

Institution: University of Oxford		
Unit of Assessment: 26A Modern Languages		
Title of case study: Translating Performance: Inspiring Transcultural Exchange in the Performing Arts between Russian-speaking Countries and the UK		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: Oct 2007–July 2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Philip Ross Bullock	Professor of Russian Literature and Music	Sept 2007–present
Julie Curtis	Professor of Russian Literature	Jan 1991–present
Noah Birksted-Breen	Post-doctoral Researcher, Creative Multilingualism Project	Oct 2017–June 2020
Period when the claimed impact occurred: Nov 2014–July 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words) <p>As part of the interdisciplinary AHRC-funded project, Creative Multilingualism, Bullock, Curtis, and Birksted-Breen have raised the profile of Russian drama and music by creating new translations and informing productions and performances at UK festivals. Beneficiaries include performers, directors of operas and festivals, theatre groups and audiences. Their co-organised workshops highlighted the importance of languages and transcultural exchange within the performing arts and resulted in productions of new writing from Russian-speaking countries at UK venues. They have enabled controversial artists with limited performance opportunities in their home countries to reach international audiences. In collaboration with Birmingham-based hip-hop artists, their research has changed perceptions of spoken English varieties and shaped public attitudes by highlighting similarities between urban black British and modern-day Russian experience.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words) <p>Within the AHRC-funded Creative Multilingualism project (GBP3,231,000), Bullock, Curtis and Birksted-Breen's research focuses on music, theatre and performative translation. In partnership with the Oxford Lieder festival, Punch Records, and Sputnik Theatre Company, their research encouraged performers, directors, and audiences to abandon purely functional approaches to language and raised awareness of the multilingual nature of modern Britain, and its creative potential.</p> <p>Bullock's research combines literary history, musicology, cultural history, history of the book, and gender studies to examine Russian music's social and cultural contexts. His 2016 book <i>Pyotr Tchaikovsky</i> [R1] was the catalyst for collaborative work with Oxford Lieder, Garsington Opera, Wigmore Hall, Welsh National Opera and the Royal Opera. His ongoing study of the Russian song tradition explores the inner world of Russian emotions and the interaction of private emotions with the public realm [R2]. Norwegian Opera (Tchaikovsky, <i>Evgeny Onegin</i>, 2020), the Salzburg Festival (Tchaikovsky, <i>Queen of Spades</i>, 2018), and the Juilliard School, New York, have included his translations and essays in their publications. He has given public talks at Stuttgart Opera (January 2017) and in Seoul (October 2019). He has written CD liner notes for Russian music releases by Universal Music (Piano Trios by Tchaikovsky, Shostakovich</p>		

and Weinberg, Trio Owon, Decca DDA1204, October 2019; 'Tchaikovsky and the Piano', in Valentina Lisitsa, *Tchaikovsky: Complete Works for Solo Piano*, Decca 4834417, March 2019).

Curtis's research specialism lies in Russian drama and subversive writers under Stalin [R3]. She has recently focused on Russian drama of the Putin era and non-conformist independent theatres' resistance to increasing restrictions placed upon them since 2012. Focusing on transnationalism, Curtis asks how economic, political and cultural processes extend beyond nation-state boundaries and how this relates to C21 theatre in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. She explores how theatre-makers used the Russian language prior to events like Russia's invasion of Crimea and the rise of protests against Belarusian President Lukashenko, and how such political events modify the story of theatre [R4]. Curtis, Bullock and Birksted-Breen organised three workshops in Oxford (2014, 2017, 2019), bringing together playwrights, directors, critics and scholars to explore contemporary theatre-making in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus, perform rehearsed readings, discuss the staging of queer themes, and explore translation issues. Curtis has collaborated with the Lieder Festival to help translate song texts (Shostakovich settings of Akhmatova), and, with Bullock, has offered a range of scholarly contributions (talks, programme notes) for Garsington Opera's staging of *Evgeny Onegin*. She also provided a word-for-word translation of the entire libretto to assist the singers' interpretations of their roles.

Theatre-maker and scholar, specialising in translation and new writing in the UK and Russia, **Birksted-Breen** founded Sputnik Theatre Company in 2005 – the only British company dedicated to bringing new Russian plays to UK stages – and has been championing Russian drama in the UK ever since [R5]. Birksted-Breen and Curtis devised a project bringing together a modern Russian play (Vyrypaev's *Oxygen*) and young British hip-hop and grime artists to create a new work drawing on both cultures. This project realised by Birksted-Breen in close collaboration with Professor Rajinder Dudrah (Birmingham City University), resulted in a chapter co-authored with Dudrah, Curtis and Bullock [R6], which will be the basis for turning the hip-hop *Oxygen* into a touring production (plans on hold due to Covid).

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- R1.** [Authored Book, available on request] Bullock, Philip Ross, *Pyotr Tchaikovsky* (London: Reaktion, 2016), 224 pp. <http://www.reaktionbooks.co.uk/display.asp?ISBN=9781780236544>, reviewed by:
Andrew Thomson, 'Public & Private', *Musical Times* (Spring 2017), 114-5
Anna Nisnevich, *Russian Review*, 76/3 (2017), 543-4
Marina Frolova-Walker, *Journal of European Studies*, 46/2 (2017), 243-4.
- R2.** [Journal Article] Bullock, Philip Ross, 'Ambiguous Speech and Eloquent Silence: The Queerness of Tchaikovsky's Songs', *19th-Century Music*, 32/1 (2008), 94-128.
DOI: [10.1525/ncm.2008.32.1.094](https://doi.org/10.1525/ncm.2008.32.1.094)
- R3.** [Journal Article] Curtis, J.A.E., 'A Theatrical Battle of Wits: Bulgakov Maiakovskii, and Meierkhol'd', *Modern Language Review*, 108(3) (2013), 921-46.
DOI: [10.5699/modelangrevi.108.3.0921](https://doi.org/10.5699/modelangrevi.108.3.0921)
- R4.** [Edited Book, listed in REF2] Curtis, J.A.E. (ed.), *New Drama in Russian: Performance, Politics and Protest in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, June 2020), 296 pp. <https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/new-drama-in-russian-9781788313506/>
- R5.** [Chapter, available on request] Birksted-Breen, N., 'Vassily Sigarev and the Presnyakov Brothers', in *Contemporary European Playwrights*, eds. Maria Delgado, Bryce Lease and Dan Rebellato (London: Routledge, 2020). DOI: [10.4324/9781315111940](https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315111940)
- R6.** [Chapter] Dudrah, Rajinder, Julie Curtis, Philip Ross Bullock and Noah Birksted-Breen, 'A Breath of Fresh Air... Ivan Vyrypaev's *Oxygen* (2002): from Moscow to Birmingham via Oxford', in Katrin Kohl et al. (eds), *Creative Multilingualism: A Manifesto* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2020), 87-108. DOI: [10.11647/OBP.0206](https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0206)

Grants and Awards

Philip Bullock, Julie Curtis and Noah Birksted-Breen, AHRC award Creative Multilingualism (Katrin Kohl PI); 1 July 2016 – 30 June 2020; GBP3,230,978. Grant Number AH/N004701/1.

Philip Bullock, British Academy Mid-Career Fellowship (1 October 2015 – 30 September 2016) 'The Poet's Echo: Art Song in Russia, 1730-2000'; GBP113,682. Award number MD140030.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Influencing and informing artistic expression through consultancy and co-production

During his BA Mid-Career Fellowship, Bullock worked with Oxford Lieder's Artistic Director on programming and content, and engaged with concert audiences through five talks, five study events, three programme notes and new translations of all the Russian repertoire performed [S1]. This partnership raised Bullock's profile with creative industry companies and venues. As a result, he subsequently worked with Garsington Opera (four lectures; one booklet essay), Wigmore Hall (13 programme notes; translations for 8 recitals), Welsh National Opera (four booklet essays [S3]) and the Royal Opera (two Insight events – one, on Tchaikovsky's *Queen of Spades*, viewed on YouTube over 15,000 times [S2]; one booklet essay). Each of these lectures, events, essays and translations generated by Bullock, sought to promote a deeper understanding of Tchaikovsky's repertoire.

Bullock and Curtis collaborated with Garsington, from conception to production, on Tchaikovsky's *Evgeny Onegin* (2016). Garsington's Director of Development and Communications acknowledges: 'Curtis's involvement in our production [...] began right at the very beginning of the process, talking to the director and conductor. [Her] ...comprehensive word-for-word translation and transliteration of the libretto for all members of the cast and creative teams [was] ...the most useful of its kind that [the artists involved] had come across and that it had helped enormously throughout their preparations for the production' [S4]. Pre-production events included 'in-depth analysis of the opera and its origins which really helped to inform our audience in advance of the performances' [S4]. Curtis' literal translation of the opera, was 'invaluable in my preparation' (Roderick Williams, performing *Onegin* [S5]). Former RSC Director, Michael Boyd describes 'Curtis's careful and vivid literal translation' as 'an invaluable and unusually privileged resource for the entire company and creative team working on the opera [enabling] us to make strong musical choices with confidence, and to clear away the clutter and grime of inherited and mistaken assumptions' [S6]. He continues 'Bullock's generous sharing of his work on Tchaikovsky [R1], in advance of publication, gave me several timely insights into *Eugene Onegin* which directly impacted on our production' [S6].

Highlighting the importance of languages and transcultural exchange across dramatic practice and the performing arts

With Bullock and Birksted-Breen, Curtis organised workshops (2014, 2017, 2019) involving playwrights, directors, and critics from Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus, international scholars and British theatre-makers [S7]. Roundtable discussions highlighted political pressures, manifested in issues of language, faced by artists working in Russian. Since politically controversial artists and companies struggle to have their work produced, the workshops provided an important platform for raising their profile, generating UK productions, staged readings, and podcasts. Writer, translator and critic John Freedman used the 2014 workshop to produce video interviews with Sasha Dugdale, a renowned translator of Russian poetry and Irish playwright Nicola McCartney (527 YouTube views) [S8]. Birksted-Breen translated Mikhail Durnenkov's *The War Has Not Yet Started*, and directed a staged reading followed by a Q&A, at the Theatre Royal Plymouth, as part of the 'Power, Politics, and Performance in Russia' festival (587 youtube views [S9]). The play was subsequently directed by Michael Fentiman at the Theatre Royal Plymouth (2016), and by Gordon Anderson for London's Southwark Playhouse (2018). A reviewer described this as 'mesmerizing, with incredible dialogue and an even better cast', calling it 'a

treat and a must-see' [S10]. The 2017 workshop included a staged reading of Belarus Free Theatre's *Time of Women* (2014) (director Birksted-Breen) performed by professional actors, featuring women human rights activists and journalists in Belarus previously imprisoned for protesting against the authorities. Curtis also introduced a 2020 radio play of the documentary drama *OYUB* by Elena Gremina, Anna Dobrovolskaia, and Zarema Zaudinova, translated by Alexander Thomas, recorded as a podcast in lockdown (226 views on YouTube; available on iTunes [S11]).

Enhanced cultural understanding of issues and phenomena; shaping or informing public attitudes and values

Providing a platform to marginalised voices and communities was a key intention behind a new interpretation of the Russian language play 'Oxygen' in October 2018. The white middle-class spoken English often associated with British 'culture' overlooks contributions from writers, composers and performers using black British speech, working-class accents or British Sign Language, as well as non-English languages. The new interpretation of 'Oxygen' involved collaboration between Creative Multilingualism, Sputnik Theatre, the Birmingham Rep, Institut perevoda (Russia), Punch Records and two Birmingham-based hip-hop stars [S12]. Working with Curtis, Birksted-Breen and Dudrah at Birmingham City University (BCU), Lady Sanity and Stanza Divan were able to '...dive into the language of the [Russian] text', through Dugdale's translation. Lady Sanity continues 'a lot of themes [...] related to what's happening in the modern-day society, so it was amazing the amount of similarities that we found'. An important element was 'sitting down with Noah [Birksted-Breen] and having an interview about our lives which is sort of interwoven with the actual story' [S12].

Culturally diverse audience members invited by Birksted-Breen, Curtis and Dudrah, attended a performance of Oxygen at BCU in 2018. The attendees appreciated the 'mix between hip-hop and a Russian play, a Russian culture.' One exclaimed 'I thought I've gotta see that!'; [S12], another commented, 'At the beginning I couldn't connect, like why am I listening to an urban, black, British from Birmingham talking about Russia. But then of course as they went through it, I say this is completely genius because they found amazing way[s] through hip-hop to relate experience of what Russia was in the 2000's [...] they completely connected to a great cultural adaptation' [S12]. Speaking to the fusion of language and culture another spectator revealed 'I loved... the tonality, how they both performed in response to what I know of Russian literature, there was a really interesting synergy'; [S12]. Another encapsulated the ethos of Creative Multilingualism, 'Whether you go to the theatre or not or whether you go to hip-hop gigs, [...] regardless of which side that you sit, the message underneath will resonate with you' [S12].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- S1. Archive of all Bullock's translations of song repertoire for Oxford Lieder, accessed 12 January 2021: <https://www.oxfordlieder.co.uk/poet/362>
- S2. Video: 'Insight into the Royal Opera's *Queen of Spades*', 18 December 2018 (16,029 views). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AW6aFBzkkYo>. (featured three times, at 10:50 – 15:30, 47:34 – 53:44, 58:45 – 1:01:20)
- S3. "Confessions of a Programme-note Writer" blog post at Creative Multilingualism site with full list of Bullock's contributions to different festivals. 4 June 2020. URLs provided.
- S4. Letter from Director of Membership at Garsington Opera, describing the benefits of Bullock and Curtis's in-depth analysis, origins, and translations for audience and cast & creative teams for *Eugene Onegin*; 6 October 2016.
- S5. Letter from singer, Roderick Williams, acknowledging Curtis's translation work that 'proved invaluable in [the singer's] preparation', 31 March 2016.
- S6. Letter from former Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) Director, Sir Michael Boyd, on Curtis's and Bullock's positive contributions to the company and creative team of *Eugene Onegin*, 2 November 2016.

- S7.** Details of Selected Workshops organised by Curtis, Bullock and Birksted-Breen.
1. 'Back to the USSR? Drama and Theatre in Ukraine and Russia: A Workshop on 21st---century Theatre in Russian', Oxford, November 2014.
 2. 'Playwriting without Borders' conference, Oxford, 6–7 April 2017. URL provided.
 3. 'Staging Queer Lives in Russia and Ukraine', Oxford, 6–7 June 2019. URL provided.
- S8.** John Freedman interviews with Sasha Dugdale (17 November 2014, 276 views) and Nicola McCartney (26 November 2014, 251 views). URLs provided.
- S9.** Q&A after staged reading of *The War Has Not Yet Started* at Theatre Royal Plymouth (15 January 2016, 587 views). URL provided.
- S10.** Review of *The War Has Not Yet Started* at Southwark Playhouse (20 January 2018). URL provided.
- S11.** *OYUB*, translated by Alexander Thomas with an introduction by Julie Curtis, 18 June 2020 (223 views); URL provided.
- S12.** 'Oxygen: a hip-hop translation': Q&A with artists and creatives at Birmingham City University (BCU), December 2018. (249 views for 3:21 trailer video, 171 views for 1:03:38 full performance video) URLs provided.