

Institution: The Open University		
Unit of Assessment: D29 Classics		
Title of case study: Creating Ancient Fragments: changing theatrical practice		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2014-2019		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Dr Laura Swift	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Senior Lecturer in Classical Studies	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: 2012 to present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>Swift's research deals with the methodology of working with fragmentary poetic texts. This lay at the heart of her collaboration with creative practitioners and Potential Difference Theatre, which has led to a series of artistic collaborations, events, and outputs between 2014 and 2020. The research has had significant impact on creative processes in a range of areas, both within the group that was directly involved and more broadly in the sector. The research has given rise to new creative outputs and new methods of working. It has also contributed to economic prosperity in the creative sector through work created and funds generated.</p>		
2. Underpinning research		
<p>Swift's Leverhulme-funded work on fragmentary literary texts [G1] from the ancient world has revolutionised understanding of the authors on which she works. Literary fragments may preserve a whole passage or poem, but are usually much less complete, consisting of out-of-context quotations, or remnants of a damaged papyrus. In working with texts such as these, Swift's work has addressed the methodological questions of dealing with fragmentation, and the dilemma a scholar faces of how far to go in reconstructing what came in the gaps.</p> <p>Swift's 2019 landmark edition and commentary on Archilochus [O1] involves a thorough engagement with these methodological issues: she produced her own text, which supersedes the classic edition of Martin West, differing from it in many passages, and including new fragments not previously identified as Archilochean. Archilochus survives in over three hundred fragments, ranging from single words to poems of more than fifty lines. Swift's critical edition required constant choices about how much to supplement or emend the text as transmitted. Doing so can assist the reader by clarifying the train of thought and the logic of the narrative. Yet supplementation runs the risk of imposing the editor's own unconscious assumptions and biases onto the text. Swift deals with similar issues in the commentary section, where for each fragment she attempts to extract as much contextual and literary information as possible, to present each fragment's value as a source. However, building an argument on such scant information is risky, and requires difficult decisions as to how much speculation is legitimate. Because this major edition and commentary defines access to a text for a generation, the expert handling of these methodological questions were crucial to the success of the volume, as well as to its influence on students and scholars who work with it.</p> <p>Several of Swift's articles deal with similar questions of how far scholars can legitimately go in reconstructing the argument of lost poems, and what the payoff can be. For example, her 2014 article on the recently discovered Telephus Elegy [O2] reconstructs damaged sections to hint at a political agenda behind an apparently pedestrian retelling of a myth. Similarly, her 2018 article on the new Sappho [O3] tries to make sense of the poem by reading it in comparison with other texts about brother-pairs. These questions of how scholars should handle fragmentation, and what we are choosing when we fill in gaps, form the cornerstone of her artistic collaboration with Potential Difference Theatre, and are at the heart of the play <i>Fragments</i> she has co-written with them, which was successful in gaining funding from the Arts Council.</p>		

3. References to the research

The first item is a substantial edition and commentary which has been positively reviewed, while the other items are published in peer-reviewed journals. All items have judged by an external assessor to be of 2-star quality or above.

- O1. Swift, L.** (2019) *Archilochus: The Poems*. Oxford University Press.
- O2. Swift, L.** (2014) 'Telephus on Paros: Genealogy and Myth in the 'New Archilochus' Poem (P. Oxy. 4708). *The Classical Quarterly*, 64(2) pp. 433–447.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009838814000433>
- O3. Swift, L.** (2018) Thinking with Brothers in Sappho and Beyond'. *Mouseion* 15(1): 71-87
<https://doi.org/10.3138/mous.15.1.6>
- G1.** 'Philip Leverhulme Prize', The Leverhulme Trust, 2015-21, GBP100,000.

4. Details of the impact

Impact on Creative Processes

Since 2014, **Swift** has been embedded in a team of artists assembled by Potential Difference Theatre (PD) on a project called *Fragments*. This has been a cultural endeavour over 6 years, exploring how fragmentation and the process of working with fragments relates to everyday human experience, and how it can be represented artistically. The project has generated new types of creative practice, and new methods of collaboration between academics and artists. The artistic team, mainly freelancers employed by PD on the project, included actors, puppeteers, set/costume designers, lighting and sound designers, musicians, a composer, a dramaturg, a lyricist, and a writer/director. **Swift's** position as a co-creator within the team, rather than simply as a consultant, allowed her to have deeper impact on the artistic process. PD attest that this relationship has helped them "*manifest a new creative process for the company*", which will have "*lasting impact*" on how they develop work, and that it "*led to the discovery of several innovative ways of representing ideas*" **[C1]**. Tom Espiner, a performer involved since 2014, comments that **Swift's** research "*brought in the key initial starting point*" for the project **[C2]**, while the visual designer on the project, Lucy Sierra, commented that her presence "*allowed for a completely different way of thinking*" and "*reframed my understanding of the ancient material and helped me focus on how to connect it to our artistic goals*" **[C3]**.

Individual artists who took part in workshops or productions report that their engagement with **Swift's** research led to a change in their practice. For example, Tom Espiner reports that the idea of fragmentation now "*seems to be permeating everything into everything that I'm doing*" **[C4]**. The team organised workshops in October 2018 and February 2020 on how assembling texts from fragments could be realised aesthetically. They created a range of visual techniques to represent papyri and the texts they preserve, using shadow puppetry performed with abstract shapes, and object manipulation. These replicated the effect of piecing information together from fragments, encouraging the viewer's mind to fill in gaps to infer meaning. As part of this, **Swift** and the artists collaborated with an Oxford-based neuroscientist to investigate parallels between her work and scientific research on how sensory perception arises from the brain creating meaning out of fragmented information. Throughout the workshops, the artists and **Swift** engaged in conversations drawing on her research to explore the practicalities of working with papyri, and the intellectual steps by which a scholar makes decisions about a text. The artists then tried to devise techniques to represent this physically and visually. Thus, the form of this artistic practice grew out of discussions about the research methodology. Jess Mabel Jones, freelance performer and puppeteer who acted as the puppetry consultant for the project, states that "*Laura's research on fragments set up the parameters for the whole artistic project*". She further attests that the new techniques she created as a result of these discussions have been career-defining, stating "*the insights I gained through engaging with Laura's research have [...] shaped my development as a puppeteer, since it has led to me developing a specialism in collage and abstract images of a type that are unique in my field*" **[C5]**. These techniques have become an important part of her practice, so much so that she has gone on to use them in later

work. Tom Espiner comments on how the ideas he developed during the *Fragments* collaboration fed back into and influenced his work on other projects (a play his company has developed and performed about sight-loss called 'Going Dark', his work on the stage version of 'Life of Pi', and the opera of 'The Little Match Girl') [C2]. He also attests that it has influenced his teaching of drama students, as well as his work on sound design and as a Foley artist working on cinematic sound [C2]. Lucy Sierra states that her engagement with **Swift's** research on fragments has stimulated a new interest in sensory perception and inferring meaning from partial information, which has taken her work as a freelancer in new directions [C3].

The research-driven nature of the collaboration has created new relationships between the artists and other partners across the academic and museums sector. The Oxyrhynchus Papyrus Collection and British Library agreed to host the artistic team for a tour of their collections, while the British Library also invited them to develop a public event showcasing their new creative techniques (this would have taken place in March 2020: see Covid statement). The British Museum invited selected artists in to attend special sessions on conservation technique. PD's testimonial describes the value of these relationships in communicating with new audiences and [C1], while Jess Mabel Jones states that "*as an artist from a working class background [...] I wouldn't have known how to have had these conversations with very specific practitioners in their field*", and comments on the "*greater network*" it has led to, calling it "*invaluable*" [C4]. The creative team organised a Knowledge Exchange Forum in July 2018, which allowed them to share their new process with a wider group of practitioners, mainly drawn from theatre and spoken word. Participants at that event attest to the impact that learning about this methodology had on their own practice, and on their future plans. For example, Josephine Balmer, a prominent poet and translator who attended the day, writes "*I found that my own creative practice has been transformed by my interactions with the Fragments project*" [C6]. She further explains how it led directly to her establishing a new collaboration with an academic, which itself culminated in a performance event and a new poetry collection soon to be published [C6]. The impact on the poetry world is further evidenced by Balmer's invitation to feature the project and script from the 2017 production in the prestigious poetry magazine 'The High Window' in a special edition in December 2018 [C7]. Similarly, the Artistic Director of Pinned in the Margins, an independent arts organisation, writes of the "*real benefits to the production*" that he believes the type of collaboration pioneered by the *Fragments* team can bring, and states that as a result of the Forum he is "*considering how [this model] could be adapted to our own future productions*" [C8]. Thus, the creative collaboration enabled by **Swift's** research has had a significant impact on the individual artists involved, and has subsequently begun to reach more widely through the sector. Indeed, PD attest that other theatre companies now seek their advice on how to construct partnerships in higher education, which demonstrates the impact of the new methodology on creative industries [C1].

Impact on Creative Outputs

Swift's research inspired the *Fragments* project from its outset and has led to the co-creation of several new cultural artefacts, most notably two new play scripts, the first performed to approximately 150 people in 2017 [C9], and the second workshopped collaboratively between 2018-2020 (the final performance, due in May 2020, has been postponed due to the Coronavirus pandemic: see Covid statement). To create the scripts, artists were asked to devise scenes or characters around a set of research ideas presented by **Swift** on different types of fragmented texts, or how scholars work with them. This formed the basis of a first written draft, subsequently improvised around by the artists, until a finalised version was agreed upon. Thus, the research ideas were deeply embedded into the writing process.

As an example, in the 2017 play, the artists chose to improvise and then develop a scene exploring how far a scholar should speculate when filling in gaps in a fragmented text, versus insisting on exact parallels. The actors devised characters of an older PhD supervisor and a talented but inexperienced student: the supervisor reproaches his student for making suggestions without sufficient evidence "*You can't just suggest something was in the text because you like the sound of it*", while the student objects that insisting on exact parallels means "*we just have to re-create the plays we already have*", and argues "*It's poetry. Isn't that*

the point? It's creative" [C9]. The same script contains a scene where a tragic fragment is reconstructed in a range of ways from the plausible to the absurd, inspired by conversations about the process for conjecturing how a lacuna can be filled. Thus, the scene begins with the plausible supposition that a fragment (from the prologue of Euripides' play *Cresphontes*) depicted the young hero speaking to a gatekeeper about recent events in the kingdom. As other characters in the play object to aspects of reconstruction (raising issues genuinely posed by scholars working on the papyrus) the scene repeatedly resets to take account of their objections, with each new hypothesis becoming increasingly unlikely, until the ancient characters find themselves in modern and comic settings such as drunk in a bar, or in a hotel corridor [C9]. During the 2018-20 workshops, the artists further responded to **Swift's** research by creating new physical, visual, and auditory techniques to represent fragmentation, such as scenes occurring partly off-stage, the use of objects, lighting, and screens to occlude audience sightlines, and sound effects based on creating gaps in a piece of audio, or layering fragmented sound effects over each other to invite the listener to make connections between them. Thus the research influenced not only the text of the plays, but inspired an assortment of staging, visual, and sound techniques, all of which are creative outputs in their own right, since they represent the professional work of artists such as sound and set designers, composers, and directors impacted upon by the underpinning research. The designer Lucy Sierra commented when interviewed that she would previously have felt intimidated by the idea of fragmentation in a performance context, but that engaging with **Swift's** research gave her newfound confidence to represent the idea visually [C4].

Since 2014, the *Fragments* project has generated participatory discussions and workshops to around 175 people: a mixture of drama students at East 15 Acting School (who worked on ideas inspired by the project as a two-day workshop during their MA course), creative industry professionals, other academics, and the general public [C1]. As PD note, the long life of the project has also led to "*unusually deep relationships with the artists involved*" [C1]; this has enhanced the level of impact on their work, and has also created new opportunities, leading to two new artistic projects, and to a collaborator joining the company as an associate artist [C1]. These new projects have been influenced by *Fragments* in adopting research-driven methodologies and have generated both new research and artistic outputs. For example, the strong bond within the artistic team of *Fragments*, combined with the interruption to the project caused by the closure of theatres in March 2020 led to the artists creating a series of discussions about the impact of Covid-19 on the theatre industry. Because of their previous research relationship with **Swift**, the artists decided that this new work too would benefit from a research angle, and so these discussions became part of a new research project for **Swift**, whose work with the group was awarded a special research grant from the British Academy of GBP8,835, and resulted in a socially distanced outdoor performance in early November 2020. This research collaboration and its creative outputs (audio visual assets and art installation) has now been selected to feature as a special exhibit in the British Academy's Summer Showcase in 2021. This will be held digitally, as was the case for the 2020 Showcase, whose exhibits attracted 3,600 views within the first 48 hours, and the Academy expects similar if not greater reach this year. The British Academy also promotes the Showcase exhibits to a selected VIP audience of approximately 500 people including senior figures from cultural organisations, funders, politicians, senior government figures, and members of the press. Thus, the new form of collaboration with **Swift** has now led to a new approach to later work, and this approach is featured by the British Academy as a highlight of their year in terms of ability to influence and engage the public and policymakers [C11].

Economic Impact on the Creative Sector

The collaboration, informed by **Swift's** research, has contributed to economic prosperity via the creative sector. PD describe the process as having "*had a transformative impact on the business model of the company*" [C1]. The level to which research was embedded in the project was crucial in its funding success. This was not only because the relationship with **Swift** gave the project credibility and allowed it to fulfil its artistic goals, but also because the rigour in the research-relationship was transformative in terms of opening doors with funders and with other partners such as the British Library and British Academy. This is attested both by PD's

testimonial, and by the Arts' Council's feedback on their successful application in 2019 (for GBP20,686). The Arts Council names the research relationship with **Swift** specifically as one reason for supporting the project, and comments that a further reason for support is that "*earlier phases have been developed with input from partners*" (i.e. **Swift**) [C10]. It is highly unusual for partners or academic consultants to be mentioned in this way. Over the six years of the project's life, it has provided around 500 days of employment for 26 freelance actors, designers, producers and stage management. It has brought in over GBP50,000 through grant applications, and this provided the majority of PD's turnover in the 2017/18 and 2019/20 financial years. Moreover, the expenditure on production costs has further generated around GBP9,000 in Theatre Tax Relief, money which will be channelled into getting new artistic projects off the ground and pump-priming them to a stage when they too can generate funding. For context, GBP9,000 is enough to cover PD's core operating costs for around 1.5 years, and the project will generate a significant portion more in the following REF cycle. The financial security this offers has allowed PD to increase the ambition and output of their other projects, and thus the economic contribution of *Fragments* has enabled other artistic endeavours to flourish [C1]. Finally, the fact *Fragments* continued in online form in 2020 allowed PD to continue offering paid work to their freelancers during the pandemic when theatres were closed, which they note was "*so important in helping them maintain their artistic identity during a period that has been devastating for the performing arts*" [C1].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- C1. Testimonial. December 2020. Potential Difference (PD) Board of Trustees
- C2. Testimonial. January 2021. Tom Espiner, freelance performer and co-director of Sound and Fury Theatre
- C3. Testimonial. January 2020. Lucy Sierra, freelance visual designer
- C4. Audio interviews transcriptions. December 2018 and January 2021. Artists organised by Potential Difference
- C5. Testimonial. January 2021. Jess Mabel Jones, freelance puppeteer and performer
- C6. Testimonial. January 2021. Josephine Balmer, freelance poet and translator
- C7. Edition of "The High Window". 10th December 2018. Special edition on translation, 10th (pp. 10-12 in pdf) <https://thehighwindowpress.com/2018/12/10/classical-greek-and-latin-poetry/>
- C8. Testimonial. January 2021. Penned in the Margins
- C9. "*Fragments*" script 2017: pp.11-18, 35-6
- C10. Arts Council England Appraisal of PD funding application. 2019. Pages 5, 6
- C11. Invite. December 2020. British Academy Summer showcase