

# **Transnational Theatre: ‘New Drama’ in the Post-Soviet Russophone Space**

**Report on the seedcorn phase of the project (1 Oct 2016 – 30 Oct 2017)**

**Professor Julie Curtis,  
(University of Oxford – satellite partner)**

## **OVERVIEW**

The purpose of the seedcorn phase of the project was to commence the investigation of the transnational dimension of contemporary Russophone theatre, specifically ‘New Drama’, mostly across the Slavic parts of the former USSR (Russia, Ukraine and Belarus), against the backdrop of political events which have rendered the writing of drama in Russian a contentious issue in the region, particularly in Ukraine. The project complements other projects of the Transnational Stand focused on Russia and the former Soviet space, especially those looking at the transnationalism of cinema and the media. Its main contribution to the strand is a pioneering examination of 21<sup>st</sup>-century Russophone theatre as a transnational phenomenon in the former Soviet space.

The key objectives for the first year of work were:

1. to conduct a review of extant materials (available primary texts, reviews and analytical studies) on the above topic;
2. to carry out short research trips to the relevant countries to interview theatre practitioners, make fieldwork observations of events and performances, and to collect additional printed materials;
3. to organise a conference in Oxford on the topic, with the participation of both scholars researching contemporary Russophone drama and theatre practitioners from the countries in question.

All three objectives have been met. The conference took place on 6-7 April 2017. Three fieldtrips have been carried out (in July, September and October). Full details are provided below.

NB the original plan was to have four case-study countries (Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Latvia) and to organise four research trips – one to each country. This proved overambitious, so we resolved to cut out the exploration of the Latvian case (specifically the Mikhail Chekhov Russian Theatre in Riga), and to concentrate on Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. In addition, we established a productive collaboration with the Belarus theatre critic Tania Artimovič, who has agreed to contribute to our project in various ways, including supplying interviews with leading Belarus playwrights (such as Pavlo Pryazhko). This, together with the fact one of our key objects of interest – the Belarus Free Theatre – is currently in exile in London, meant that there was no longer the need to organise a fieldtrip to Belarus. Of the three trips that were organised two were to Ukraine and one to Russia.

## **RESEARCHERS**

As lead researcher, Professor Curtis spent her research consultancy time on all three of the above components of the research. Her work was supported by the contributions of the research assistant, Noah Birksted-Breen.

Noah Birksted-Breen is Artistic Director of Sputnik Theatre in London, which specialises in staging contemporary drama from Russia and neighbouring countries. He has served both as the translator and director of these plays; he is also a successful playwright himself, with a strong interest in human rights issues. In 2017 he successfully completed a practice-based PhD carried out at Queen Mary, University of London, in which he looks at the development of a number of theatres in 21<sup>st</sup>-century Russia.

The RA's contributions to the seedcorn project included:

- help with collecting and researching materials;
- help with organising the conference;
- taking sole responsibility for arranging the staging of the Belarus Free Theatre production which formed part of the conference (including casting, rehearsing and directing);
- providing input on the planned volume of essays to come out of the conference;
- undertaking two research trips to Ukraine this year (July and October) to collect key materials.

## **FIELDWORK**

Noah Birksted-Breen undertook a useful research trip to Ukraine in July, bringing back five important interviews. Professor Curtis attended the Liubimovka festival of contemporary drama in Moscow in September. Given the vital role festivals play in establishing and maintaining transnational contacts in this sphere, we decided that it would be essential for Noah to attend the equivalent festival in Ukraine, which takes place in October. During this trip, Noah attended the Week of the Contemporary Play [Тиждень актуальної п'єси] in Kiev. This festival is a series of readings supporting emerging talented playwrights from Ukraine. It was established in the late 2000s by leading Ukrainian playwright Natalia Vorozhbit and director Andrei May-Malahov. The festival plays a unique role in the cultural life of Ukrainian theatre, but, being overshadowed by its Russian equivalent, the Liubimovka in Moscow, it has yet to be studied and written about in English. During this trip, Noah interviewed the festival's directors, attended rehearsed readings, and conducted interviews with participants.

## **CONFERENCE**

The conference, *Playwriting without Borders* (Wolfson College, Oxford, 6-7 April 2017), addressed collaborations across post-Soviet frontiers between Russian, Ukrainian and Belarus playwrights and practitioners, through events such as playwriting competitions, festivals and workshops. With growing political tensions in the region, these collaborations have become more difficult to arrange, although a number of writers continue to address themes pertinent to contemporary problems in all three nations. The conference focused on the following key aspects of transnational post-Soviet drama within the Slavic part of the former Soviet Union:

- the importance of documentary and verbatim theatre
- theatre as a sphere for political debate
- theatrical practice across national borders
- the development of theatre after the emergence of 'New Drama' ('Novaya Drama')
- the language(s) of 'New Drama'
- developments in theatrical form and the use of technology

15 proposals for papers were received from scholars based in 10 countries (Russia, UK, USA, France, Czech Republic, Ukraine, Germany, Poland, Italy and China). 9 proposals were selected for inclusion in the conference. Each of the four short sessions of academic papers (on the recent history of and current prospects for Russian-language drama, and on Ukrainian and on Belarus theatre) was followed by a 75- to 90-minute round table session, allowing maximum opportunities for discussion and the sharing of expertise between academics and invited guests. For the full programme see Appendix 1.

Among the guests were: Elyse Dodgson, International Director of the Royal Court Theatre (London); Sasha Dugdale, Britain's leading translator of contemporary Russian-language drama; Nicola McCartney, a Scottish playwright and director of youth projects in Russia and Ukraine; Mikhail Durnenkov, playwright and director of Moscow's Liubimovka festival; leading theatre critics from Ukraine and Belarus (Nadezhda Miroshnychenko and Tania Artimovič); and the three founder-members of the Belarus Free Theatre (Natalia Kaliada, Nicolai Khalezin and Vladimir Shcherban). For the full list of participants see Appendix 1.

The Belarus Free Theatre gave us permission to stage one of their recent plays, *Time of Women* (2014), as a rehearsed reading. This play about the experiences of Belarus female human rights activists and journalists imprisoned for protesting against the authorities was directed by Noah Birksted-Breen and performed by four professional actors who rehearsed with him in London before travelling to Oxford for the performance. This was followed by a Q&A session with the Belarus Free Theatre founders and authors of the play. The occasion was attended by 30+ conference participants, plus another 25+ audience members, since the event had been advertised widely in Oxford (entrance was free).

The conference was funded from three sources:

- 1) a £6,000 seedcorn grant from the CrossLangDyn OWRI project
- 2) a £2,000 personal research allowance allocated to Julie Curtis by the Faculty of Medieval and Modern Languages in Oxford.
- 3) a £400 conference award offered to Governing Body Fellows of Wolfson College for conferences arranged in the college.

The funds were used:

- to cover all travel, visa expenses, day delegate charges, food and accommodation costs, for the four keynote participants from Russia, Ukraine and Belarus;
- to cover all day delegate charges and food and accommodation for the speakers (many of them young scholars) from Europe, the USA and Canada. Colleagues on the OWRI projects (Professor Katrin Kohl, Oxford and Professor Philip Bullock, Oxford) kindly enabled B&B bookings in their own colleges, keeping costs down;
- to cover the costs of the performance (London rehearsal room, travel and fees for the actors), which came to just under £1,000;
- for travel and food costs for invited guests who came for the day from within Britain;
- to cover food costs for the four postgrad and undergrad students who study Russian-language drama, who attended the conference, provided interpreting, and gave Oxford tours to visitors;
- for sundries (stationery etc.).

There was one unfortunate wasted expense, amounting to approximately £200. We had invited one Ukrainian playwright who told us of a clashing commitment about five weeks before the conference; we consequently invited another playwright, who accepted the invitation but explained he could not afford to buy the airfare. It was therefore agreed that the fare should be purchased from this end. In the event, it turned out to be impossible for him to obtain a visa in time (applications are processed in Warsaw, not Ukraine, and both Ukrainian invitees separately described the application process for a British visa as 'hellishly' complex). The fare was not refundable, although the tax portion of the cost was refunded.

The seedcorn grant included a separate budget heading to cover the costs for a member of the CrossLangDyn OWRI steering committee (Professor Stephen Hutchings) to attend the conference, while the costs of attendance for the RA, Noah Birksted-Breen, were covered from his expenses part of the budget.

The event fulfilled the aims of bringing together academics and practitioners to review the development of Russian-language theatre in Russia, Belarus and Ukraine in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Academic papers for the most part explored the works and careers of leading playwrights from the three countries, while the round tables allowed for all participants to understand the complexities of the interactions between theatre professionals within and across the three countries, and also the importance of collaborations with Western (primarily Anglophone) countries.

Topics addressed included: the shifting aesthetics of contemporary theatre over the last 20 years; the theatrical practices shared across the three countries during that period and fostered through festivals and competitions; and the ways in which the subject-matter of contemporary Russian-language drama continues to range widely across the geographical regions under discussion, as they develop in the post-Soviet era. There was considerable emphasis on the political, social and even therapeutic functions of contemporary drama in Russian.

## **IMPACT**

One of the project's key aims was to facilitate transnational dialogue on major developments in contemporary Russophone theatre by bringing together academics and practitioners from a range of different countries. In particular, the conference allowed practitioners from countries now divided by political tensions to meet in a location and an environment which fostered sympathetic dialogue (especially between Ukrainians and Russians). This opportunity was much appreciated by those attending.

Our ambition was also for the meeting to stimulate a collaborative development of new scholarly, educational and theatrical projects. One example of follow-on projects emerging from this encounter is the proposal of a group of Oxford undergraduates to bring a Ukrainian play to Britain in the near future. Another is the DPhil project by one of the Oxford postgrads, who will embark on doctoral research focused on the language of 'New Drama'.

See blog review of the conference by Stephen Hutchings: <http://projects.alc.manchester.ac.uk/cross-language-dynamics/playwriting-without-borders-transnational-translingual/>

See also the conference organisers' own public-facing report: <https://www.dur.ac.uk/owri/subprojects/transnationaltheatre/playwriting/>

### *Feedback Received from Conference Participants:*

"I'm [...] just returning to my notes from the conference and am remembering what a generative couple of days it was." (*Molly Flynn*)

"Такие встречи вдохновляют на дальнейшие исследования. [...] Я очень надеюсь, что еще будут конференции в этой области" ['Meetings such as these will inspire further research [...] I very much hope there will be further conferences on this topic.'] (*Maria Polakowa*)

"All the speakers, as well as the performers, were truly amazing. Just going through my notes now -- so much material to work on!" (*Valeria Muts*)

"The variety of participants you had organised was fantastic, and the various panels all interconnected fascinatingly." (*James Rowson*)

"Thank you very much for organising such an exciting and informative conference. I've learnt a lot from it. It was very enjoyable, too." (*Sasha Smith*)

"Очень благодарна вам за приглашение на конференцию, которая была интересной и насыщенной, [...] Честно говоря, я ехала со сложными чувствами и рада, что мои опасения не оправдались. Очень остро почувствовала, насколько сейчас, во время гибридной войны, диктатур, Брексита, Трампа... когда миром манипулируют и пытаются разделить, людям науки и искусства важно объединяться, дискутировать, сравнивать, искать взаимопонимания и духовной оппозиции." ['I am very grateful to you for the invitation to the conference, which was interesting and rich. [...] To be honest, I came with complex feelings, and am glad that my apprehensions were not fulfilled. I felt very acutely how important it is, in this time of hybrid war, dictatorships, Brexit, and Trump, when the world is being manipulated and people are trying to divide it, for those engaged in scholarship and the arts to come together, discuss, make comparisons, and seek mutual understanding and spiritual resistance.'] (*Nadezhda Miroshnychenko*)

"I found the presentations and surrounding conversations energizing and thought-provoking." (*Jessica Hinds-Bond*)

"Было удивительно интересно и насыщенно!" ['It was astonishingly interesting and rich!'] (*Mikhail Durnenkov*)

### **PUBLICATIONS**

Two publications are expected to emerge out of the work carried out during 2016-17. They will be brought to completion during 2017-18.

1. A 5,000-word chapter with the working title 'The Politics of Theatre: "New Drama" in Russian across Post-Soviet Borders' for the forthcoming *Transnational Russian Studies* volume (edited by A. Byford, C. Doak and S. Hutchings), to be published by Liverpool UP in 2019. Professor Curtis submitted the first draft in May 2017 and is due to submit the second draft in April 2018.

2. A number of participants at the *Playwrighting without Borders* conference, as well as some of the scholars unable to attend this event, were invited to contribute to a volume of essays and interviews on 21<sup>st</sup>-century Russian-language theatre in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. The book (c. 120,000 words), titled *New Drama in Russian: Performance, Politics and Protest*, edited by Professor Curtis, is now under contract with I.B. Tauris (see Appendix 2 for further details, in the form of a book proposal). The manuscript is due to be submitted to the publisher by 1 October 2018 and the projected publication date is early 2020 at the latest.

## FUTURE WORK

The next phase of work will build on research carried out during 2016-17 in the following way:

### 2017-18

- dissemination of findings in the form of a panel at the most significant international meeting of Slavists – the annual ASEES conference, taking place in Chicago, 9-12 November 2017. The panel, titled ‘Overstepping Transnational Boundaries: 21<sup>st</sup>-century Theatre and Drama’ and made up of papers by Julie Curtis, Tania Arcimovič and Noah Birksted-Breen, presented on 11 November 2017.
- completion of the above two cited publications (chapter in the TRS volume and the edited volume emanating from the conference), both to be submitted to publishers by 1 Oct 2018.

### 2018-19

- take the project in a new direction by refocusing attention onto *representations of homosexuality* in the contemporary performance arts in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. Our research on theatre to date has revealed this to be a highly significant emergent theme in the cultural production in the region. Indeed, the legal ban on promoting homosexuality to minors has rendered plays about ‘non-traditional’ relationships highly controversial across Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. This phase of research will be led jointly by Professors Philip Bullock and Julie Curtis.
- funding for 2018-19 will be sought on a pattern similar to that requested for the seedcorn grant – namely, to cover: research time of the two PIs; (possibly) some research assistance; fieldwork trips to the relevant countries; a conference; and finally, costs associated with staging a rehearsed reading of a play at the conference.
- the central event (to be scheduled in 2019) will be the aforementioned conference to which we will aim to invite Russia’s leading theatre director Kirill Serebrennikov to talk about his film project on Tchaikovsky and ballet project on Nureyev (both of which have foundered in the prevailing atmosphere of homophobia in Russia; Serebrennikov himself is currently under house arrest in Moscow).
- the conference will include a staged reading of a play from Ukraine or Belarus on the topic of homosexuality in the former-Soviet Russophone region. We will negotiate a collaboration with Sputnik Theatre to work on this project.
- the main academic output will be a publication co-authored by Bullock and Curtis.
- the main non-academic output that we will continue to work on is the bringing of a Russian-language drama from Ukraine or Belarus to the British stage with the possible involvement of the Sputnik Theatre. We envisage this as the overall impact highlight of the project, which we aim to realise by the end of 2019.

## **Appendix 1 – Playwriting without Borders (Oxford, 6-7 April 2017) – conference**

### **VENUE**

Wolfson College, University of Oxford

### **PROGRAMME**

Thursday 6 April

*Welcome and coffee 10-10.30am*

SESSION 1 - 10.30-11.30am, 11.45-1pm

Susanna WEYGANDT (Dalhousie University, Canada): Teatr.doc's Manual-Manifesto: How to Practice Ethnography while Side-Stepping the Censor

Valeria MUTS (Yale University, USA): Contesting Constructions of Post-Soviet Identity in Vyrypaev's Theatre

*Round table on 'The History of New Drama':*

Noah BIRKSTED-BREEN (*Chair*, Sputnik Theatre Company, London), Mikhail DURNENKOV (playwright and director, Moscow), Elyse DODGSON (Royal Court Theatre, London)

*Lunch 1-2pm*

SESSION 2 – 2-3pm, 3.15-4.30pm

Andriej MOSKWIN (University of Warsaw, Poland): Человек и мир в стадии распада (на примере белорусского драматурга Максима Досько)

Natalia OSIS: (University of Genoa, Italy): Общее для восточных славян художественное пространство и методы его создания на примере пьесы *Любовь людей* белорусского драматурга Дмитрия Богославского.

*Round table on 'Theatre in Belarus':*

Julie CURTIS (*Chair*, University of Oxford), Andriej MOSKWIN (University of Warsaw), Tatiana ARTIMOVIČ (theatre critic, Minsk), Natalia KALIADA, Nicolai KHALEZIN and Vladimir SHCHERBAN (Belarus Free Theatre, London and Minsk)

*Tea 4.30-5pm*

SESSION 3 (in the Leonard Wolfson Auditorium) – 5-6.30pm

*Rehearsed Reading and discussion:*

*Time of Women* (2014) by Nicolai Khalezin and Natalia Kaliada

In English, directed by Noah Birksted-Breen, followed by a *discussion* with the play's authors. (This reading has been made possible by kind permission of the Belarus Free Theatre)

*Supper 7pm*

Friday 7 April

SESSION 4 – 9.30-11am, 11.30-1pm

Molly BLASING (University of Kentucky, USA): “Не сквернословь, отец мой”: ‘Mat’ and the Language of Faith and Family in Anna Yablonskaya’s *The Pagans*

Jessica HINDS-BOND (Northwestern University, USA): Natalya Vorozhbit’s *Vii*: Contemporary Ukraine through a Gogolian Lens

Molly FLYNN (Royal Holloway, University of London): Theatre of Displaced People: Ukraine’s Stages of Change

*Coffee 11-11.30am*

*Round table on ‘Theatre in Ukraine’:*

Molly FLYNN (*Chair*, London), Pavlo AR’YE (playwright and director, Lviv), Nadiia MIROSHNYCHENKO (pseud. Neda Nezhdana, playwright and critic, Kyiv), Nicola McCARTNEY (University of Edinburgh)

*Lunch 1-2pm*

SESSION 5 – 2-3pm, 3.30-5pm

Lucie KEMPF (Université de Lorraine, Nancy): Советское прошлое, болезнь Альцгеймера: когда уже невозможно вспомнить... Театр КНАМ, *Сухобезводное* (2006) и *Я есть* (2012)

James ROWSON (Royal Holloway, University of London): Dissent and Documentary: Performing Justice in Teatr.doc’s *The Bolotnaya Square Case*

*Tea 3-3.30pm*

*Round table on ‘Recent Theatre in Russia’:*

Sasha DUGDALE (*Chair*, London), Mikhail DURNENKOV (Moscow), Maria KROUPNIK (Moscow), Sasha SMITH (University of Edinburgh)

The languages of the Conference were ENGLISH and RUSSIAN

## **PARTICIPANTS**

ARCIMOVIČ Tania (director and theatre critic, Belarus)

DODGSON Elyse (International Director, Royal Court Theatre, UK)

DUGDALE Sasha (translator, UK)

DURNENKOV Mikhail (playwright/director and Liubimovka festival director, Russia)

FLYNN Molly (director and scholar, Royal Holloway, Univ. of London, UK)



## **Appendix 2 – New Drama in Russian (I.B. Tauris) – book proposal [contract now signed]**

*New Drama in Russian: Performance, Politics and Protest*

Edited by Professor J.A.E. Curtis (Wolfson College, University of Oxford)

‘New Drama’ is the name given to a development in Russian drama after the 1990s, which has drawn significantly on the techniques of documentary and *verbatim* writing for the theatre. This transnational movement has been shared by Russian-speaking dramatists outside Russia, notably in Belarus, where Russian is the most commonly used language, and in Ukraine, where the use of Russian was relatively unproblematic until the occupation of Crimea and the civil discord within Ukraine rendered it a contentious issue. For nearly twenty years theatres, dramatists, directors and theatre critics in all three countries have collaborated with each other through playwriting competitions, theatre festivals and workshops. This collaboration has been jeopardised by the political situation in Ukraine, and has been a controversial issue under the repressive regime of Belarus’s President Lukashenko. These developments in the sphere of contemporary drama provide an eloquent reflection of broader socio-political changes in the region in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Drama provides a particularly interesting lens through which to view developments in the politics of culture in these countries, because the theatres of ‘New Drama’ – which lie outside of the commercialised mainstream – have remained more outspoken than almost any genre. The transformations wrought to texts by a production, and the shifting qualities of live performance make drama more difficult to police and to censor than, say, literature or cinema. ‘New Drama’ has defied legislation banning the use of obscenity on stage; it examines social issues such as homosexuality; it transgresses socially conservative boundaries relating to religion and blasphemy; it explores crime, youth disaffection and violence in post-Soviet societies; it has explored taboo scandals of political corruption and police brutality; and it has resisted attempts to impose monologic narratives about historical issues such as the Stalinist Terror. *Verbatim* drama is constituted by individual testimonies, offering a voice to the wider population. Overall, therefore, ‘New Drama’ has become identified with campaigns for human rights and freedom of speech.

There has been relatively little written about ‘New Drama’ in English, the notable exception being the book by Birgit Beumers and Mark Lipovetsky, *Performing Violence. Literary and Theatrical Experiments of New Russian Drama* (Intellect: Bristol and Chicago, 2009). As the title suggests, this book focuses specifically on the important issue of violence in modern drama, but it concludes by suggesting that the era of ‘New Drama’ has come to an end, as many of its practitioners seemed to be moving over to cinema instead. Events have proved this prediction to be somewhat premature. Our proposed book examines how the transnational ‘New Drama’ movement has continued to nourish the most adventurous drama by young authors in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus over the last decade, offering challenging content as well as innovative forms and techniques to a predominantly youthful audience.

In April 2017 I organised a conference to explore these fascinating issues at Wolfson College in Oxford, which brought together scholars and theatre practitioners from 9 countries. A combination of academic papers from scholars and roundtable discussions involving playwrights, theatre directors and theatre critics ensured that we all gained a directly relevant and highly focused picture of developments in Russian-language drama in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus over the last ten years. We also provided a rehearsed reading of a recent production by the Belarus Free Theatre, followed by a Q&A session with the show’s creative team.

The edited volume I am proposing seeks to replicate the richness of the April conference in two specific respects. Firstly, we have contributors from the English-speaking world (UK, USA and Canada), from the Russian-speaking world (Russia, Ukraine and Belarus), but also from other European countries such as France and Italy. This should lend the volume particular authority and strength, since in my research hitherto I have been struck by the lack of awareness in Anglo-Saxon scholarship of what is being written in French and Italian, and *vice versa*. I have invited contributions to be submitted in English, Russian or French, so that we can maintain a high standard of English and consistency of lexicon and style by translating foreign-language contributions ourselves.

Secondly, we propose to combine academic essays with contributions from practitioners, in the form of edited interviews. The inclusion of vivid first-hand material alongside analysis will be very appealing to academic readers and theatre professionals alike, providing authentic testimony and opinions from the people most directly involved in creating, performing and evaluating contemporary drama in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus today.

To sum up: contemporary drama in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus is one of the most exciting and outspoken art forms in a region currently grappling with political and social tensions. As a shared endeavour (through past collaborations and the common use of the Russian language) it has come under unprecedented pressures in recent years, making this a fascinating case-study for an investigation of transnationalism. The volume of essays will offer perspectives from within the region and from across Europe as well as from North America, lending it an unusually wide range of authority. There are no comparable volumes currently available in English. Its combination of academic analyses and interviews with theatre practitioners from the region will ensure that the volume will be of interest to those studying the cultural politics as well as the literature of the three countries. It will also be of interest to theatre practitioners in the Anglo-Saxon world interested in getting to know about exciting drama in Russian, enabling them to bring it to western stages and stage it with authority and conviction.

We believe that a volume of this kind would make a lively contribution to the burgeoning field of contemporary theatre studies relating to Russia, and that a strand of this kind would fit very well alongside I.B. Tauris's unique series of studies of Russian cinema.

I have attached a planned 'Table of Contents' in fully annotated form, providing a brief synopsis of each contribution. I estimate the overall length of the book to be 120,000 words. Contributors have been asked to submit their full-length contributions to me by 31 January 2018. I expect to draw on the help of my Post-doc research assistant Noah Birksted-Breen for some of the editorial work on this volume. Allowing time for feedback to contributors, revisions, editing and translation, all of which will need to be fitted in alongside a full teaching and administrative commitment for me next year, I estimate that a submission date of 1 October 2018 is probably realistic.

Academic reviewers (suggested names):

Professor Cynthia Marsh, Emeritus Professor of Russian Drama and Literature, University of Nottingham

Professor Mark Lipovetsky, Department of Germanic and Slavic Languages and Literatures, University of Colorado at Boulder, USA

## *Table of Contents*

### **1. Introduction**

*(J.A.E. Curtis, Professor of Russian Literature, Wolfson College, University of Oxford)*

Survey of the transnational phenomenon of Russian-language drama in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century, and how this has been affected by political developments.

### **2. Back to the USSR? Modern Russian Drama and Socialist Realism**

*(Alexander Thomas, D.Phil. student, University College, University of Oxford)*

Survey of the legislative framework shaping the staging of drama in Russia since 2009, and the ways in which this seems to be informed by the tenets of Stalin-era Socialist Realism.

### **3. New Writing in Russia and the 'Postdramatic'**

*(Marie-Christine Autant-Mathieu, Director of Theatre Research at the CNRS, Eur'ORBEM, Paris)*

A consideration of the ways in which Hans-Thies Lehmann's concept of the post-dramatic has developed in Russian-language theatre, where spectators have remained more attached to text and narrative than in western Europe. Illustrated with Konstantin Bogomolov's staging of *An Ideal Husband* (2013) and the Belarus author Pavel Pryazhko's *Field* in Dmitri Volkostrelov's 2016 production.

### **4. Documentary Drama in Russian: Theatre of Komsomol'sk on Amur, Teatr.doc in Moscow, and Belarus Free Theatre**

*(Lucie Kempf, Maître de conference, Département des Langues, Littératures et Cultures Etrangères, Université de Lorraine, Nancy)*

Using the example of a provincial Russian theatre, of Moscow's leading documentary theatre, and the Belarus Free Theatre (now in political exile in London), this study considers the national and transnational phenomenon which is 'New Drama': politically challenging, socially non-conformist, and formally experimental, 'New Drama' is a movement shared between Russia, Belarus and Ukraine.

### **5. Youth drama projects: 'Class Act' in Russia and Ukraine**

*(Maria Kroupnik, School of Social and Economic Studies, School of Advanced Studies in the Humanities, Moscow)*

The Traverse Theatre in Edinburgh originated the 'Class Act' theatre project for teenagers in the 1990s. Professional playwrights give masterclasses in schools to young people who write and then perform their own plays. This project has been developed internationally, particularly by Nicola McCartney in Russia and Ukraine, where it has been used to address issues of international and internal civil conflict.

## **6. Contesting Constructions of Post-Soviet Identity in Vyrypaev's Drama**

(*Valeria Mutc*, Yale University)

This essay considers the plays of the best-known playwright of Russian 'New Drama', Ivan Vyrypaev. His plays *Oxygen* (2003), *Genesis No.2* (2004), and *July* (2006). Vyrypaev's personal and artistic life has been shaped by a new perception of "native" space that came with the period of national transition. Undermining spatial borders between provincial and central, Russian and foreign, and refusing groundedness in one particular place, Vyrypaev through his characters addresses the issue of self in conflict with the hostile other.

## **7. 'New Drama' in 21<sup>st</sup>-century Ukraine**

(*Noah Birksted-Breen*, Research assistant to JAEC on Oxford and Manchester University C21 Russian theatre projects 2017-20; Artistic Director of Sputnik Theatre, London)

Survey of the ways Russian-language drama has evolved there in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, sometimes in conjunction and collaboration with similar developments in Russia, and more recently following new goals of its own.

## **8. The Development of Russian-language Drama in Contemporary Ukraine**

(*Nadezhda Miroshnichenko*, Ukrainian theatre critic and playwright)

Miroshnichenko focuses particularly on the project 'Before and After Maidan', which over the last three years has addressed the issues arising from the hostilities between Ukraine and Russia over Crimea, followed by a period of civil conflict between eastern and western Ukraine. She considers the painful issue of language (the choice for authors between Russian and Ukrainian), and the way that topical plays have drawn upon the documentary trends in 'New Drama'.

## **9. Stages of Change: Ukraine's 'Theatre of Displaced People'**

(*Molly Flynn*, Lecturer in Theatre Studies, Birkbeck, University of London)

In 2015, a group of independent theatre-makers including Natalia Vorozhbit founded the country's first dedicated documentary theatre company, Theatre of Displaced People, in direct response to the 1.7 million people who have been internally displaced in Ukraine as a result of the ongoing military conflict in the east of the country. Since then Theatre of Displaced People has created dozens of works in which internal refugees, journalists, artists, activists, soldiers, and children speak their own stories on stage. Flynn's study, based on her work with the theatre, illustrates how the theatre works on the frontlines of Ukraine's cultural conflicts, but also at the forefront of 21<sup>st</sup>-century political theatre practice.

## **10. Anna Yablonskaya's *The Pagans* and the Search for a Language of Authenticity**

(*Molly Thomasy Blasing*, Department of Modern and Classical Languages, Literatures and Cultures, University of Kentucky)

One of Moscow-based Teatr.doc's longest-running productions is the play *The Pagans* by Ukrainian playwright Anna Yablonskaya, who was tragically killed in the 2011 Domodedovo Airport terrorist bombing. Against the backdrop of increasing social pressures in Russia against blasphemy and profanity, the play explores the role of religious faith in contemporary society.

### **11. Natalia Vorozhbit's *Viy*: Autoethnography through a Gogolian Lens**

(*Jessica Hinds-Bond*, Northwestern University)

This essay explores leading Ukrainian playwright Natalia Vorozhbit's 2011 play *Viy: A Docudrama*, an adaptation of Nikolai Gogol's 1935 eponymous Ukrainian tale. While retaining Gogol's basic plot—a traveling student encounters a shape-shifting witch who dies, necessitating his enactment of a prayer vigil—Vorozhbit transplants the events to contemporary Ukraine and reimagines the supernatural occurrences for a disbelieving and globalized age. Vorozhbit engages in autoethnography, writing from the periphery back to Russian and Western images of Ukraine, much as Gogol did before her.

### **12. Linguistic Transformations in Belarus 'New Drama' as a Reflection of a New Model of Identity**

(*Tania Arcimovič*, Belarus theatre critic)

The influential theatre critic Tania Arcimovič provides an account of the development of drama during the repressive rule of President Alexander Lukashenko, which has done much to suppress and delay the development of 'New Drama' in Belarus. The most adventurous contemporary company, the Belarus Free Theatre, has been forced into political exile in Britain in recent years. As in Ukraine, the choice between using the national language or Russian in Belarus is one which is fraught with implications for writers and audiences alike.

### **13. Dmitry Bogoslavsky's *Love of People*: a Belarus play in Moscow**

(*Natalia Osis*, University of Genoa)

This essay considers a play which has been hugely successful in Russia and in Belarus, and the ways in which it succeeds in promoting a sense of common identity amongst Eastern Slavs through its portrayal of the eternal values of rural and peasant society, where the pagan intermingles with the Christian.

#### *Interviews*

#### **14. Russia:**

Playwrights (Ivan Vyrypaev, Sasha Denisova). Interviews by *Susanna Weygandt* (Instructor of Culture, Russian Studies, Dalhousie University, Halifax, Canada)

Theatre director and playwright (Mikhail Durnenkov). Interview by *J.A.E. Curtis*, Professor of Russian Literature, Wolfson College, University of Oxford).

#### **15. Ukraine:**

Playwrights (Natalia Vorozhbit, Pavlo Ar'ye) and theatre director (Vladimir Troitsky). Interviews by *Noah Birksted-Breen* (Research assistant to JAEC on Oxford and Manchester University C21 Russian theatre projects 2017-20; Artistic Director of Sputnik Theatre, London).

#### **16. Belarus:**

Playwright (Pavel Pryazhko). Interview by *Tania Arcimovič*, Belarus theatre critic.

Belarus Free Theatre (London). Interview by *J.A.E. Curtis*, Professor of Russian Literature, Wolfson College, University of Oxford).