
P R O F I L E

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The Violent Lenin

“I haven’t made the revolution, the revolution has made me. I am the offspring of history.”
(Lenin)

LENIN’S CHILDHOOD was draped, ever since his death and embalming in January 1924, within the folds of edulcorate encomium, hinting at the “titan’s” timely humanity and at the stainless exemplariness of his biography. In this sense, as A. I. Ulyanova writes in *V. I. Lenin’s Childhood* that “our leader” was the third child of a happy tightly-knit family. “He was rather impish and uproarious; his eyes were brown, sprightly and joyous. He started walking almost at the same time as his sister Olya, who was one and a half years younger than him and who had started ambling at a rather early age, without the ones around her having noticed that.”¹ “He used to learn easily and heartily”—as he had been accustomed to diligent work since he was a child—“he always listened carefully to the lesson being explained in class” and always memorized things on the spot, which left him with very little work to do at home, where he was tutored by his father in supplementary intellectual exercises, separately from the other siblings: “Volodya usually knew everything. Then father would start asking him Latin words from previous lessons. Volodya would answer unerringly.”²

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Anna Ulyanova was the source of many mystifications, which were later on adopted and disseminated by the Stalinist party propaganda; however, if we read her testimonies carefully, casting their glossy veneer aside, the image of Lenin gains altogether different contours and even manages to really make us wonder. We have already seen that, as Anna remembers, Lenin the child was “uproarious”: both he and Olya (the future leader’s younger sister) “liked noisy games and scurrying about.”²³ “He wouldn’t play much with toys,” Anna remembers, “he would, most often than not, break them,” sometimes openly, at other times perfidiously, surreptitiously. “I remember how once, on his birthday,” Anna writes, “he got a cardboard sledge drawn by three horses as a gift from his nurse. It wasn’t long before he had vanished from sight with his new toy; as this raised suspicions, we started looking for him and found him behind the door. He stood there quietly, raptly twisting the legs of one of the horses; he kept twisting them until he tore them off.”²⁴

One other time, he ruined one of his sisters’ mood by instantly destroying a present she had received on her birthday. Although he was “a little impish brat,” Anna Ulyanova tenderly makes excuses for him, “his good side was . . . his love for truth: whenever he was up to a prank, he would always admit to his guilt. Thus, at the age of five, he broke off a rule [a ruler] of his elder sister’s, which the latter had just received as a gift. He ran to her with the broken rule, confessing to his wrongdoing...”²⁵ His verbal *mea culpa* was thereafter combined with the scrupulous, manic-meticulous demonstration of his deed: “When his sister asked him how that had happened, he said, ‘I broke it on my knees’ and, lifting his leg a little, he showed how things had happened.”²⁶

A systematic, cynical and deliberate troublemaker, he “made a racket” when his sisters were overwhelmed by the vast number of chores they had to do; he broke a glass decanter at his aunt Anya’s place and lacked the courage to admit his deed (although he did remedy his conduct later, when the punitive effects had faded away); he ruined his siblings’ passion for music, incurring repeated admonishments from his father, who consigned him to the “black armchair” in his study. What Anya also remembers is that all this uncontrollable hyperexcitability was counteracted by the daily routine of playing chess, which, according to the testimonies of other of his contemporaries, Vladimir Ilyich would give up only at the beginning of his revolutionary activity, on account that it depleted his powers.

For the time being, what we ought to remember is that he attempted to contain a certain primary, diffuse, virtually asocial violence by a recourse to the objective and objectivizing discipline that an assumed strategy presupposes. This was the model he followed throughout his existence: withdrawal from lived

experience and the constructive individualism it entails, and immersion into the frantic and tumultuous atmosphere of one organization or another, particularly given its association with the obligation to run such an organization. Almost all the witnesses who knew him personally claim that Lenin did not have a cult of his own person, that he only modestly accepted the proofs of the admiration he was incessantly surrounded with.⁷ This detail may, of course, also stem from the icing of an embellished biography, but it may have other explanations as well, such as privileging organized revolutionary collectivism over individualism. Lenin's repudiation of anarchism, individualist nihilism and solitary attacks pertains to this very attitude, associated to the conviction that only a well-organized and disciplined revolutionary minority may bring about a change of political regime. In 1917 it was the Bolsheviks who constituted this minority; before we reach that moment, however, we have a long way ahead, strewn with surprising details.

"Volodya," Anna writes, "didn't like the crafts" (or horses, as D. Ulyanov adds⁸); he forgot to feed a chaffinch he had kept in a cage and it died "frozen stiff." M. I. Ulyanova remembers his violent, hypertrophied aversion to flies, his family being forced to block the windows with blankets—in summertime!—to prevent their insidious entry.⁹ In highschool, Lenin did not have "close friends" and very few of his colleagues visited him at his place; "in class, however," Anna Ulyanova says—"his relations to the other students were good: he would explain to them whatever they didn't understand, review their translations or compositions, and sometimes even help them write their assignments when they were unable to manage that on their own."¹⁰ In that respect, Anna's affectionate confessions seem to be contradicted by the more objective testimonies of Aleksandr Kuprin, a former highschool colleague, and then a journalist, who wrote the following in *The Atlantic Monthly* issue of 1924: "Ulyanov never helped any of his classmates cheat, never gave anyone his notebooks and never assisted anyone by explaining a difficult lesson to them. We didn't love him but, then, neither did we dare tease him. He spent his eight years of highschool like that: he was alone most of the time, his gestures were awkward and he had a wolfish glare when he raised his eyebrows."¹¹

His "awkward gestures" and his "wolfish glare" of one who is constantly on the guard, beset by others, were apparently the result of an infantile drama he had interiorized and channeled into fury and impotence. Lenin started walking abnormally late, only at the age of three: "My elder sister, Anna, to whom I remained very close until my disappearance," the protagonist recounts in Alexandre Dorozynski's *I, Vladimir Ulyanov, Known As Lenin*, "told me that when I was a child my behavior worried my parents, who were afraid I might be retarded. I

was tiny, big-headed, with short wobbly legs, and I constantly fell down. Anna told me I had often had fits. I would sometimes hit my head against the floor so hard that you could hear it throughout our entire wooden house.”¹²

The frustration accumulated from his belated infantile mobility was not the sole reason for his trauma; another reason was his unsightliness, his unpleasant physiognomy with mongoloid energetic-impulsive features, which he had inherited from a Kalmuk grandmother. Even his early biographers, sanctioned by the party and by the system, agreed that Lenin did not convey the image of a man who would inspire friendship or solidarity in others. “At first, I was somewhat disappointed,” M. P. Golubeva writes in “My First Encounter with Vladimir Ilyich,” “he was a rather unhandsome young man, who looked quite old for his age.”¹³ Tatiana Aleksinsky, the wife of Grigory Aleksinsky, a leader of the Bolshevik faction in the second Duma, experiences the same unpleasant impression, combined with the embarrassment coming from cowardice: “I met Lenin for the first time in the summer of 1906. It doesn’t give me great pleasure to reminisce about this encounter,” the author writes, and her reasons have to do with his physiognomy, since he was “bald, with a reddish beard, with Mongolian cheekbones and a disagreeable countenance. Then came his behavior during the manifestation. When someone who had noticed that the cavalry was heading towards the crowd shouted ‘The Kazaks!’ Lenin was the first to run away. He jumped over a barrier. His hat fell to the ground, baring his hairless skull, which had been sweating and was shining in the sun. He tripped, got back to his feet and kept on running.”¹⁴

While the official biography insists on Lenin’s unbridled courage during the struggle against the Tsarist regime, the memory of unregimented biographers seems to infirm this martial version, which portrays Lenin as a hero. For instance, one of the most credible biographers is Nikolai Valentinov, nicknamed “Samsonov” for his Herculean physical prowess, who writes in *Little Known Facts about Lenin* that

There was a huge gap between his words and his actions. He would never have gone out into the street and expose himself to gunshots. In his books, in his public speeches and appeals, he struck blows in all directions, and his pen breathed hatred and contempt for cowardice. One might have thought that a brave spirit would have been able to prove his courage in practice, physically engaging in fighting for his beliefs. But none of this happened. Lenin would flee even from an immigrant reunion where things might have degenerated into skirmish. The rule was “Run while you still can!”¹⁵

Because of this impulse, the beginning of the revolution would find him, as we know, in the safe haven of Finland; the apparent ‘reasonable’ explanation—also adopted by Trotsky—was that he was too important for the impending revolution not to safeguard the integrity of his own person. The real reason was, however, a lack of sustained existential incandescence: Lenin would exhaust himself spasmodically, excessively, in short bursts of explosive vitality, only to fall prey, thereafter, for very long periods of time, to a state of apathy, melancholy and prostration. A confession in this sense comes from the same Samsonov, who confirms that during the emigration of the first years of revolutionary activity (the period of editing *The Iskra*, in Munich, in 1900), the maniacal meticulousness of his daily routine was suddenly interrupted by unexpected hypertrophied outbursts:

Lenin desired for himself a tidy life, without excesses, with fixed hours for meals, sleep, work and rest. He didn't smoke or drink alcohol; he took care of his health and exercised daily. In the morning, before reading the paper, writing and working, Lenin cleared his desk with a dusting broom. He would sew the loosened buttons on his vest or trousers without troubling Krupskaya. If he noticed a stain on his suit, he would immediately try to remove it with gasoline. He kept his bicycle as clean as a surgical instrument. This balance, this 'normal condition' sometimes lasted for very little. He would all at once drop the reins, falling under the sway of an enthusiasm that won him over completely . . . Coupled with fury, it would make him lose all sense of measure and he would start ranting and raving. Krupskaya was right to use the French word 'rage,' madness. . . . Like a starting engine, Lenin would generate incredible amounts of energy to fulfill his desires, or the goals he had just embarked upon. . . . Then, his organism would exhaust its fuel, . . . after raving, he was dejected; the circuit was: tension, explosion, raving, energy depletion, apathy, depression.¹⁶

Lenin's schizophrenia was a perfect rendition of the double “placenta” paradigm from psychohistorian Lloyd deMause's theory of “The Fetal Origins of History,” whereby a fetus is born with two already configured intrauterine traumas: the pleasure felt in the moments of *the Nurturing Placenta*, when the fetus has a sufficient quantity of oxygenated blood, alternates with states of suffocation and anorexia, experienced at moments when the human psyche reiterates the unpleasant intrauterine experience of *the Poisonous Placenta*.¹⁷ We know little, unfortunately, about Lenin's first weeks or months of life to be able to carry the demonstration further. He grew up, for the most part, in the absence of his father, who was almost always on the road, fulfilling his work-related obliga-

tions as a school inspector and headmaster. His mother, on the other hand, was very authoritarian, averse to concessions in the Spartan education given to her offspring. As A. I. Ulyanova-Elizarova remembers, she “would notice [her children’s] defects and fight patiently and insistently for eliminating them.”¹⁸ She had also been raised in a very austere and sober—albeit traumatic—manner, considering the fashion awareness of an adolescent who was preparing to make her debut into society. As Anna remembers about her grandfather, “the father had given his daughters a Spartan education: both in summer and in winter, the girls [hence, also the mother of the future leader] wore bare necked calico dresses with short sleeves, and at no time did they have more than two dresses each.”¹⁹

This rough military spirit—which generated, by way of compensation, the luminous image of a surrogate mother in the person of “Vava,” a peasant woman called Varvara Grigoryevna Sarabatova—was later on associated with the punitive authority of the husband, respected and remembered by his children primarily on account of his dictatorial severity. We have already mentioned the “black armchair” in his study; it was here that Volodya would often be confined in order to have a check put on the turbulences he unleashed and to calm him down: “When Volodya or Olya happened to be obstreperous, to have them calm down, mother would take them to father’s study and seat them on the oilskin armchair—the ‘black armchair,’ as they called it. As a punishment, they had to sit there until mother let them get up and go play again.”²⁰

It should be noticed that the punitive sentence was executed when the father *was not there*, which would have been enough to trigger, in the children’s psyche, the negative specter of a generic authority that was omnipotent even in its absence. Lenin’s entire work from later on—and especially his books or the texts written on various occasions—indicates an almost hallucinating concrete materialization of his opponents: the social-democrats had concrete, palpable faces, so did the empirio-critics, the enemy of the revolution gained palpable contours too, everything took place as if Lenin obsessively *materialized* a historical script being performed around him, giving it flesh and bone. One might expect such a man to frantically experience the ecstasy of direct, unmediated conflicting contact but in fact—as we have seen in Samsonov’s memoirs—he was far from doing anything of that kind, because of the scanty amounts of sustained energy that were available to him. “Dying” each and every time because of the vital explosions that drained him of his entire strength, he needed something that might bring him back to life, feed his activism and energize it. Lenin did not live his life, he let himself lived by it, drawn into the most difficult of situations. He lived “by proxy,” arriving each time when the table had already been laid, always leaving others to launch an action, including the October Revolution. He let himself be fashioned by the moment, by the organization, by history, instead

of fashioning them himself, and he became thus a pragmatic and by no means unhappy victim of his own psychosis.

GEORGE LEGGETT remarks, in this sense, that he often happened to be one step behind the event he would adhere to only in phase two. Thus, the “revolution of February [1917] took Lenin by surprise,” because of a strategic miscalculation: “he laid stress on clandestine activity instead of stimulating an ample movement of the working class.”²¹ Eye-witnesses also remember, with rather unpleasant surprise, that in the revolutionary year 1917 there were plenty of moments when Lenin was not to be found where many had expected him to be. When he did take, however, effective command of the hostilities, he did it from his office, sheltering himself behind incendiary proclamations and manifestos, and indulging at will in cabinet violence. What violence? Not spontaneous, sincere and exuberant violence, but secondary, retractile, tactical violence, which Lenin called “organized violence,” using a fetish word from the arsenal of his thought and behavior: organization.

“We, Marxists,” Lenin wrote in the heat of the revolutionary days of 1917 and 1918, “have always known, said, and emphasized that socialism cannot be ‘introduced,’ it emerges out of the most intense, the most acute class struggle—which reaches heights of frenzy and desperation—and civil war; we have always said that a long period of ‘birth-pangs’ lies between capitalism and socialism; that violence is always the midwife of the old society; that a special state (that is, a specific system of organized coercion of a specific class) comes into existence between the bourgeois and the socialist society, namely, the dictatorship of the proletariat.”²² Within the perimeter of this tactically justified, organized violence, Lenin unleashes himself without reservation: “Let them shoot on the spot every tenth man guilty of idleness,” he wrote in an essay in which he extolled the violent benefits of the Paris Commune and the French Revolution. “Until we apply terror to speculators—shooting them on the spot—we won’t get anywhere,” he urges the Petrograd workers. “And thieves must be treated in the same way: shooting on the spot.”²³

Terror pertained to the war arsenal of the Bolshevik Party, which was in a minority at the time the revolution broke out: the other parties sensed that the Bolsheviks were wedging themselves in by force and protested against that.²⁴ In mid-January 1918, 700 civilians and officers were tortured and butchered in Evpatoria, in Crimea; in February 1918, approximately 800 officers and civilians were butchered in Sevastopol; on 18 January 1918, Soviet troops occupied Taganrog, in the Don province, being met with gunshots by cadets from a local military school: by way of punishment, the latter were burnt to death in factory furnaces. Trotsky, the secret orchestrator of many atrocities, was rapt with de-

light, and wrote, rather ominously, on 1 December 1919: “in one month’s time at the most it will assume more frightful forms, modeled on the terror of the great French revolutionaries. Not the dungeon but the guillotine will await our enemies.”²⁵ Lenin went frantic on seeing the violence that had been unleashed and he had no qualms to incite it himself. George Leggett mentions, related to this, the decree entitled “The Homeland of Socialism is under Threat” (of 21 February 1918), where he decreed that all the bourgeois in Petrograd and other great cities, men and women alike, shall be obliged to enroll in regiments for digging trenches against the German attacker; “those who resist, will be shot.” “Enemy agents,” the decree also states, “speculators, burglars, thieves, hooligans, counterrevolutionary agitators, and German spies will be shot on sight.”²⁶

It should also be remarked that Lenin never got down into the street to order those execution battalions around; his orders were given in his Smolny cabinet for others to carry out. On 16 June 1918, the decree for the reintroduction of capital punishment was also passed at Smolny: “a revolutionary who won’t pass for a hypocrite can’t do without the death penalty,” Lenin justified himself to the SOVNARKOM on 5 July 1918. “There has never been a revolution or a civil war without executions.” Trotsky was also fascinated by the freedom to exercise discretionary powers over someone else’s life, praising the guillotine of the French Revolution, “this remarkable invention . . . that leaves a man one head shorter.” Leggett, from whom I have taken this information, also mentions the account of Steinberg, Lenin’s Commissar for Justice, who, noticing the latter’s taste for blood and summary executions, is said to have exclaimed exasperatedly: “Then why bother with a Justice Commissariat? Let’s just frankly call it the Extermination Commissariat and be done with it!” On hearing this, Lenin, his interlocutor claims, lighted up and said: “Well put... this is exactly what it should be . . . , but we can’t call it that.”²⁷

Lenin’s two-phase action—he always moved in two phases, preferring the “organization” of the second phase to the unpredictable spontaneity of the first phase—must have had an intra-family mental justification before it turned into an obsession of the revolution coordinated from a central nucleus. As for the latter, there are few uncertainties: Lenin’s preference for the organized form of revolutions was a pragmatic and doctrinarian evidence, faithful to the legacy of Marx’s thought. Lenin conceived life in terms of centralized obedience and leadership forms, as Nina Tumarkin remarks in *Lenin Lives! The Lenin Cult in Soviet Russia*; in *The State and Revolution* (August–September 1917) the cult’s protagonist also extolled the need for revolutionary collectivism and its centralized leadership: the proletariat, he said, needs “state power, a centralized organization of force, an organization of violence, to crush the resistance of the exploiters.”²⁸

To give synthetic form to his obsession for “organized violence,” he ante-dated Marxism in Russia, claiming that his country was already in a capitalist phase of development (although statistics, agrarian preeminence and the mere 2 million factory workers showed that the country languished in feudalism), eventually embarking on a revolution “stubbornly . . . in a wrong place and at a wrong time.”²⁹ In everything, however, Lenin’s conviction was that change cannot be accomplished on one’s own, through voluntary or terrorist-anarchist means, and that the individual must be surmounted within an organized, collectivist approach. It is not an individual, but an organized individual who can make a revolution: the individual whose will and life are subordinated to the will and life of a strategic, opportune minority.

Whence this conviction? From carefully reading Marx, of course, whose *Capital*, considered harmless by Tsarist censorship because it included too many statistics, had been translated into Russian as early as 1872, enjoying an unexpected public interest, but also from a family trauma, linked to the premature death of Lenin’s brother, Aleksandr, hanged by the Tsarist authorities on 8 May 1887, when Volodya was in his final highschool year, on account of his membership in a conspiratorial organization that aimed to assassinate the tsar.

The death of his brother, to whom he had been very close, was a seminal moment in Lenin’s life, which facilitated his rebirth. It was as if he himself had died and had been reborn, overcoming, at the same time, the individualist, quasi-anarchist revolutionary model his brother had followed. “Aleksandr Ilyich fell like a hero and his blood lit, like a revolutionary torch, the path of his younger brother, Vladimir,” A. I. Ulyanova-Elizarova writes in *Memories about Ilyich*.³⁰ If we eliminate the phrase “revolutionary torch” from the quotation above, we will probably get to what Ilyich experienced at the moment of his brother’s stigmatizing death: he felt that the latter’s blood flooded him, helping him become another man. This proved to be a double trauma since, one year before, in January 1886, his father had also died from a sudden stroke; his separation from his brother was subliminally associated in the mind of the adolescent Ilyich with the fatality of his separation from the entire family in order to adopt a new one, the “family” of the revolutionaries, who were ready to launch the struggle for setting up a new social and political order.

This subliminal overlapping was remarked by none other than Trotsky, and it was made public in a document published in *Pravda* (“An Unfinished Autobiography,” 16 April 1927). Trotsky tells how, shortly after he had met Lenin, he asked the latter to write an autobiography in order to be better understood by the party members. Lenin is supposed to have written: “My name is V. I. Ulyanov. I was born in Simbirsk, on 10 April 1870. In the spring of 1887, my elder

brother Alexander was executed by Alexander II for an attempt on his life.” At Trotsky’s urge to elaborate on what he had written, and talk about the origin of his family, about his grandparents, Lenin is supposed to have dodged the issue, suggesting that he hardly knew anything about them.³¹

Lenin’s reticence had two subliminal motivations which were, ultimately, convergent. On the one hand, he knew that any unconventional detail might go against the official historiography and the biographical doctrine endorsed by the party, according to which any Soviet leader had to have a needy family, be poor and “come from among the people,” which he did not. Neither was the premise of “sound” Russian origins fully met, since his mother, Maria Aleksandrovna Blank, was the great-granddaughter of Moses Itsykovich Blank, a Christianized Jew, and the daughter of Alexander Blank, a landowner after his retirement. His father, Ilya Nikolayevich Ulyanov, became a professor of mathematics and physics at Penza, and then was an inspector and director of the public schools in Simbirsk province, being knighted by the tsar with the Order of St. Vladimir; this entailed his becoming a *cinovnik* of the fourth degree, assimilated to the hereditary nobility, a title under which Vladimir presented himself to the University of Kazan. In *The Bolsheviks: The Intellectual and Political History of the Triumph of Communism in Russia* (1998), Adam B. Ulam asks an inciting question at the very beginning of his preamble: if Tsarist Russia had been a mere “prison of nationalities” and an oppressive state by definition, Ilya Nikolayevich Ulyanov’s spectacular and unquestionably meritocratic rise—he was born to an illiterate father—would have been inconceivable. Lenin had, then, sufficient reasons to eschew the details of his hereditary biography, leaving “the other biography” (the counterfeit, propagandistic one) work its way. Again, we are faced here with an action rationally divided into two phases; we shall not keep tabs on how many such actions we can detect, but we notice a certain consistency here.

Official historiography also endorses the notion that Vladimir broke off with God indirectly because of his father. When visited by a superior, he told the latter that his children did not go to church much (a reticence also evinced by the future leader’s mother); the reaction of the superior was devastating: “they must be flogged!” Reference books claim that Lenin left the room enraged, tore the cross from around his neck and broke it into pieces.³² The detail is rather too anecdotal to be taken seriously, all the more so because it is known that Lenin chose religion as a compulsory subject in Kazan, which contradicts the idea of his early emancipation. Subliminally, however, his revolt marked a symbolical “murder” of his father, whose disappearance would be consented to in January 1886: tyrannical, scrupulous, going to church on grounds of social representativeness and pedantic in his daily life, the father had dictatorially controlled his family, setting even the position of his daughters in their sleep.³³

It was not by chance that Lenin conspired against him from a very early age, together with his impish, boisterous sister Olya, at first, and then by subliminally identifying himself with Aleksandr, who was a student in Petrograd and a member of the anarchist organization *Narodnaya Volya* (The People's Will), which had been set up in 1878 in order to assassinate the tsar and his ministers.³⁴ Vladimir's closeness to his brother is a leitmotif of his biographers, irrespective of whether they are hagiographical or objective. There are well-grounded reasons for us to think, Ulam writes, that Lenin's radicalism flourished after Aleksandr's death, mostly through his reading the books of the martyred brother.³⁵ Vladimir processed the trauma—experienced in a *detached* manner from his brother, at least according to testimonies—in two phases. At the moment of the execution, he was preparing for his highschool graduation exam, which he passed with a gold medal and flying colors: nothing could, apparently, unsettle the intellectual and mental balance of the examinee. In September 1887, he became a law student in Kazan, took part in a manifestation in December and was expelled as “the hanged man's brother,” the guilt of having had a relative punished by the tsar being greater than that derived from actual political involvement, even though official historiography would later on insist, in a hazy and mystifying manner, on his role as a “leader.” Expelled from university and refused readmission despite the countless memoirs he drafted, Lenin retired to his Kokushkino estate, read revolutionary literature and his brother's books and grew up unawares, like a prince from a fairy tale: “After the winter of 1888, Volodya became an adult, a serious individual,” as Nikolai Veretenikov, a cousin on his mother's side, wrote; “it was as if he were five years older than me.”³⁶

The second trauma had to do with the social stigmatization of his family, which not even the elderly chess master, whom Volodya was at war with, visited any more. “All their acquaintances turned their backs on the Ulyanovs,” Nadezhda Konstantinova Krupskaya writes.³⁷ It would be expected that a family might sentimentally draw closer together at such a difficult time; Lenin himself might have subjectivized his resentment by reinforcing his close ties with the ones back home. Significantly enough, he did not. Adam B. Ulam recounts, in this sense, an encounter from 1891 between Lenin and the Orientalist Serge Oldenburg, who had been a fellow college student of Aleksandr's. Having expected to be questioned about his revolutionary activity and the execution, Oldenburg was surprised to notice that Lenin avoided these topics, being interested exclusively in his brother's scientific work and in its validity within an academic context. He was not attracted to his flesh-and-blood brother, he was only fascinated by the brother persona derived from books, essays and scientific papers; however, the latter was undeniably less exciting than the former, who had been guilty of tsaricide.

What Oldenburg didn't know was that Lenin had already murdered his brother in his subconscious, just like he had done with his family, who were not to play any role in his revolutionary ascent. The ideational "family" had completely supplanted the blood-related family: the former could be "organized," the latter could not. As Lenin would obsessively repeat later on, "I haven't made the revolution, the revolution has made me. I am the offspring of history" (and not of my father and mother—we might be tempted to add...).



Translated by CARMEN BORBÉLY

Notes

1. A. I. Ulianova, *Copilăria lui V. I. Lenin*, 2nd edition, trans. Al. Philippide and Aglaia Scărlătescu (Bucharest: Ed. Tineretului, 1950).
2. *Ibid.*, 15–16.
3. *Ibid.*, 8.
4. All quotations are from *ibid.*, 8–10.
5. *Ibid.*, 11.
6. *Ibid.*
7. "Ritualized praise was, for Lenin, not an acceptable alternative expression of political submission"—Nina Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives! The Lenin Cult in Soviet Russia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 25.
8. *Amintiri despre Lenin*, 1 (Bucharest: Ed. de Stat pentru Literatură Politică, 1957); see D. I. Ulianov and M. I. Ulianova, "Din perioada de la Samara (Alakaevka), 1889–1893," 74.
9. *Ibid.*, 68.
10. *Ibid.*, 23 and 26.
11. Quoted in Alexandre Dorozynski, *Eu, Vladimir Ulianov, zis Lenin: Romanul bolșevismului*, trans. Mihai Constantinescu (Bucharest: PRO, 2007), 29.
12. *Ibid.*, 27.
13. *Amintiri despre Lenin*, 1: 120.
14. Quoted in Dorozynski, 113–114.
15. Quoted in *ibid.*, 115.
16. *Ibid.*, 101.
17. Lloyd deMause, "The Fetal Origins of History," in *Foundations of Psychohistory* (New York: Creative Roots, 1982), 244–332.
18. A. I. Ulianova-Elizarova, "Amintiri despre Ilici," in *Amintiri despre Lenin*, 1: 13.
19. *Ibid.*
20. Ulianova, 8.
21. George Leggett, *CEKA: poliția politică a lui Lenin: Comisia Extraordinară Panrusă pentru Combaterea Contrarevoluției și Sabotajului*, trans. Felicia and Marius Ienculescu Popovici (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2000), 24.

22. Quoted in *ibid.*, 88.
23. *Ibid.*
24. Cf. Leggett, 41.
25. Quoted in Leggett, 87.
26. *Ibid.*, 89–90.
27. Quoted in Leggett, 89.
28. *Ibid.*, 30.
29. *Ibid.*, 32.
30. Ulianova-Elizarova, 18.
31. Cf. Dorozynski, 32.
32. Quoted in Adam B. Ulam, *The Bolsheviks: The Intellectual and Political History of the Triumph of Communism in Russia* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1998), 9.
33. *Ibid.*, 5.
34. Cf. Dorozynski, 16.
35. Ulam, 10.
36. Cf. Dorozynski, 56.
37. “Amintiri despre Lenin,” in *Amintiri despre Lenin*, 1: 91.

Abstract

The Violent Lenin

Lenin’s childhood was draped, ever since his death and embalming in January 1924, within the folds of edulcorate encomium, hinting at the “titan’s” timely humanity and at the stainless exemplariness of his biography. Lenin did not live his life, he let himself be lived by it, drawn into the most difficult of situations. Lenin’s two-phase action—he always moved in two phases, preferring the “organization” of the second phase to the unpredictable spontaneity of the first phase—must have had an intra-family mental justification before it turned into an obsession with the revolution coordinated from a central nucleus. The death of his brother, to whom he had been very close, was a seminal moment in Lenin’s life, which facilitated his rebirth. This proved to be a double trauma since, one year before, in January 1886, his father had also died from a sudden stroke; his separation from his brother was subliminally associated in the mind of the adolescent Ilyich with the fatality of his separation from the entire family in order to adopt a new one, the “family” of the revolutionaries, who were ready to launch the struggle for a new social and political order. The ideational “family” had completely supplanted the blood-related family: the former could be “organized,” the latter could not.

Keywords

Lenin’s childhood, violence, childhood trauma, revolutionary organization, revolutionary terror