



jakeaustinrobertson@gmail.com

+44 7466009577

University College, Oxford

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J ROBERTSON

they | them

RESEARCHER & STORYTELLER

My years of experience as a professional theatermaker, historian and teacher have taught me that history is full of untold stories that can help us understand our shared human experience. I believe the performing arts have the potential to transform research into creative experiences that inspire and educate far beyond the classroom.

EDUCATION

University of Oxford (Clarendon Scholar, University College)

- DPhil (PhD) in Modern Languages (Russian) Exp. Completion, May 2025
- Dissertation: "Stages of Captivity: Creativity & Colonization in the Professional Gulag Theaters of Vorkuta and Magadan" supervised by Polly Jones & Dan Healey

Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (Glasgow, UK)

- M.A. in Classical & Contemporary Text (Acting) - 2016

Princeton University (Princeton, NJ)

- B.A. in Slavic Languages & Literatures, summa cum laude - 2015
- Certificates: Russian, East European & Eurasian Studies; Theater

RESEARCH & TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Teaching Fellow in Russian History (Dept. of History, University of Warwick, 2024-25)

- Lead on Socialist Bodies: Dreams and Realities of the Physical in Soviet Russia

Undergraduate Lecturer (Modern Langs. Faculty, Oxford Jan 2024)

- "Gulag Worlds: Solzhenitsyn, Shalamov, Life & Culture Behind and Beyond the Barbed Wire"

Summer Course Instructor, Worldview Scholar Programme (2023)

- For this I created an original course: "Russia from the Outside In: A Decolonial History of Repression, Expression & Empire"

Freelance Russian Language Instructor (2018-Present)

REEEC Summer Research Laboratory Associate (University of Illinois 2022)

Asst. Instructor to Prof. S. Morrison (Princeton Global Seminar Moscow 2019)

Editor/Research Asst./Translator for Profs. Deborah Kaple, Caryl Emerson, Olga Hasty, and R. N. Sandberg (Princeton University 2017-2024)

PUBLISHED WORK

J. Robertson, "They watch Faust, hew coal and conquer the tundra!': Professional Gulag Theaters and the Cultural Colonization of the Soviet Periphery" (Scholarly Article Pending Publication, 2025)

Jake A. Robertson, "Tragedies & Triumphs: Culture and Power in the Gulag Operas of Vorkuta and Magadan" Chapter in Precarious Identities: Theatre of Refuge and Risk in Russia and East Central Europe (Co-Edited Volume, Iowa University Press, 2026)

Jake A. Robertson and D. T. Kozlova. "Khudozhestvennaia kul'tura GULAGa kak fenomen v amerikanskoi i rossiiskoi istoriografii". Sotsial'no-kul'turnye protsessy na territorii Komi kraia: Istorii i sovremennost' (Sbornik statei) (Syktyvkar, 2014)

ACADEMIC INITIATIVES

Narrating the Gulag Workshop (Organizer/Presenter/Performer | Oxford 2025)

Na stsenu! From the Footnotes to the Footlights (Founder/Producer/Performer | ASEES Convention, Boston 2024)

- The first live theater event in the conference's history, 'Na stsenu!' is a showcase of research-based creative projects by an international cohort of scholar-artists.

Rethinking Soviet & Post-Soviet Research Project (Organizer)

- Decolonizing and Decentering Slavonic Studies at Oxford and beyond.
- Recipient of The Oxford Research Center for the Humanities (TORCH) Critical-Thinking Communities Grant (2023)

Oxford Reimagining Performance Network (Convenor 2022-2023)

Kruzhok: Slavonic Work-in-Progress Group (Founder/Convenor 2022-2024)

- Interdisciplinary, interdepartmental initiative providing academic and mental health support and community-building for Oxford graduate students

CREATIVE PROJECTS

Songbird (Writer/Performer | In Development 2024-25)

- A new play centering the life and music of queer Soviet cabaret icon and Gulag theater star Vadim Kozin in the context of anti-LGBT campaigns in Russia today.

Sandra Lezenbaum: Love in Concert (Writer/Producer/Performer | Oxford 2024).

- A One-Woman Drag Spectacular straddling cabaret, stand-up comedy, improv and group therapy.

MADMAN (Writer/Producer/Performer | NYC - Off-Broadway 2018, Princeton 2019)

- Adapted from my Princeton thesis, this solo show weaves together my queer autobiography with Nikolai Gogol's surrealist classic "Diary of a Madman"
- Winner of "Best Emerging Artist" at the United Solo Festival (2018)

Dragademia: Show & Tell (Founder/Producer/Performer | Oxford 2023-24)

- A variety event showcasing local drag artists with an in-depth panel discussion of drag as artistic practice, life experience, and political statement.

The Sound of Liberty Podcast (Writer/Producer/Performer | 2018)

- A narrative podcast that is part intergenerational family mystery, part Cold War thriller, and part sketch show, in which I perform as over 50 unique characters.

SCHOLARSHIPS, FELLOWSHIPS & GRANTS

Clarendon Fund Scholarship of Oxford University & University College (2021-2025)

Oxford Research Grants:

- University College Grants: Old Members' Trust (2022, 2023), Keasbey (2023, 2024)
- Modern Langs. Grants: Ilchester Grant (2022, 2023), Graduate Travel (2022)

BASEES Postgraduate Research & Development Grant (2024)

Title VIII Research Grant (U.S. Dept. of State, 2022)

St. Andrew's Society of New York Scholarship (2015-2016)

Princeton Institute for International & Regional Studies Fellowship (2014)

HONORS & AWARDS

Best Emerging Artist (United Solo Festival, NYC 2018)

Moses Taylor Pyne Prize (2015)

- Princeton's highest undergraduate distinction, two conferred yearly

Nicholas Bachko Jr. Scholarship Prize in Slavic Langs. & Literatures (2014)

Phi Beta Kappa Member Class of 2015 Montgomery Raiser 1992 Thesis Prize (2015)

Lewis Center for the Arts Award in Theater (2013 & 2014)

Shapiro Prize for Academic Excellence (2012 & 2013)

LANGUAGES & SKILLS

Russian - Advanced

- Princeton in Petersburg Language Intensive (2012)
- American Councils Russian Language & Area Studies Program (2013)

Georgian - Intermediate

- Oxford School of Global & Area Studies Georgian Programme (2021-2023)

Other Relevant Skills:

- Theatermaking: Professional Actor (Off-Broadway, The Globe, Regional US & UK)
- Public Speaking, Workshop and Group Event Facilitation, Improv Performance, Comedy/Sketch/Lyric Writing, Clowning