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**Translating the homoerotic from and into
Russian: Valerii Pereleshin's translation
of Imitation of the Arabic", Alexandrian
Songs and "Antinous"**

**Traduzir o homoerótico do russo e para o
russo: as traduções de "Imitação do
Árabe", Canções de Alexandria e Antinous
feitas por Valéri Pereléchin**

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Translating the homoerotic from and into Russian: Valerii Pereleshin's translation of "Imitation of the Arabic", Alexandrian Songs and "Antinous"

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Abstract: The translation of a text with homoerotic content reveals complex political, social and cultural contestation in the transnationalization of sexual desire and identity. This article examines the translations of homoerotic poetry by Russian émigré writer Valerii Pereleshin *from* and *into* Russian. Pereleshin's different approaches in his inverse translation (Pushkin's "Imitating the Arabic" and Kuzmin's *Alexandrian Songs*) and direct translation (Pessoa's "Antinous") demonstrate how translation choices are governed by the interplay of discourses of same-sex desires in different cultural contexts, as well the poet-translator's expression of sexual otherness.

Resumo: A tradução de um texto com conteúdo homoerótico revela as complexidades políticas, sociais e culturais na transnacionalização do desejo e da identidade sexuais. Este artigo examina as traduções de poesia homoerótica feitas *do* russo e *para* o russo pelo escritor emigrado Valéri Pereléchin, cujas abordagens diferentes, na versão ("Imitando o Árabe", de Púchkin, e as *Canções de Alexandria*, de Kuzmin) e na tradução direta (*O Antinous*, de Pessoa), demonstram como as escolhas tradutórias são regidas pela inter-relação dos discursos de desejos entre pessoas do mesmo sexo em contextos culturais diferentes, bem como pela expressão de outridade sexual do poeta-tradutor.

Keywords: Valerii Pereleshin; Poetic translation; Translation of queer texts; Ventriloquism; Russian homoerotic literature

Palavras-chave: Valéri Pereléchin; Tradução poética; Tradução de textos *queer*; Ventriloquismo; Literatura homoerótica russa



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From translations that “shied away from translating the bald-faced queerness”¹ of a text to “overtranslations” of homoerotic desires,² the translation of homoerotic, homosexual or queer texts reflects the complexities of the transnationalization of sexual desire. Transporting a text *from* and *into* a culture, where perceptions of sexualities are vastly different, entails various forms of accommodation and manipulation. In the Russian context, the discursive silence over erotic culture and sexual otherness on one hand led to the practice of re-heterosexualization of homoerotic texts in translation, on the other, rendered translation the “protected venue for the expression of homosexual desire.”³

While Russian translation of texts that explore homoeroticism or homosexuality has been discussed in several studies (Baer 2011, 2016, 2017; Chernetsky 2017; Tyulenev 2014), the translation of such texts from Russian into other languages has received little critical attention. In this article, I compare the work of émigré writer Valerii Pereleshin, whose translation of homoerotic texts from and into Russian reveals different cultural, linguistic and aesthetic implications. This study examines his translation of Pushkin’s “Imitation of the Arabic” (Подражание арабскому) into English and Mikhail Kuzmin’s *Alexandrian Songs* (Александрийские песни) into Portuguese through the frame of a minoritizing discourse of sexuality and compares it with the translation of Fernando Pessoa’s “Antinous” into Russian, which I read as an act of ventriloquism.

Born in Irkutsk, Valerii Pereleshin (Valerii Frantsevich Salatko-Petrishche, 1913-1992) moved to the Russified city of

1 GRAMLING, 2019, p. 496.

2 WALSH, 2020, p. 106.

3 BAER, 2014, p. 424.

Harbin in China at the age of 7 and migrated to Brazil in 1953. Having received a Russian education that followed a pre-revolutionary curriculum, the émigré poet published poetry in Russian and Portuguese. Among Pereleshin's oeuvre were his prolific translations of Chinese, English and Portuguese poetry. Pereleshin's only known translations from Russian are Pushkin's "Imitation of the Arabic" and Kuzmin's *Alexandrian Songs*. Both texts explore same-sex attraction – a predominant theme in Pereleshin's translation and writing of the period.

The following evaluates Pereleshin's translation of homoerotic elements in Russian poetry through a minoritizing model of translation, which is based on Eve Sedgwick's distinction of a minoritizing and universalising view of sexuality:

...seeing homo/heterosexual definition on the one hand as an issue of active importance primarily for a small, distinct, relatively fixed homosexual minority (what I refer to as a minoritizing view), and seeing it on the other hand as an issue of continuing, determinative importance in the lives of people across the spectrum of sexualities (what I refer to as a universalizing view).⁴

Associated with equal-rights and liberation movements especially in post-Stonewall Anglo-American cultural politics, the minoritizing view of homosexuality calls for greater visibility of the representation of homosexuality and, in the literary context, puts forward a "family of narrative structures attached to coming out".⁵ In turn, a minoritizing model of translation, that "testifies to the urgency of making cultural texts speak the language of a specific regime of sexuality"⁶ makes visible homosexual content and poetics, but at the same time inflicts "interpretative violence" on the text by its unidimensional rendering of it.⁷ Pereleshin's translations of "Imitation of the Arabic" and *Alexandrian Songs* show different attitudes towards a minoritizing mode of translation.

4 SEDGWICK, 1990, p. 1.

5 Ibid., p. 84-85.

6 DÉMONT, 2018, p. 162.

7 Ibid., p. 161.

This mode of translation is contrasted with the understanding of translation as ventriloquism in the discussion of Pereleshin's translation of non-Russian texts. Recognizing the way poetic translation enables a poet to speak through the words of another, Tom Dolack argues how translators, such as Pasternak and Mandelstam, employ "lyrical ventriloquism" to comment on contemporary life that would otherwise be censored.⁸ My discussion of Pereleshin's translation of "Antinous" focuses on the way cultural and linguistic crossing gives freedom to the translator, who, struggling to express sexual otherness in his language (Russian), ventriloquises through the text of another.

Translating "Imitation of the Arabic" as Pushkin's gay poem

Pereleshin's translation of "Imitation of the Arabic" is a departure from his other translations. Despite his emphasis on transposing form, rhythm and a poem's acoustics in its translation, his rendition of Pushkin's poem into English is marked by a simultaneous verbal fidelity and removal of stylistic features of the original. The paratext attached with the translation further circumscribes the poem in a minoritizing discourse.

Pushkin's poem, presented as an imitation of a foreign text, highlights sameness as well as the unity of the male speaker and the boy addressee, which is symbolised by the image of a nut with a double kernel. It is believed that the source of the image is the French translation of *Gulistan* by the Persian poet Saadi – "I recall that long ago my friend and I kept company like two almonds in one (the same) shell."⁹ This motif is echoed by multiple pairings and sound repetitions – lexical repetition, internal rhyme, alliteration and anaphora – which consolidate the theme of same-sex attraction and contribute to the euphonic effect of the poem.

⁸ DOLACK, 2014, p. 64.

⁹ Translated by WACHTEL, 2011, p. 227.

Подражание арабскому¹⁰

Отрок милый, отрок нежный,
 Не стыдись, навек ты мой;
 Тот же в нас огонь мятежный,
 Жизнью мы живем одной.
 Не боюсь я насмешек:
 Мы сдвоились меж собой,
 Мы точь-в-точь двойной орешек
 Под единой скорлупой.

Sweet boy, gentle boy,
 Don't be ashamed, you are mine forever:
 The same rebellious fire is in both of us,
 We are living one life.
 I am not afraid of mockery:
 Between us, the two have become one,
 We are precisely like a double nut
 Under a single shell.

(Translated by V. Pereleshin)

In terms of lexical and syntactic structure, Pereleshin's translation follows the original closely. Except for the adjustment of word order into one that follows English syntactic structure – for example, “навек ты мой” (forever you are mine) becomes “you are mine forever” and “Тот же в нас огонь мятежный” (the same in us fire rebellious) is rephrased so that the adjective precedes the noun – Pereleshin's version reads like a “faithful” translation of Pushkin's poem. However, in the translation, the poem's metrical structure (trochaic tetrameter), regular rhyme scheme, and various repetitions are not transposed into the English version. The motif of twinning and sameness, intimately tied to the image of a double nut and reinforced by sound repetitions, is only transferred semantically in the translation by expressions like “same”, “both of us” and “two have become one”. The feminine ending on line 2, as opposed to the regular feminine ending on every other line in the original, makes it even harder for the reader to associate the text with Russian metrical structure.

¹⁰ Note that no title is given in Pereleshin's translation.

Pereleshin's version of "Imitation of the Arabic" suggests a verbal literalness that is uncharacteristic of his other poetic translations. Aleksis Rannit calls Pereleshin "the guardian of form and style",¹¹ and his various translations demonstrate the importance of recreating the rhythmic and sound effects of the original works. For instance, in the translator's note of *Poems on a Fan* (Стихи на веере), Pereleshin outlines an elaborate list of how particular features (rhythm, rhyme, style) of each type of classical Chinese poetry are to be translated into Russian, and his translation of *Shakespeare's Sonnets* strictly follows the rhyme patterns and metrical structures of the original.

An examination of paratextual materials underscores how the translation is embedded within a minoritizing discourse of sexuality. Pereleshin's translation appears for the first time in the 1978 issue of *Gay Sunshine Journal*, in his article entitled "Pushkin's Gay Poem".¹² The journal represents the post-Stonewall minoritarian discourse of gay liberation, closely associated with the San Francisco Gay Cultural Renaissance. The inclusion of translations of homoerotic or homosexual literature from different parts of the world, whilst rendering visible a sexuality that is silenced in some cultures, ascribes it within a "universality" of gay experience which has its basis in an Anglophone culture. This stance is reflected in Pereleshin's essay and translation.

The essay begins with a summary of Pushkin's life, stating that "[d]oubtless, he was 'straight,'" but emphasises Pushkin's tolerance towards the "abominable acts against nature".¹³ Before presenting the translation, Pereleshin writes,

More than this! In 1835, a mature Pushkin wrote a frankly homosexual poem which the puritanical Soviet editors of *Selected Pushkin* (three volumes, 1949) chose not to include in the collection (most primarily for children).¹⁴

11 RANNIT, 1976, p. 80. My translation.

12 The quotations are taken from the reprinted version of the article in *Gay Roots, Twenty Years of Gay Sunshine: An Anthology of Gay History, Sex, Politics & Culture*.

13 PERELESHIN, 1991, p. 649.

14 Ibid.

Such introduction compels one to read the poem against the backdrop of Soviet repression of sexual deviance, circumscribing Pushkin (anachronistically) in a discourse of gay liberation. The essay concludes by reiterating that the poem, written “by the ‘straightest’ possible poet is a proof of his remarkable insight, understanding and tolerance”.¹⁵

One significant element of Pereleshin’s translation is his removal of the poem’s title “Imitation of the Arabic” with the result of making it “Pushkin’s gay poem”, an original expression of homosexual love by a Russian poet, instead of a poetic experiment and borrowing. However, by removing the metrical structure, rhyme and sound effects in the original and preserving almost only the semantic aspects of the poem, the complexities of Pushkin’s poetics are reduced or “flattened” into a textual “proof” of sexual tolerance amidst Soviet oppression of sexual otherness – Pushkin’s text is a “frankly homosexual poem”. This demonstrates that although Pereleshin’s translation suggests a “faithful” transfer of the poem’s semantic meaning, its minoritizing treatment of the poem flattens its poetics into a “game of denotative equivalence.”¹⁶

Transposing the homoerotic musicality of Alexandrian Songs into a Brazilian context

If the type of publication and its discourse on sexuality constrain Pereleshin’s choices in translating “Imitation of the Arabic” into English, his co-translation of Mikhail Kuzmin’s *Alexandrian Songs* into Portuguese demonstrates a different relationship between translation and publication. *Cânticos de Alexandria* (Alexandrian Songs) is a non-commissioned work of Pereleshin and his Brazilian companion Humberto Marques Passos. The co-translation went through a winding path to publication, and was finally published with Pereleshin’s funds

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ DÉMONT, 2018, p. 157.

in 1986.¹⁷ Introducing to Brazil the work of a Russian writer little known abroad, and whose homosexual identity had been subject to prolonged disregard at home,¹⁸ Pereleshin and Passos adopt a very different style of transfer compared with Pereleshin's introduction of Pushkin's poem to an Anglophone culture. The translation does not follow a minoritizing model and instead strives to preserve both the semantic ambiguities and musicality of the original text.

Kuzmin's poetry on homosexuality is characterized by Vladimir Markov as "the only first-class poetry on this subject in Russia".¹⁹ He noted the sense of freedom in Kuzmin's presentation of same-sex love:

there is no "damnation", provocative poses, advertising, "problem statement", and [...] development of a homosexual theme under the pretext of "finding oneself" and "liberation".²⁰

A collection of songs about love, narrated by speakers of both sexes and set in Alexandria, Kuzmin's *Alexandrian Songs* is considered a pioneer work in Russian poetry that openly expresses same-sex love. Defying rigid metrical rules and rhyming, the musicality of the songs is achieved through the use of repetition (structural and lexical), refrains, internal rhymes and other acoustic devices. Pereleshin mentions how he and Passos attempt to translate Kuzmin's free verse in *Cânticos de Alexandria*:

Trying to reconstruct these asymmetrical poems, almost all without fixed meter and without rhyme, we seek to use other elements of Kuzmin's poetic art: refrains, repetition, contrasts. We follow the vocabulary of the poet faithfully; only in rhyming poems do we admit liberty once or twice.²¹

¹⁷ See BAKICH, 2015, p. 244-246.

¹⁸ Although Mikhail Kuzmin was regarded as a prominent Russian poet of the Silver Age, there was a prolonged discursive silence or obfuscation over his biography and literary works in Russia. (HEALEY, 2018, p. 188-189)

¹⁹ MARKOV, 1994, p. 67. My translation.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ KUZMIN, 1986, p. 6. My translation.

Pereleshin and Passos' treatment of the sections that were originally written in rhymed meters (VI.3, VI.4) shows a preference that is very different to Pereleshin's translation of Pushkin's poem: priority is given to the reproduction of rhythm, rhyme and other sound repetitions.

The translation of the following stanza demonstrates several typical features of Passos and Pereleshin's translation of *Alexandrian Songs*:

Вечерний сумрак над теплым морем,
огни маяков на потемневшем небе,
запах вербены при конце пира,
свежее утро после долгих бдений,
прогулка в аллеях весеннего сада,
крики и смех купающихся женщин,
священные павлины у храма Юноны,
продавцы фиалок, гранат и лимонов,
воркуют голуби, светит солнце,
когда увижу тебя, родимый город!
(I.3)

(Evening dusk over warm sea,/ lights of lighthouses on the darkened sky,/ smell of verbena at the end of feast,/ fresh morning after long vigil,/ walk in alleys of spring garden,/ shouts and laughter of bathing women,/ holy peacocks at the tempo of Juno,/ sellers of violets pomegranates and lemons,/ coo doves, shines sun,/ when I will see you, my darling town!)²²

A bruma vespertina sobre o mar morno,
os fogos de faróis no céu escurecido,
o aroma de verbena no final da festa,
a manhã fresca após longas vigílias,
os passeios por aléias de jardim primavera,
os gritos e a risada de mulheres que se banham,
os pavões sagrados junto ao templo de Juno,
os vendedores de violetas, de romãs e de limões,
arrulham pombas, brilha o sol,
quando eu te vir, ó, cidade materna!
(Translated by Pereleshin and Passos)

²² Unless otherwise stated, all English translations are my literal translation.

(The evening mist over the warm sea,/ the lights of light-houses on sky darkened,/ the smell of verbena at the end of the party,/ the fresh morning after long vigil,/ the walks by avenues of garden spring,/ the shouts and laughter of women that are bathing,/ the sacred peacocks next to the temple of Juno,/ the sellers of violets, pomegranates and lemons,/ coo doves, shines the sun,/ when I will see you, O, city maternal!)

The translation preserves the syntactical structure and diction of the original. In most cases, the subject-verb inversion used in the original is kept, such as “воркуют голуби, светит солнце” (“coo doves, shines sun” or “are cooing the doves, is shining the sun”). The only occasions when word order is different are when the translation follows Portuguese grammatical structure, where an adjective usually follows the noun it modifies. In terms of structure, the accentual rhythm is roughly maintained, with 4 stresses per line. All lines in the original have a feminine ending, which is the case in the translation except for the last two lines.

As is observed in the rest of the translation, Pereleshin and Passos keep the ambiguity of the original and make little attempt at interpretation or explication. In the excerpt, the last line (когда увижу тебя, родимый город!) creates confusion as the images (sights, sounds and smells of Alexandria) are depicted in the present tense, but the sentence ends in the future tense. The surprise caused by the unexpected change in verb tense indicates that the images of Alexandria described above are imaginary:

reality turns out to be a memory or recollection. Thus, this song is another example of a game with the reader, who must review both the content of the poem (the lyrical hero is not inside the city described, but lovingly goes through its signs in memory), and grammatical time [...] This is a case of a failure of movement, namely the loss of what has been achieved.²³

The Portuguese version keeps this nuance by using the future subjunctive form “vir” (when I’ll see), which at the same time implies the speaker’s determination to revisit Alexandria.

²³ PANOVA, 2006, p. 356-357. My translation.

In other songs, Pereleshin and Passos strive to recreate the sound repetitions of the original. Take the refrain of VI.5 as an example:

Кружитесь, кружитесь:
 держитесь крепче за руки!
 Звуки
 звонкого систра несутся, несутся,
 в рощах томно они отдаются.

(Whirl, whirl:/ hold tighter by the arms!/ Sounds/ of ringing sistrum rushing, rushing,/ in groves languidly they resound.)

Girai, girai,
 segurai
 um ao outro nos coros.
 Sonoros,
 triunfam os sistros, reverberam, ressoam,
 languidamente nos bosques ecoam.
 (Translated by Pereleshin and Passos)

(Turn, turn,/ hold/ each other in the choruses./ Sonorous,/ triumph the sistra, reverberate, resonate,/ languishingly in the woods echo)

While reproducing the repetition of “кружитесь” (whirl) with that of “Girai” (turn), the internal rhyme of “кружитесь” (whirl), “держитесь” (hold) is reflected by the rhyming of “segurais” (hold) and “girai”. Although the translation of “держитесь крепче за руки” (hold by the hands more tightly) into “segurais um ao outro nos coros” (hold each other in choruses) seems odd, “nos coros” (in choruses) and “sonoros” (resonant) create a consonance which replaces the alliteration in “звуки” (sounds) and “звонкого” (ringing). It also adds to the sibilance of the penultimate line. The repetition of “несутся” (rush) in the original is echoed by the sound repetition of “triunfam” (triumph) “reverberam” (reverberate) and “ressoam” (resonate).

In Passos and Pereleshin’s cultural transfer of the sights and sounds of Alexandria, the exotic becomes familiar. The idyllic world of Egyptian seas, blazing sun and bustling city life, whi-

ch is associated with a hedonistic view towards life and love, reminds one of the scenes of Brazil, as well as the translators' impression of it. For example, throughout the translation, the Brazilian "tamborim" is used to replace "тамбурин" (tambourine), a musical instrument often depicted to be held by goddess Cybele (such as in I.1). While the two terms are phonetically similar, a different sound is represented in the translation: a tamborim, which is one of the major instruments in samba music of Brazilian and African origin, is played with a wooden drumstick and does not have jingles. Apart from this cultural transposition, descriptions of a foreign land in the original

Как люблю я солнце,
тростники и блеск зеленоватого моря
сквозь тонкие ветви акаций!
(IV.3)

(How I love the sun,/ reeds and the lustre of the greenish
sea/ through the thin branches of acacia!)

becomes a familiar scene for readers of the translation:

Como eu amo o sol, os canaviais,
e o brilho do mar esverdeado
através dos ramos das acácias!
(Translated by Passos and Pereleshin)

(How I love the sun, the cane fields,/ and the brightness of
the greenish sea/ through the branches of the acacias!)

The Portuguese word "canaviais" can mean "reeds", but it is more often understood as sugar cane plantations in Brazil, just as Egyptian acacias would recall acacias grown locally. Similarly, scenes of the city depicted by Kuzmin

Como eu amo a policromia da turba na praça,
os gritos, o canto e o sol,
o riso alegre dos meninos jogando bola!
(Translated by Passos and Pereleshin)

(How I love the polychromy of the throng in the square,/ the shouts, the singing and the sun,/ the laughter joyful of the boys playing ball!)

resonate with Pereleshin's impressions of Brazil as an émigré:

Белеет статуя Христа,
но дружно плещутся в бассейнах
и белизна, и чернота,
и косяки детей кофейных.
("В Рио де Жанейро")

(Turns white statue of Christ,/ but amicably splash in pools/ whiteness, and blackness,/ and shoals of coffee kids.)

Pereleshin and Passos' treatment of the homoerotic theme in the songs upholds the same elusiveness as the original. Although there is no attempt to hide same-sex attraction or relationships, Kuzmin presents such love in a subtle manner. For example, in song II where the speaker declares "I love you, I love you forever!" the gender of the addressee (the beloved) cannot easily be identified. Apart from using a second-person direct address (you) or first personal plural (we) to avoid revealing the gender of the addressee, synecdochic displacement is used to refer to the youth: "бледноватые щеки" (pale cheeks), "серые глаза под темными бровями" (grey eyes under dark brows), "смуглые щеки" (dark cheeks). The only suggestion that the addressee may be male is made through the simile "Ты – как у гадателя отрок" (You – like a fortune-teller's boy). While these features are retained in the translation, readers would find it even harder to tell the gender of the speaker as verbs are not gendered in the past form in Portuguese. In fact, throughout the entire song, only the gendered adjective "idoso" (elder) indicates that the speaker is male: "embora eu seja muita mais idoso do que tu." (although I am much more elderly than you.)

"Three times I saw him face to face" (V.5) explicitly portrays the male speaker's attraction to a slave boy and the development of their relationship. The persona recalls the boy's captivating beauty and his ensuing repression of erotic desires, which are presented in the translation in a similar manner.

Он был бледен,
но мне казалось,
что комната осветилась
не факелом, а его ликом.

[...]

я почувствовал,
что спящий рядом Марций
трогает мою руку обычным движением,
я притворился спящим.

(V.5)

(He was pale,/ but it seemed to me,/ that the room was lit/
not by the torch,/ but his face [...] I felt,/ that sleeping next
[to me] Marcius/ touches my hand with a habitual move-
ment,/ I pretended to be asleep.)

When they meet for the third time, depicted to be bathing together, the focus of the narration is swiftly shifted to the drowning of Antinous, the boy lover of Roman Emperor Hadrian (AD 117-138):

Вытащенное из воды тело
лежало на песке,
и то же неземное лицо,
лицо колдуна,
глядело незакрытыми глазами.
Император издали спешил,
пораженный горестной вестью,
а я стоял, ничего не видя
и не слыша, как слезы,
забытые с детства,
текли по щекам.

(Ibid.)

(Dragged from the water the body/ was lying dead on the
sand,/ and the same unchanging face,/ face of an enchant-
er,/ looked with unclosed eyes./ The emperor hurried from
afar,/ struck with the sad news,/ and I stood, not seeing
anything / and not hearing anything,/ as tears,/ forgotten in
childhood,/ flew along the cheeks.)

The narration, building anticipation towards an intimate encounter, is displaced to the allusion of the same-sex love and tragedy of Hadrian and Antinous. In the translation, Pe-releshin and Passos neither deliberately highlight nor mask



the gender of the lovers, nor present homoerotic sentiments differently.

O corpo, retirado da água,
jazia na areia,
e o mesmo rosto do outro mundo,
o rosto do feiticeiro,
olhava com os olhos ainda não fechados.
O imperador se apressava de longe,
atingido pela notícia infaustuosa,
e eu estava de pé, não vendo nada
nem percebendo como as lágrimas esquecidas
desde a infância
corriam pelas faces.

(The body, removed from the water,/ laid on the sand,/ and
the same face from the other world,/ the face of the sorcerer,
er,/ looked with the eyes still not closed./ The emperor hastened
from afar, struck by the news disgraceful,/ and I was standing,
not seeing anything, nor realising how the tears forgotten/
since childhood/ streamed down the cheeks.)

The empathy of the speaker towards the devastated emperor reveals a passionate love that he is not aware of. The change from “not hearing anything” (не слыша) to “nor realising” (nem percebendo) in the translation puts a greater emphasis on the speaker’s emotions, showing a parallel between him and Hadrian.

Vladimir Markov states that

almost all homosexual poems of Kuzmin can be read as poetry about the “normal” love of men towards women. Unfortunately, Russian verb forms sometimes reveal the true state of things, and the reader is forced to switch from “universal” perception to “segregated”. (68)

Although Markov’s opposition of same-sex love to “normal” love is problematic, the choice of words – “universal” and “segregated” – reverberates with Sedgwick’s universalising and minoritizing views of sexuality. Kuzmin’s poetry does not depict male-male and male-female attraction as different, and same-sex relationships are not portrayed through a minoritizing model. Pereleshin and Passos’ co-translation manages to recreate Kuzmin’s attitude towards natural love and transpose the aesthetic quality of the poem into a foreign context.

Ventriloquising through translation – translation of Fernando Pessoa’s “Antinous”

Pereleshin’s poetic translation from Chinese and English into Russian from the 1960s onwards demonstrates an idiosyncratic reading and “recreation” of foreign texts in Russian. For example, taking advantage of the gender ambiguity of pronouns in classical Chinese, Pereleshin’s translation of *Li Sao* (Overcoming Sorrow), in which a minister’s loyalty towards the king is allegorized as a male(king)–female(subordinate) relationship, transforms it into a text with homosexual connotations. Similarly, his translation of *Shakespeare’s Sonnets* underscores elements of same-sex attraction. In both translations, Pereleshin occasionally departs from the original and introduces his own voice, blurring the line between translation and poetic creation. In the following, I will discuss several choices made by Pereleshin in his translation of Fernando Pessoa’s *Antinous*, as well as the role of translation in his writing.

Pessoa’s *Antinous*, one of the English poems written by the Portuguese writer, was first published in Lisbon in 1918.²⁴ The poem is about the love and grief of Hadrian over the death of Antinous, “the Bithynian boy”, known in history as his companion, lover, or slave boy. Pereleshin translated the poem in 1976 but it was only published posthumously by E. Viktovskii in 2004. Although Pessoa’s work does not follow a regular meter or rhyme scheme, Pereleshin’s translation maintains most of the rhymes and internal rhymes of the original. Describing his own work as a “free translation”, Pereleshin accentuates the homoerotic aspect of the poem and injects his voice into Hadrian’s lament through the use of direct address.

In the first part of the poem, the translation shifts the focus from Antinous’ death to the erotic and sensual image of the youth:

²⁴ The version translated by Pereleshin is the 1921 version.

The boy lay dead
 One the low couch, on whose denuded whole,
 To Hadrian's eyes, whose sorry was a dread,
 The shadowy light of Death's eclipse was shed.
 The boy lay dead, and the day seemed a night
 Outside...

И юноша, раздет,
 Лежит на ложе низком, весь нагой,
 И Адриан, в чьем сердце гнев и бред,
 Глядит на тусклый мертвый полусвет.
 Мертв и раздет. А день оделся тьмой
 (Translated by Pereleshin)

(And the youth, undressed,/ Lies on the low couch, all
 naked,/ And Hadrian, in whose heart rage and delirium,/
 Looks at the dim dead twilight./ Dead and undressed. And
 day was clothed in darkness)

While “dead” is repeated and forms the major rhyme of the stanza (dread, shed), in the translation the focal point changes to the naked body of Antinous. Pereleshin’s version compels the reader to visually confront the naked body of the youth without providing any context; the suggestion of death is delayed until the figurative “мертвый полусвет” (dead/lifeless twilight). The repetition of “The boy lay dead” is replaced by the repetition of the word “раздет” (undressed), not only suggesting nakedness, but also turning the body into an object of the gaze and unattainable desire.

Similarly, the summoning of various body parts of Antinous (hair, eyes, bare female-male body, lips) results in a change of Pessoa’s figuration into an explicit portrayal of sexual intimacy:

O lips whose opening redness erst could touch
 Lust’s seats with a live art’s variety!

О алость губ, ласкавших те места,
 Где похотью играло мастерство!
 (Translated by Pereleshin)

(O redness of lips, which caressed those places, / where
 with lust played mastery.)

The ambiguity of Pessoa’s version (the displacement of lips into *redness*, which could “touch/ Lust’s seats”) is more subtle and metaphorical than Pereleshin’s. This “literal” rendition

of the sexual act is also seen in the following excerpt, where Pessoa's archaic style and word-play are transformed into a description of the release of desires:

O tongue which, counter-tongued, made the blood bold!
 O complete regency of lust throned on
 Raged consciousness's spilled suspension!

Когда язык смыкался с языком!

О сила похоти, когда она
 Прикоплена – и освобождена!

(Translated by Pereleshin)

(When tongue closed with tongue/ O the power of lust,
 when she/ Was saved up and released!)

Throughout the translation Pereleshin highlights the transition from a chorus-style narration to Hadrian's lament, meanwhile inserting his voice into the poem through direct address. In the following stanza, Pereleshin changes third-person narration to direct address by adding "Утешься, император." (Comfort yourself, emperor.)

Even as he thinks, the lust that is no more
 Than a memory of lust revives and takes
 His senses by the hand, his felt flesh wakes,
 And all becomes again what 'twas before.

(Pessoa)

Утешься, император. Снова плоть
 Превозмогла двусмысленный отказ,
 И снова всё как было столько раз,
 И снова похоти не побороть!

(Translated by Pereleshin)

(Comfort yourself, emperor. Again lust/ Overcame the ambiguous refusal,/ And again everything is as it was so many times before,/ And again lust cannot be overcome!)

In the Russian translation, the emperor is never referred to in the honorific third person plural. Direct address is presented by the informal *ТЫ* (you), which suggests that the emperor is stripped of his power in his desperation. At the same time, the informal *ТЫ* puts him in a much more intimate relationship with the narrator/translator, who not only witnesses him at his most vulnerable moments but also talks to the emperor, telling him what to do as someone who has, or is experiencing similar emotions.

In the above excerpt, Pessoa presents how memory manages to revive Hadrian's senses, bringing the dead to life, albeit only momentarily. However, Pereleshin places minimal emphasis on memory, focusing instead on the power of the flesh. The terms "снова" (again) and "опять" (again) replace the term "memory" and bring readers to the actual past/imagination, evoking the domination of the senses – again flesh *overcame* (Превозмогла) equivocal refusal; lusts cannot be *defeated* (побороть). This change of focus implies very different preferences for Pessoa and Pereleshin.

The departure from the original is at times so drastic that it reveals a more intense emotion based on the translator's idiosyncratic reading of the original:

Now are thy nights widowed of love and kisses;
Now are thy days robbed of the night's awaiting;
Now have thy lips no purpose for thy blisses,
Left but to speak the name that Death is mating
With solitude and sorrow and affright.

Без поцелуев ночи, без любви,
А дни – предвиденье ночей одних.
Искровени же губы, разорви,
И смерть, разочарованная в них,
Боль отведет – и удалится прочь.
(Translated by Pereleshin)

(Without kisses night, without love,/ And days are the
prevision of nights alone./ Beat the lips, tear,/ And death,
disappointed in them,/ Will take away pain – and go away.)

Here not only does Pereleshin do away with the anaphora in the original, but with the use of added imperatives, the descriptive portrayal of Hadrian's grief is transposed into a much greater sense of devastation. For example, Pessoa's persona states that Hadrian's lips have lost all their functions (to kiss Antinous' body), except to utter the name "Antinous" in grief. Pereleshin replaces melancholy with a violent command: "Искровени же губы, разорви" (Beat the lips, tear). "Искровенить" carries the meaning of inflicting blood injuries (to stain with blood, or to beat, wound until it bleeds) and "разорви" means "tear asunder". These words convey a desperation far more intense than the original, implying even a

degree of self-harm. If Pessoa intends to highlight the reversal of power relationships – Hadrian the emperor has become utterly powerless and helpless – Pereleshin’s version not only demonstrates an agony more representative of Hadrian’s emotional collapse, but also creates a more personal voice, as if the translator is projecting his own emotion through the speaker.

The voice of the translator is strengthened as the persona’s supplication to Jove on behalf of Hadrian is changed to direct address:

The clod of female embraces revolve
 To dust, O father of the gods, but spare
 This boy and his white body and golden hair!
 Maybe they better Ganymede thou feel’st
 That he should be, and out of jealous care
 From Hadrian’s arms to thine his beauty steal’st.

Отец богов, объятий женских ложь
 Развей, чтоб только этот уцелел:
 Он золотоволос и белотел!
 А вдруг он большую внушает страсть,
 Чем прежний твой, и просто захотел
 Ты для себя любовь мою украсть?
 (Translated by Pereleshin)

(Father of gods, the falsehood of female embraces/ Dissolve,
 so that only this survived:/ He golden-haired and white
 bodied!/ But suddenly he inspires great passion,/ Than your
 previous, and simply wanted/ You for yourself my love to
 steal?)

As the entreaty of Pessoa’s persona to God to spare the life of Antinous changes into the suspicion that God himself is taking Antinous away out of his own attraction to the boy, Pereleshin expresses a more direct and desperate fury. Without the mediation of the persona, in the translation Hadrian confronts God and asks, “Did you want to steal my love for yourself?” (my emphasis) Having strengthened Hadrian’s direct address in the translation, the lament of the emperor sounds as much like the thoughts of the character, as the personal emotions of the translator, ventriloquised through Pessoa’s character.

Dolack defines “lyric ventriloquism” as “the ability to speak through another poet’s words through translation”, a process

through which poet-translators gain their voice.²⁵ Through ventriloquistic translation, “Shakespeare can comment on the Soviet Union”²⁶ in Pasternak’s translation of the sonnets, and Jack Spicer transposes Lorca’s poetry “with the specific intent of advocating gay visibility” in America in the 50s.²⁷ Pereleshin’s ventriloquism, however, is more complex than being a performative act of “coming-out” through Pessoa’s words. Rather than a public utterance of the self in disguise, Pereleshin’s translation of “Antinous”, which was unpublished during his lifetime, serves as the poet-translator’s idiosyncratic reading and aesthetic experimentation. More importantly, Pereleshin’s Russian translation of homoerotic or homosexual texts during this period coincides with his attempt to break from a euphemistic treatment of the theme of homosexuality in his poetry. For instance, a closer examination of Pereleshin’s *Ariel* (1975) reveals that his “magnum opus” is fundamentally connected with his reading and translation of Shakespeare and Pessoa’s works. The strategy of masking and unmasking one’s sexuality in translation is in essence an integral part of his self-writing.

The translation of a homoerotic text into a different linguistic and cultural code involves complex negotiations of the translator with dominant discourses of sexuality. This study has examined Pereleshin’s three different modes of translation beyond the traditional critical frame of faithfulness and translation competence. Both of Pereleshin’s translations from Russian show a degree of semantic fidelity, but reflect different preferences in the transnationalization of sexuality: the transmutation of Pushkin’s poetic imitation into an Anglophone minoritizing view of gay tolerance; and the collaborative introduction of early twentieth-century Russian poetics of homoeroticism into a Brazilian context. Transferring the homoerotic in a foreign text into Russian, in contrast, enables the translator to ventriloquise and express his sexuality. Pere-

25 DOLACK, 2014, p. 58.

26 Ibid., p. 64.

27 KEENAGHAN, 1998, p. 290. See also WALSH, 2020, p. 132-133.

leshin's translation of "Antinous" is an example of the poet's multilingual and multicultural interaction with non-Russian literature, which helped him overcome years of poetic silence on the subject of homosexuality.

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