

Luc Beaudoin, *Lost and Found Voices: Four Gay Male Writers in Exile*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2022. 264 pp.

Lost and Found Voices is a remarkable study devoted to Witold Gombrowicz, Valerii Pereleshin, Abdellah Taïa, Slava Mogutin, and their “gay writing in exile.” As such, it contributes simultaneously to Queer Studies, Slavic Studies, and Comparative Literature. At the same time, it is about the book’s author, Luc Beaudoin, and his own queer reading in exile as a French Canadian in an English-speaking queer world, as well as a gay person in a straight society.

In his introduction Beaudoin introduces himself first before the four authors whom he then analyzes. This ordering is indicative of the way the book is constructed, for it is the author who connects the four, not a hypothetical queer common denominator in their writing in exile – nor a gay male one, for that matter, because, as Beaudoin notes, “My use of these terms is purposefully slippery at times. [...] It has to be” (26). He briefly acknowledges that he will be interpreting these writers’ works quite subjectively: “I am a gay man reading these texts, and I interpret them from my experiences, informed by my life as a queer person who lives in a language not his own [...]. In that sense, queer reading includes my own personal observations” (13). Beaudoin, consequently, is the queer lens through which Gombrowicz, Pereleshin, Taïa, and Mogutin become visible as queer authors. This approach offers both great advantages as well as some small disadvantages.

Four chapters, each approximately forty pages in length, dedicated to the designated authors follow: “Witold Gombrowicz: Queer in Plain Sight,” “Valerii Pereleshin: The Left-Hander,” “Abdellah Taïa: The Storyteller,” and “Slava Mogutin: The Sex Rebel.” These units are structured around the protagonists’ respective bodies of work and chart Beaudoin’s personal history as a reader of them.

In the opening chapter on Gombrowicz, who publicly time and again rejected the notion of himself as gay, the borders between interpretation and analysis are blurred. On the one hand, the author expertly shows the possibility of a queer reading of Gombrowicz’ work. At the same time, however, Beaudoin sometimes presents far-reaching conclusions about the Polish author’s inner life that cannot indisputably be drawn from his body of work. He notes that “Gombrowicz [...] was a homosexual” (27), calls his marriage “a substitute that evidently was important emotionally but could not be complete” (37), and states that the author “did not see [women] as wholly constituted beings possibly until his relationship with Rita” (48). In such specific cases, it would have been especially valuable for readers unfamiliar with his methodology had Beaudoin made more explicit that these far-reaching claims are rooted in his specific queer reading—and not straightforwardly deducible from Gombrowicz’ body of work. As it stands, the brief statement at the book’s outset (13) does a lot of heavy lifting. That said, Beaudoin’s queer

reading is often persuasive. When he pairs it with skillful analysis, it becomes especially so as regards the relationship between Gombrowicz' literary form and sexuality.

Different authors, different works, and even different media solicit different approaches. Pereleshin's avenues for expressing his homosexuality, Beaudoin convincingly argues in the next chapter, are closely connected to his Russian-Portuguese bilingualism. His displacement from both Russia and heteronormative frameworks results in a poetics that is intimate, indirect, and linguistically hybrid. Beaudoin's treatment of Pereleshin is attentive to these linguistic nuances and the subtle ways in which queerness is expressed (especially in Pereleshin's Portuguese) or concealed (especially in his Russian).

In the chapter on Taïa, Beaudoin navigates the interplay among autobiography, postcolonial identity, and queer visibility. Here, Beaudoin shows how Taïa's public self-fashioning as an openly gay Arab writer having left Morocco for the metropole cannot be disentangled from his artistic strategies. These are not just literary: Beaudoin delves into Taïa's own film work as well as into film adaptations of his literary oeuvre.

In the next chapter, "Slava Mogutin: The Sex Rebel," Beaudoin engages with another writer, who is not just a literary figure. Beaudoin also focuses on him as a multimedia artist in both (pornographic) film and photography. His treatment of Mogutin is energized by his own fascination with artistic transgression. Resultingly, Beaudoin captures especially well how textual as well as visual provocations speak to queer resistance in post-Soviet contexts.

All these chapters as well as the whole book benefit from Beaudoin's refusal to offer simple categorizations, instead emphasizing fluidity, contradiction, and creative self-invention. The final takeaway may not be a unified theory of queer writing in exile—but then, Beaudoin never promises one. Instead, *Lost and Found Voices* offers readers, both queer and otherwise, something quite compelling: a highly personal account of what it means to read queerly across borders, languages, and histories, paired with a sharp and thoughtful engagement with his four authors and queer literature itself.

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