

Feliks before the Fall. A Biographical Approach to Understanding Stalinism

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Abstract

This article explores the use of biography as a means of explaining the rise of Stalin. As a case study it focuses on the early life of Feliks Dzerzhinskii, founder of the Cheka, a man who seemed to embody the ambivalent nature of the transition from Leninism to Stalinism. This piece highlights the formative experiences of a figure many saw as the ideal Bolshevik and the way in which these experiences shaped the Stalinist regime.

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Biographical Criticism: This approach “begins with the simple but central insight that literature is written by actual people and that understanding an author’s life can help readers more thoroughly comprehend the work.” Hence, it often affords a practical method by which readers can better understand a text. However, a biographical critic must be careful not to take the biographical facts of a writer’s life too far in criticizing the works of that writer: the biographical critic “focuses on explicating the literary work by using the insight provided by knowledge of the author’s life. [B]io

Before Stalinism is a historical study of democratic life and institutions and their decline in the early years of the Russian Revolution. While attempting to synthesize a wealth of available historical material, the author assesses the extent to which the disappearance of Soviet democracy was due to objective circumstances, for example the impact of the Civil War, and the Before Stalinism is a historical study of democratic life and institutions and their decline in the early years of the Russian Revolution. Anyone with the slightest understanding of political issues will know that ideas are one thing - implementing them is another. If the objective conditions or the social base giving rise to such ideas are undeveloped or destroyed, all the good intentions in the world will prove fruitless.