brother, Victor, joined the chorus of condemnation, exclaiming during heated arguments that gays should be “destroyed or castrated” (Basílio 2021). All this even though Pereleshin had established a noble pedigree for *Ariel's* theme: the

¹ Was Vitkovskii gay? Vitaly Chernetsky takes him at face value and implies that he is not (Chernetsky 2003, 64). Karlinsky claims he is, whereas Leung writes that Karlinsky is conflating Pereleshin's imagined Vitkovskii with the real one (Karlinsky 2013, 304; Leung 2022, 99). Vitkovskii himself wrote about how uncomfortable it was to be on the receiving end of such passionate gay affection (Vitkovskii 2013, 17).

sonnets of Shakespeare and the works of Fernando Pessoa (Bakich 2015, 208, 214; Leung, 2022). His readers wrote angrily that *Ariel* was pornographic; Pereleshin calmly pointed out that pornography is written for the majority, not the minority (Bakich 2015, 215). The reaction to *Ariel* forced Pereleshin to openly side with that same gay minority, which was beginning to claim its place in the public and artistic spheres. It also pushed him to write in Portuguese.

The late 1970s in Brazil were dramatic: the end of the military dictatorship was clearly approaching and there were mass demonstrations in the streets of major cities, along with a growing sense of gay community. James N. Green, who witnessed the beginning of gay organizing during that unrest, described it as an organic artistic and literary movement: During the long, tropical summer that ended 1978 and rang in 1979, I joined a dozen or so young students, office workers, bank clerks, and intellectuals in the city of São Paulo who met weekly.... Every month, we poured over the new gay monthly publication *Lampião da Esquina* [*Corner Lamp*], produced by a collective of writers and intellectuals from Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo that declared itself a vehicle for discussion on sexuality, racial discrimination, the arts, ecology, and machismo (Green 2013, 240).

These gay men, and queer-identified individuals, were struggling not only against a dictatorship, but also against a fierce Catholic antipathy towards them. The only tolerated outlet of deviance was Rio de Janeiro's Carnival, when anything could happen (and anything did), but the perception that such liberties spilled over into everyday life was mistaken, making open manifestations of queerness in everyday life dangerous (Posso 2003, 3, 7). The dictatorship, and the democracy that immediately followed it, judged public expressions of queerness as serious transgressions, necessary, perhaps, to define the proper boundaries of heterosexuality, whose limitations in turn circumscribed homosexuality: only the gay man who engaged in passive anal sex was labeled homosexual; everyone else was spared. The markers of heterosexual masculinity, then, were clearly articulated; from Pereleshin's perspective, as he repeatedly insisted, they were signified by the mustache, the wife, the children, and the dull, unthinkingly preordained existence. As long as those markers were present, even those men and boys who could be bought for sex by an older white man were not queer (Mitchell 2016, 124).

The Brazilians mentioned by Green, however, were seeing themselves increasingly as part of a sexual minority not necessarily defined by what sexual activities they preferred: it was a worldwide unification of queers that did not discriminate against male passivity, identifying by a character trait rather than an act. For Pereleshin it was a cause for a celebration expressed in the poems he sent to be published in English for gay literature anthologies.

What a change from his earlier Russian-language poems, in which he justified his homosexuality through historical associations with antiquity and a forgotten Russophone gay past. The visibility of the new gay movement gave Pereleshin an opportunity to stop self-censoring, providing him with the means to comprehend and translate his queer experience. Choosing to write in Portuguese gave him his freedom: Portuguese is the language in which he had sex, in which he seduced young men, in

which he could extoll a queer desire differentiated from, and ultimately elevated above, what he considered the breeding masses. The juxtaposition of gay enlightenment and dull reproduction became the principal theme of *In Old Wineskins* (*Nos Odres Velhos*, 1983), Pereleshin's sole published collection of Portuguese-language poetry.²

Most importantly, *In Old Wineskins* also reflects the influence of a young man Pereleshin met around 1977. Humberto Marques Passos was more than three decades younger than Pereleshin when they met in October, 1977, standing in line in a photocopy shop. They shared cultural interests and discussed word choice late into the night (Bakich 2015, 225, 242).³ Passos flattered and cajoled Pereleshin to write and publish his Portuguese-language work.

In 1979 the poet and literary critic Francisco Bittencourt (without Pereleshin's knowledge) sent a few of Pereleshin's poems to *Lampião* (the paper mentioned by Green and then Brazil's only gay publication) so they could be reviewed by a leading queer literary and artistic voice in Brazil, Glauco Mattoso.⁴ The short biography included in the resulting article notes that "Pereleshin, who was only writing in Russian, remains ignored among us, although he's already lived in Rio for 25 years." Mattoso comments that Pereleshin's preferred form, the sonnet, is "for these topics and in Portuguese so unused that it's as though it's a new form" (Mattoso 1979). That review marked a significant new recognition for Pereleshin, who was ecstatic that his poetry had been published in the journal—at last an audience, even if, ultimately, nothing much came of it.

That the review was published in *Lampião* highlights Pereleshin's poetic transformation. In 1978 the Brazilian gay journal was founded as a result of Winston Leyland's first visit to Brazil a year earlier (Encarnación 2016, 163; Green 2013, 249, 265). Leyland was in Rio in order to collect ideas for an anthology of Latin American gay literature (Trevisan 1986, 136; Green 2013, 249). James N. Green was helping Brazilian gay activists organize at the time; he and Leyland subsequently met in São Paulo (Leyland 2025b). As Leyland was influential in queer literary circles (he had been instrumental in publishing gay male literature in the United States—often erotic, such as the *Meat Men* series), that meeting convinced Brazilian gay writers to establish *Lampião* (Leyland 1979, 8).

Soon Leyland had an apartment in Copacabana, where he would periodically escape from the stress of being a publisher (Leyland, telephone conversation April 5, 2025). Leyland also met Pereleshin during that first visit to Brazil, at the urging of Simon Karlinsky, who felt that Pereleshin should be included in Leyland's Latin American anthology (Bakich 2025). Pereleshin then introduced Leyland to Passos, and the latter two

² At the same time, his decision to change languages was a conscious choice to try to reach a Brazilian readership. Despite his efforts, he always remained a Russian-language émigré poet with little recognition in Brazil or beyond.

³ Leyland claims that Passos also wrote poetry in his youth. That poetic connection gave Passos influence over Pereleshin. But the relationship, like that between Pereleshin and Vitkovskii earlier, was strained; Leyland has commented that Passos was distraught whenever Pereleshin said he loved him. (Leyland 2025a).

⁴ Bakich writes that it was Pereleshin himself who sent the poems to the journal after Leyland and Passos convinced him to do so (Bakich 2015, 246).

become close friends; Leyland even hired Passos as his financial representative for when Leyland was not in Rio. Leyland became convinced of Pereleshin's significance, and he included the poet's work in his planned anthology, giving Pereleshin another chance to engage with a large readership.

Leyland published his anthology, *Now the Volcano: An Anthology of Latin American Gay Literature*, two years later. It included four of Pereleshin's Russian-language poems—many of which were sexually frank—translated by Simon Karlinsky (Pereleshin 1979). Pereleshin (a recluse of sorts, “eccentric and difficult,” according to Leyland) was suddenly declaiming a proud gay future, in line with how Leyland himself marveled, in his own introduction to the volume, that “the Gay Cultural Renaissance is a world-wide phenomenon” (Leyland 1979, 6).

The first and longest of the four poems, “To One Who Confessed” (“Priznavshemusia”) begins with a raunchy comparison of homosexuality with animals: jack rabbits in China (whose name also serves as a swear word), and deer in Brazil, in order to create an extended analogy to the Brazilian slang word for a gay man, “veado” or “viado,” pronounced the same way (with the first word, “veado” also meaning “deer”). Yet through the bond of being called “viado” (queer, perhaps faggot, in English) a movement is created, with the recipients of the insults, through their evident connection to the natural world (deer, jack rabbits), joining together in fraternal unity. Pereleshin goes even further: it is Leyland's publishing, his *Gay Sunshine Journal* and *Orgasms of Light*, that are drawing queers together in a new global gay movement that is fighting for equality:

Глядите же: «Левшинский свет» — газета
С рисунками, статьями, интервью,
И целый том — стихи «Оргазмы света»:
И то, и то я на дом Вам даю.

Мы не одни. Поверьте, миллионы
За Лейландом идти готовы в бой
За равенство, за добрые законы,
За право жить и быть самим собой!
(Pereleshin 2018, 345)

Just look: *Lefthanded Light** — a journal
With drawings, articles, interviews,
And a whole book of poems — *Orgasms of Light*:

The one and the other I'll lend you to
take home.

We're not alone. Believe me, millions
Are ready to follow Leyland in the fight
For equality, for good laws,
For the right to live and be ourselves!⁵

*Pereleshin uses his term “left-hander”
to translate *Gay Sunshine*.

⁵ My translation. Karlinsky's translation is published in Pereleshin, “To the One Who Confessed,” *Now the Volcano* 264-65; *Out of the Blue* 184-85. The Russian original is in the Olga Bakich Archive, comprising Pereleshin's complete poetry in Russian and copies of his letters (the poetry, annotated with relevant sections from Pereleshin's correspondence, is currently in the author's possession), and Pereleshin 2018, 344-35. Pereleshin wrote the poem specifically for Leyland, sending a copy to Karlinsky for translation (Pereleshin 1977).

So much for the ethereal Pereleshin; to the barricades! Evidently for an American English-language readership Pereleshin is positioning his own work and experience at the vanguard of gay rights. But a poem such as “To One Who Confessed” is also a reflection of how Pereleshin’s sexuality is more changeable depending on the language he is using (or intending for publication if the work is to be translated by someone else). It is also a clear indication of the queer radicalization of his poetry, the result of his getting to know activists such as Leyland.

Leyland continued to publish Pereleshin’s works in translation. In the 1980 tenth anniversary issue of *Gay Sunshine Journal* (subsequently reprinted in *Gay Roots: Twenty Years of Gay Sunshine* in 1991), he published “To the Green-Eyed Boy” (Pereleshin 1991, 648). The translation is based on Pereleshin’s 1980 Portuguese reworking of a 1978 Russian poem, both of which were unpublished. Given that Pereleshin himself selected the poem for Leyland, it must have had personal importance, both in the event described and in the message he is giving the reader. As an example of Pereleshin’s self-translation the two poems are significant in that they are not only rewritten by the poet but also intended for yet a further translation into English.

Pereleshin’s self-translations reflect conscious decisions: he decided which poems to rework, thereby reflecting how his identities are constituted in different languages. “As a kind of multilingual palimpsest, the self-translated poetic text offers insights into the functioning of poetic creativity in different languages, the conundrum of translation, and the vagaries of bilingual identity” (Wanner 2020, 14). For Pereleshin, self-taught in Portuguese and learning the habits of its versification (such as the recognition that for Brazilian readers the sonnet was an awkward form), the effort was worthwhile, as his new poetic language offered a directness that he could not duplicate easily in his native Russian.

Does that new directness make for a new original (enough so that it was the Portuguese version—and not the Russian—that was translated and published by Leyland)? Which version is the true “original”? Given the two years that elapsed before Pereleshin decided to translate the poem, the motivations behind his reworking of the topic may differ enough that the new poem itself gains a new and different intent (Antunes 2009, 106). Pereleshin could allow himself flexibility, he could avail himself of “liberties of which regular translators would never dream; self-translation typically produces another ‘version’ or a new ‘original’ of a text. What is being negotiated is therefore not only an ‘original’ text, and perhaps the self which wrote it, but the vexatious notion of ‘originality’ itself” (Cordingley 2013, 2).

Pereleshin’s identity in his self-translations was new; he was free to (re-)situate himself linguistically and culturally, as “not only a means of representing one’s identity and particular way of thinking—seeing the self from the inside and outside, situated between others in different languages and spaces—but also as a particular writing activity in search of an effective channel of intercultural dialogue, one which can open a space for the enunciation of a diversity of voices, positions and sensibilities” (Klimkiewicz 2013, 190). It is not necessarily that he is rephrasing his homosexuality

differently, perhaps in a minoritizing discourse, as has been suggested (meaning reorienting his poems to the questions of gay identity prevalent at the time), but rather that the experience of his own homosexual desire is contextualized in the language he used in conversation with the many young men he addresses.⁶ It is a radical repositioning; for, as José Santaemilia has argued, “Translating the language of sex or pleasure, therefore, is not a neutral affair but a political act, with important rhetorical and ideological implications, registering the translator’s attitude toward existing conceptualizations of gender/sex identities, human sexual behavior(s) and moral norms” (Santaemilia 2018, 12).

Writing queer desire is a political act, one that asks the reader to engage in creating queer meaning. Pereleshin saw its impact in the Russian-speaking diaspora’s reaction to *Ariel*: clearly, those readers had little interest in co-creating queer meaning alongside him. By writing in Portuguese, Pereleshin assumed that his Brazilian readership would be different (even as he could not have intended to reach a worldwide audience by writing in Portuguese, or in Russian, for that matter). Queer poetry, as John Vincent writes, sees queer as an “imperative to read differently,” with lyric forms that “go against the grain of heteronormative reading practices so as to participate in the constructions of meaning that constitute each lyric” (Vincent 2002, xix). Pereleshin challenges us to see the world as he does, from different perspectives and in dialogue with himself, across time, space, languages, and cultures. He challenges the reader to sort out who the real Pereleshin is. Or, maybe more accurately, challenges himself to understand who he really is (Hokenson 2013, 54; Klimkiewicz 2013, 190).

But what of “To the Green-Eyed Youth”?⁷ This pair of poems reflects Pereleshin’s state of mind when he was working furiously with Humberto Passos on Portuguese poems (by 1980 Pereleshin had not yet published *In Old Wineskins*, although he and Passos were busily preparing it), when he was rethinking his earlier Russian poetic life, when, in fact, he was opening up to the new gay literary flowering Leyland had celebrated.

Зеленоглазому

«Твои зрачки — сверканье изумруда», —
Находится сравнение без труда,
Хотя оно — стоячая вода
И ничего не значит, кроме зуда.

To the Green-Eyed Youth

“Your pupils are the sparkling of an
emerald,” —
The comparison is found without effort,
Although it’s stagnant water

⁶ See Démont 162 and Leung, “Translating the Homoerotic” 46, 49 regarding minoritizing translations. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s minoritizing discourse was not intended to be a mode, necessarily, but rather a question about the intent and applicability of the queer experience (Sedgwick 1).

⁷ Pereleshin did not bequeath any copyright and wanted others to quote from his work freely (Bakich 2015, 291). I will be referring to the Portuguese version by the same title as the Russian, “To the Green-Eyed Youth” (as opposed to the “boy” used in the English translation), even though the literal rendering from the Portuguese is “To the Youth with Green Eyes.” For ease of reference I am providing citations indicating these and other poems’ locations in Pereleshin’s complete poetic works in Russian, published in Moscow (2018), or the appropriate source in the case of Portuguese-language works. All translations are my own, as are any errors in translation.

А для меня — великолепье чуда,
 Взлет и провал, победа и беда,
 Продленные неведомо куда
 Посул добра и предвещанье худа.
 Забудем же о девушке! Живи
 В рифмованном бессмертии любви
 Вне времени, надменной и нетленной
 И не желей, давая ей отказ,
 Что юноши грядущих поколений
 Не воскресят таких зеленых глаз!
 12 July, 1978 (Pereleshin 2018, 170)

And doesn't mean anything other than an
 itch.
 But for me it's the magnificence of a miracle,
 Upward flight and downfall, victory and
 defeat,
 That are extended to no one knows where
 The promise of good and the foretelling of
 bad.
 Let's forget about the girl! Live
 In the rhymed immortality of love
 Outside of time, haughtier and imperishable
 And, don't regret, when giving her your
 refusal,
 That youths of future generations
 Won't be resurrecting such green eyes!

Ao Jovem de Olhos Verdes

"As tuas pupilas são esmeraldas..."
 Surge a metáfora já consagrada
 E tão banal que não revela nada
 Exceto certas manobras ribaldas.
 Quase desconhecido, tu me baldas
 Nas ramificações da minha estrada
 Com a duplicidade calculada,
 Com as pseudo-promessas que desfraldas!
 Quero-te para mim. Então, esquece
 A noiva, diz-lhe que "tudo acontece",
 Que não desejas nem filhos, nem netos,
 Que neles não é muito que tu perdes,
 Mas, multiplicados nos meus sonetos,
 Serão mais salvos os teus olhos verdes!
 4 March, 1980 (Pereliéchin 1980)

To the Youth with Green Eyes

"Your pupils are emeralds..."
 The already well-used and so banal metaphor
 Arises, revealing nothing
 Except certain ribald maneuvers.
 Almost a stranger, you thwart me
 And the ramifications of my intents
 With a calculated duplicity,
 With the pseudo-promises you unfurl!
 I want you for me. So, forget
 The fiancée, tell her that "things happen,"
 That you want neither sons nor grandsons,
 That they're not much that you'll lose,
 But that, multiplied in my sonnets,
 Your green eyes will be more secure!

The Russian version of "To the Green-Eyed Youth" opens with the same line as does the Portuguese, but with one word's difference: "Your pupils are the sparkling of an emerald" (Russian); "Your pupils are emeralds" (Portuguese). While the initial lines are similar, the Russian places more poetic distance between the poet and the youth, as signified by the intermediary word "sparkling," a choice of word that gives the reader a more distant approach to the youth's beauty, even as it also evokes cheap and clichéd poetry.

Both poems are centered on the narrator's (Pereleshin's) desire to be with this youth, but the Russian poem focuses, in the second stanza, on an emotional level of the impending conquest as filtered through the poet's desire. It is the chase that matters, despite the description of the only logical conclusion (to the poet writing the poem, at

least). Yes, the youth is already with a girlfriend, but that does not matter: "Let's forget about the girl!" ("Zabudem zhe o devushke!"). The youth will live on in verse, in an immortal rhyme of love that is outside time and death: "Live / In the rhymed immortality of love / Outside of time, haughtier and longer-lasting" ("Zhivi / V rifmovannom bessmertii liubvi / Vne vremeni, nadmennei netlennei"). Future generations of youths, whoever they may be, will not lay claim to those emerald green eyes because Pereleshin will have immortalized them, outside of their other transmission, physical reproduction. Pereleshin is laying a poetic claim to the youth's beauty, eager that he selfishly agree to be deified so that his beauty not be tarnished by heterosexuality and its implicit (explicit?) act of repetition, the tragedy of procreative sex. The rhymes emphasize the need to escape corporeality: "imperishable" and "generations" ("netlennei," "pokolenii"), whereas refusing the girl brings him life, love, and the existence of his eyes: "live," "love," "refusal," "eyes" ("zhivi," "liubvi," "otkaz," "glaz").

Pereleshin's Portuguese-language parallel poem, however, has an edgier tone. Even the first stanza, in which the poet comments about the cliché he uses to describe the youth's eternal beauty, seems more risqué, as the metaphor "arises" ("surge"), clearly, is part of his "ribald maneuvers" intended to bed the young man. (The sexual overtones are more emphatic in the Portuguese, as the verb "surgir" means not only "to arise," but also "to arouse.") And the stakes are higher, too: the girlfriend is a fiancée (or a new bride); the reason the young man is to give for jilting her is an effective "shit happens" (even if Pereleshin did not choose those exact words). What is the youth to give up? His sons and grandsons, his procreation.⁸ Even the rhymes highlight the price that must be paid: "forget" and "happens," "grandsons" and "sonnets," "lose" and "green," meaning green eyes ("esquece," "acontece," "netos," "sonetos," "perdes," "verdes").

In both poems, the first two stanzas, while they follow Pereleshin's typical sonnet rhyming structure, nonetheless are constructed around rhymes that are all so close in sound as to be almost identical. It is as though the situation is blurry, bleeding from one idea into the next as Pereleshin pursues his conquest. But, once the gambit is played, then the associations are clearer. The Portuguese reveals a rowdier sense of being gay; it also reveals a life experience—of Brazilian rent boys who saw no threat to their masculinity when being bought and paid for by an older (usually white and foreign) gay man (Mitchell 2016, 32-33). In both versions, however, the irony remains: the poet, indeed, has immortalized the green-eyed youth for eternity.

Since Pereleshin wrote poems regularly and consistently he did not write "To the Green-Eyed Youth" in a vacuum: the two versions exist within a cycle of other poems, whose topics serve to illuminate them. In 1978, four days before Pereleshin wrote the poem's Russian version, he was once again haunted by Evgenii Vitkovskii, his Ariel. The result was "Not Ready!" ("Ne gotov!"):

⁸ These words, "filhos" and "netos," could be translated as "children" and "grandchildren," as well as "sons" and "grandsons." Given the emphasis on the "youths of future generations" ("iunoshi gradushchikh pokolenii"), I feel that using the words referring to male progeny in the translation better reflects the masculine world that Pereleshin was creating.

Тому назад лет семь я занемог,
И, вот, опять в очередном припадке
Тропической — московской — лихорадки
Меня знобит: я до костей продрог.
(Pereleshin 2018, 169)

About seven years ago I fell ill,
And now, again, in another attack
Of tropical — Moscow — fever,
I'm shivering: I am chilled to the bone.

Later in the poem we learn that this illness, however, can lead to death, the only time when the poet will be able—at last—to reunite with his beloved Ariel. “I was ordered to prepare for the trip... Where there is peace—to the subterranean peaceful world” (“Mne veleno gotovit'sia k poezdke... Tuda, gde mir—v podmirnyi mirnyi mir”). Yet Ariel is not there, either.

For Pereleshin, Ariel (or more accurately, the poetic and ethereal idea of Ariel) is to be found in the glories of art and literature, those same treasures the poet promises to the green-eyed youth. In “To My Sun” (“Moemu solntsu”), three days before writing the first “To the Green-Eyed Youth,” Pereleshin turned to that same ultimate and comforting answer:

Тебя в руках Цветаева держала:
Ладони рук и губы жгла себе,
И при такой — не утолишь — алчбе
Не на себя, а за тебя дрожала.

Tsvetaeva held you in her arms:
She burned her palms and lips,
And with such unquenchable thirst
Not for herself, but for you, she trembled.

.....

.....

Теперь ты мой, и мы горим вдвоем,
Но в пламени, но в бешенство твоём
Я чувствую прохладные прослойки:

Now you are mine, and we burn together,
But in the flame, and in your fury
I feel the cool layers

Спаленных губ останки и сердец.
... Воистину, поэты огнестойки:
Сожженные, переживут конец.
(Pereleshin 2018, 169-70)

Of the remains of burnt lips and hearts.
... Truly, poets are fireproof:
Burnt, they will survive the end.

It is poetry that provides the escape from the torments of life, even as poetry itself remains a torment. For Pereleshin, writing that Marina Tsvetaeva, a major (bisexual) Russian poet, is sharing in the torment of everyday life and is burning with the gift of poetry, provides us with a larger frame for the Russian poem. He is thinking about the cycle of queer life and expression, about its suffering, its artistic possibilities, about its transcendence of time and place, about the fire—the sun—that is both the one who is desired and poetry itself.

What about after the Russian version of “To the Green-Eyed Youth” was written? The answer in “Why?” (“Dlia chego?”), written four days later, is more dejection. Why live a life? What is the point when everyone will end up in a coffin? What does love mean, then? Where are the beautiful young men for whom the poet has expended so much effort, physically, spiritually, and artistically?

Когда лежать я буду под доской,
Кто будет мне разглаживать сутану,

.....

Как вытерплю сонливую нирвану?
Ведь, я и сам любить не перестану
Своей любви крылатый непокой.

.....

Но и сегодня, дома,
Мне тишина забытости знакома,
Так для чего, скажите, я умру?

(Pereleshin 2018, 170-71)

When I'll be lying under the coffin lid,
Who will smooth out my cassock,

.....

How can I endure this drowsy nirvana?
After all, I myself will not cease to love
The winged restlessness of my love.

.....

But even today, at home,
I am familiar with the silence of oblivion,
So why, tell me, will I die?

How does physical love compare to spiritual love? Is desire why we are on this earth, and, if so, is it necessarily physical? Evidently, the green-eyed boy is the cause of these types of questions because of what he represents, in his beauty and its possibilities. Around the time of the Russian iteration of "To the Green-Eyed Youth" the boy was evidently a replacement for Evgenii Vitkovskii, a representative of gay love yet unattainable.

The Portuguese version of the poem, however, is situated within a context that reflects a shift in Pereleshin's perspective. He had been writing in Portuguese for a year by then: *In Old Wineskins* included many of his 1979 poems, racier answers to *Ariel's* original questions. The 1980 rewrite of "To the Green-Eyed Youth" follows in the same tradition, and, significantly, it was written after Pereleshin and Passos attended Carnival that year. No wonder, then, that the poems surrounding the 1980 translation and rewrite of "To the Green-Eyed Youth" are, in general, so much more sexually assertive.

Even the Russian-language poems written around that 1980 attendance at Rio's annual bacchanal are earthier, as is clear in the poem "Gymnos" ("Gimnos") written on the day that Pereleshin finished his new version of "To the Green-Eyed Youth."

Гимнос—по-гречески нагой,
гимнасий—под открытым небом
пустой участок, дорогой
невинно-влюбчивым эфебам.

Теперь «гимнаст» и «гимназист»
размежевались в обиходе:

.....

Я раздеваю циркача,
а отрок не прельстился платой
и ощетинился, ворча,
моралистической цитатой!

(Pereleshin 2018, 234)

Gymnos—in Greek, naked,
gymnasium—under the open sky
an empty area dear
to the innocently-amorous ephebes.

Now "gymnast" and "high school boy"
have become separated in general usage:

.....

I undress the circus actor,
but the lad was not tempted by the payment
and bristled, grumbling,
with a moralistic quotation!

The poem plays on the connection between Greek and Russian, between athleticism, nudity, teenage boys in high school and their amorous availability (both in the ancient Greek sense and on the contemporary streets of Rio). The temptations are magnified by the cross-lingual connections in meaning: every boy can be had, if only he would agree. The retelling of “To the Green-Eyed Youth” was not the only poem Pereleshin completed on March 4, 1980, however. The Portuguese-language poem “Duplicity” (“Duplicidade”) looks at similar events: the seduction of (unwilling) young men from the perspective of a poet who was doomed from the start. At the same time, his uniqueness as a poet, existing above the heterosexual masses, means he must resign himself to a reincarnation—in his artistic eternity—of more of the same.

Para os poetas eu não sou tão pequeno,
Embora viva entre tantos pigmeus,
Mas os cínicos e os epicureus,
Já os esqueci no carnaval terreno.

Among poets I am not so small,
Although I live among so many pygmies,
But the cynics and the epicureans,
I’ve already forgotten them in the earthly
carnival.

.....

Basta que na futura encarnação
Retenha o mesmo câncer de gigante
Na alma de um miserável artesão!

(Pereliéchin 1983, 30)

.....

It is enough that in the future incarnation
I may retain the same giant's cancer
In the soul of a miserable artisan!

The poet is cursed. But his greatness means that he must continue to write, continue to rise above, continue to desire, even if those young men can never be attained.

Two days after Pereleshin rewrote “To the Green-Eyed Youth” he also penned a poem in Russian and one in Portuguese. The Russian poem, “Maple” (“Klen”), revolves around autumn’s tearing away of the maple tree’s leaves, its mask that it proudly wears all summer, something Pereleshin equates to the men who strut with a pompous air. They, too, will have their masks stripped off, leaving them uncovered for all to see when autumn comes.

День-другой подожди,
и разучишься плакать:
истощатся дожди,
и останется слякоть.
Встреть остатками сил
нагому и огласку.
«Я когда-то носил
эту самую маску.»

(Pereleshin 2018, 235)

Wait a day or two,
and you will forget how to cry:
The rains will be depleted
and slush will remain.
With what remains of your strength meet
the naked and the public.
“I once wore
this very mask.”

Autumn is the end of the cycle of birth and death, when all are unmasked to be revealed as who they really are. But there is a lesson: to understand that the mask is part of the game, a necessity even as it is removed (something Pereleshin learned over time).

In that day's Portuguese poem, a similar mask is torn off in a different setting: on a theatre stage, where all are playing their parts. Now Pereleshin is Romeo, but a Romeo not interested in the "pseudo-romantic" Juliet, a Romeo who upsets the performance by giving a flower to a man, thereby even making the prompter blush. But is it a mistake or a revelation of the truth? After all, it is Mercutio who becomes jealous, thereby unmasking the hidden plot, unspoken, of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, at least as understood by Pereleshin.

Na cena eu precisava de coragem,
Quando a pseudo-romântica Julieta
Fingiu paixão e, fazendo careta,
Já preparava a rápida abordagem.

Eu devia submeter-me à montagem
Conforme o plano do famoso poeta,
Mas do buquê tirei uma roseta,
E dei a flor ao belíssimo pagem!

.....

Gargalhou todo o elenco divertido,
Mercúcio se enciumou, e na cabina
O "ponto" enrubesceu, mal-entendido.

(Perelechin 1983, 31)

In the scene I needed courage,
When the pseudo-romantic Juliet
Pretended to be passionate and, making a face,
Was already preparing a quick approach.

I had to submit to the setting
According to the famous poet's plan,
But from the bouquet I took a rosette,
And gave the flower to the handsome page!

.....

Amused, the whole cast burst out laughing,
Mercutio became jealous, and in the booth
The prompter blushed, misunderstood.

Remarkably, this poem is titled in English: "God Supposes," winking not only to Shakespeare but also to the idea that God's plans may not always be what we make them out to be, that Juliet may well be deceived. The audience may be laughing, but Pereleshin is queering Shakespeare's intentions. Still, questions are left unanswered. What is the mask that Pereleshin is removing on stage, the mask that he is calling out in Shakespeare, flustering the prompter? It is the mask of compulsory heterosexuality, the shedding of his poetic drag to reveal the man underneath. It is the maple whose autumn is making it losing its cover, leaving it spindly and defenseless.

Pereleshin understood his predicament all too well. Despite his turn towards gay pride, he realized that his desire was grounded in the chasm caused by age—between his more advanced years and the age of those he lusted after—and by the death of physical desire even as poetic desire could live on for eternity. While the green-eyed youth would continue forever, spiritually in Russian and carnally in Portuguese, the desire itself would fade away.

"The Meeting with the Past," written in Russian in 1976 and rewritten in Portuguese in 1980, two months after "To the Green-Eyed Youth" was translated, makes his predicament clear. Time, as represented by both a meal and the men sharing the food, has erased any former attraction. Pereleshin's lust has dissipated, and the boy (the Russian poem is dedicated to a young man Pereleshin had found physically and culturally engaging almost a decade earlier) has opted for a typical heterosexual life, as can be seen in the Russian version below:

Встреча с прошлым
Алмиру Андраде

Всё Хроносу глотателю равно:
От падали до соловьиных грудок,
От ясеня до робких незабудок,
От Рубенсов до плохоньких панно.

Так: никому сберечь не суждено
Ни плоть, ни дух, ни разум, ни
рассудок,
Да я и сам в объемистый желудок
Нежеванным сползаю заодно.

Обжора сыт — и даже до отрыжки:
Горчат во рту безвидные излишки —
Горошины, волокна колбасы...

—«Тому семь лет меня вы отличали
За красоту».—А я гляжу в печали
На тусклый лоб, на глупые усы.

(Pereleshin 2018, 98)

The Meeting with the Past
To Almir Andrade

Everything is the same to Chronos the Devourer:
From carrion to nightingale breasts,
From ash trees to timid forget-me-nots,
From Rubens to inferior panels.

So no one is fated to hold on to
Either flesh, or breath, or mind, or reason,
Indeed, I too find myself descending
Unchewed into this voluminous stomach.

The glutton is full — even to the point of
belching:
Formless excesses leave a bitter taste
In his mouth — peas, sausage fibers...

“Seven years ago you singled me out
For my beauty.” — But I look in sadness
At the dull brow, at the stupid mustache.

What is it, then, that remained a constant in both his Russian identity and the new linguistic identity Pereleshin had constructed by 1980? Age. The irredeemable pull of heterosexuality for the right-handed majority. Everything is destroyed by time: flowers, Rubens, his own verse as well as the object of his desire who inspired that verse. It no longer matters whether the poet is an artist or not, desiring beauty or not; everyone, including the formerly desirable young man, is consumed by time's ravenous appetite, leaving only a bitter taste. We are left with the result of time's passage: the young man who used to be enchanting is now identical to everyone else (as signified by the mustache), digested by boring expectation, made stupid by his heterosexuality.⁹ The potential the poet had offered to the green-eyed youths in all their incarnations was not taken.

Pereleshin's turn to a poetic gay identity occurred because of several circumstances: the Russian diaspora's rejection of *Ariel* and Pereleshin's subsequent decision to write in Portuguese, his friendship with Simon Karlinsky, his chance encounter with Humberto Passos and acquaintanceship with Winston Leyland, the appearance of a gay community in Brazil and worldwide. These events formed the framework for a radically different Pereleshin, a poet who decided to join a new gay male reality, a reality that he then recorded in his Portuguese reworkings of earlier Russian-language poems as well as in his curated selection of works to be published in English. That reality reflected the way cultural and linguistic translation, diaspora, and sexual identity interacted in both his creative and personal life. “To the Green-Eyed Youth” exemplifies this fundamental shift in Pereleshin's conception of self: the poem's circumstances, and the accompanying

⁹ The Portuguese version, while it has different initial imagery, ends with the same dejection.

poetry surrounding its original version (and its subsequent translation into Portuguese and English), serve as a record of his queer self-translation, of the impact those influences had on his artistic and personal sense of self. The poem's trajectory maps the growth of a bold, new Pereleshin seeking to claim a queer place of his own, a poet who did not write in isolation but instead chose to engage with the gay world, changing it and being transformed by it in turn.

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