

Robert H. Greene

Robert H. Greene (1975–2020), Associate Professor of Russian history at the University of Montana, died from cancer on December 18, 2020. A leading scholar of Russian religious history and author of the path-breaking book *Bodies Like Bright Stars: Saints and Relics in Orthodox Russia*, Robert chaired the history department for many years and was a beloved teacher, mentor, and colleague. He made important contributions to the history of popular religion, pilgrimage patterns, canonization policy, and the political deployment of sacred symbols.

The oldest of three children, Robert was born in Sarasota, Florida in 1975 to Phyllis and Kelly Greene. He first started learning the Russian language in high school. He went to the University of Rochester on scholarship to study Chemistry. It did not take long for Robert to make the transition from science to history and Russian studies. At Rochester, Robert took courses with Brenda Meehan and Jeffrey Burds, where he developed a lifelong interest in the history of popular religion and spirituality. In 1996, during the summer between his junior and senior years, Robert traveled with Burds to Moscow and L'viv to participate in a summer archives program (developed by Burds and Arch Getty for western PhD students). Working with original archival materials gathered in Moscow and L'viv, many of which had been highly classified, Robert wrote a senior thesis on the Soviet infiltration into the inner circle of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church head, Metropolitan Andrzej Sheptytskii, and the Soviet efforts to suppress the Greek Catholic Church in Ukraine after World War II.

In the fall of 1997, Robert enrolled at the University of Michigan, where he worked with Valerie Kivelson, William G. Rosenberg, Brian Porter-Szucs, and Thomas N. Tentler. At Michigan, Robert was part of a vibrant group of graduate students who went on to make important contributions to the field of Russian and post-Soviet religious history, which was just becoming a lively area of inquiry. Based on meticulous archival and library research in Moscow and St. Petersburg, Robert completed, in 2004, his award-winning dissertation on popular devotion to Russian Orthodox saints and relics. Robert remained at the University of Michigan for two years, first on a postdoctoral fellowship and then as a lecturer in the history department, before accepting a tenure-track position in Russian history at the University of Montana.

We both had the opportunity to work with Robert on collaborative projects. While he was still in graduate school, he partnered with Valerie to edit a collection of essays on popular expressions of Russian Orthodoxy. The resultant volume (2003) reflected Robert's deep and empathetic understanding of lived religion. Eugene and Robert translated and edited the memoirs of Anna Pavlovna Vygodskaiia, a rare account of childhood and young adult life written by a Jewish woman, detailing Vygodskaiia's personal determination to work for the greater good and overcome the challenges and conflicts of integration into civil society (2012).

His monograph, *Bodies Like Bright Stars* (2010) remains a major, much-cited contribution to Russian religious history. Aside from its astoundingly rich source base and exquisite writing that makes it a joy to read, the book advances several important arguments. It confronts entrenched notions that Russian Orthodoxy encouraged mystical detachment from the concerns of this world or encouraged a putative Russian tendency to passive suffering and fatalism. Through lively examples,

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the book shows instead the sometimes touching, sometimes hilarious ways in which ordinary Orthodox believers made pragmatic use of the benefits their saints had on offer. Taking seriously the religious meaning of these prosaic interactions, the book employs the productive notion of “embedded theology,” that is, religious doctrine that inheres in the performances and rituals of daily practice. Straddling the customary historiographical dividing line of 1917, *Bodies like Bright Stars* shows how the devotional practices associated with the cult of the saints evolved from the mid-nineteenth century to the end of the first decade of Soviet power. It demonstrates that Bolshevik anti-religious agitators profoundly miscalculated when they launched attacks on religion in conventionally theological terms, because it was the saints’ immediate, tangible, local presence and not any abstract theology of sanctity or even of incorruptibility that made the cult of relics vital and adaptable to the conditions of the modern world. Ironically, it was the Bolshevik anti-religious agitators who clung to the Church’s formal precepts (or what passed as such); ordinary believers turned out to be far more flexible in their veneration of the saints.

At every stage of his career, Robert won the admiration of appreciative colleagues and devoted friends and students. At the University of Montana, Robert received the Cox Family Award for Teaching Excellence in 2012. Robert’s courses on Soviet, Russian, and Eastern European history, as well as Western Civilization and Introduction to Historical Methods, usually filled to capacity. Robert was also a favorite at the University of Montana’s Osher Lifelong Learning Institute, where his classes on Russian and Soviet history were consistently standing room only.

Shortly after his untimely death, an outpouring of student tributes on Facebook recalled Robert’s intelligence, creative energies in the classroom, and enormous intellectual curiosity. Some called Robert their very own patron saint—a career director and mentor who was not afraid to share honest advice. Others remembered Robert’s wry, understated sense of humor, reflecting comfort with absurdity and a resilience to the hardships of life itself. His humor retained its humanity and its edge through the entire ordeal of his illness. In a commencement speech to undergraduate history students in Spring 2020, he remarked, “If the study of history has taught you anything, it is that things could always be worse.” Robert would often joke to his students, “If you can help it, I’d advise you away from contracting cancer.”

Robert remained an active scholar to the end. He continued to publish articles and book reviews and had a number of works in progress at the time of his death. He read voraciously and loved discussing books and sharing impressions. At his memorial, one of his students described Robert as “a man who lived a fearless life of intellect, humor, and most importantly, heart.”

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Albert Resis

Albert Resis, noted historian of Soviet foreign policy, passed away in DeKalb, IL on March 10, 2021, aged 99. The child of Russian-Jewish immigrants, Albert grew up in Lockport, IL, then attended Northwestern University on a music scholarship. Having completed his undergraduate music degree, he entered Northwestern’s

History Masters. In 1942 he left university and enlisted in the United States Army. Albert spent the war stateside playing bassoon in one of the army's orchestras, but his service duties also included guarding German POWs on transport trains to camps in the US interior. He often recalled that prisoners' reflexive use of Nazi race rhetoric about Russians and Jews had set him on the path to studying Soviet history. After the war, Resis returned to Evanston (where he roomed with George McGovern), and completed his MA in French history. He then was among the first cohort of graduate students at Columbia University's Russian Institute. He spent the 1950s and early 1960s in temporary teaching positions while working on his dissertation, a study of the Profintern and early Soviet labor policy, directed by Geroid Taquery Robinson. In 1964, he completed his dissertation and took a tenure track post at Northern Illinois University. Albert's engaging lectures and graduate seminars made him a favorite for generations of History students at NIU. Although I was the only student to complete a dissertation under his direction, scores benefited from Albert's guidance and from his generous support of their projects. In 1992 he retired from NIU and was granted the rank of Professor Emeritus.

Albert's major contributions to scholarship came in the form of journal articles—fluidly written and closely argued essays published over the course of five decades that reflected his meticulous approach to documentary evidence. His first series of publications, in the 1960s and 70s, grew out of a never-completed biography of Lenin. These included his 1970 essay in *Slavic Review*, “*Das Kapital* Comes to Russia,” and “Lenin on Freedom of the Press,” published in *Russian Review* in 1978. But Albert's is best known for his many articles on Stalin's foreign policy and the origins of the Cold War. These included “The Churchill-Stalin ‘Percentages’ Agreement on the Balkans, Moscow, October 1944” in the *American Historical Review* in 1978, as well as a dozen other essays. Two of his most-cited publications appeared in 1988: *Stalin, The Politburo, and the Onset of the Cold War* in the Carl Beck Papers; and his edited and annotated volume *Molotov Remembers: Inside Kremlin Politics*.

For almost a quarter century after retirement, Albert continued publishing new work that explored aspects of Soviet foreign policy in the Stalin years. He never ceased being a scholar, just as he never stopped being a musician. Into his late nineties, Albert divided his days between listening to Mozart or other favorites, score spread out in front of him; working through newly available Stalin-era foreign policy documents, always with another article in mind; and reading—always reading. For twenty-five years, Albert and I would meet for lunch or dinner whenever I was back in DeKalb and invariably, after inquiring after the health of my family, he would start conversations with: “So, Misha, tell me what you're reading now that's *really* good?” He was a gentle person, a scholar, a musician, an excellent cook, an avid story-teller—someone who loved life and loved the world of the mind.

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