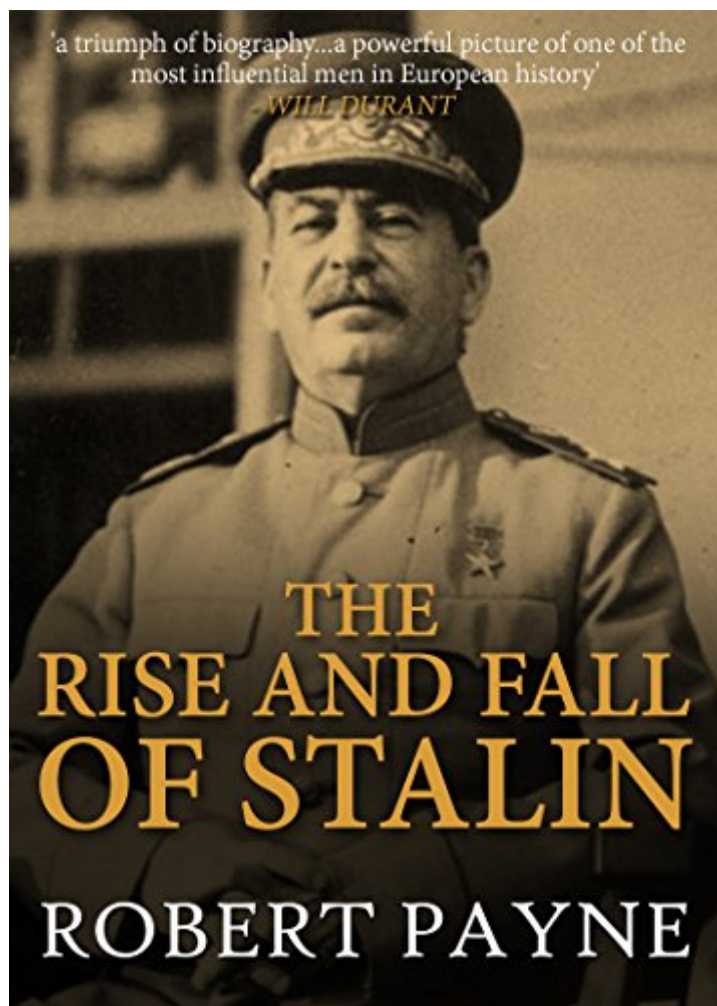


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The Rise And Fall Of Stalin



Synopsis

This is the story of modern history's most treacherous and terrifying dictator. Stalin was a man of many facets: he studied for the priesthood, he was a romantic poet, a bank-robber, an assassin, a revolutionary, a ruthless leader, and, for a time, one of the two most powerful men in the world. But after he took power he was also one of the bloodiest and cruellest leaders in all history. He cracked an iron whip over Russia and Eastern Europe as millions fell to his purges. His bizarre, sinister life was matched only by his strange death in 1953 and his subsequent fall and condemnation by his successors.

Praise for Robert Payne: "A whale of a book" | "extremely readable, the verve and gusto of the writing are unflagging to the end." - The Spectator "A prodigious biography" | "Fascinating. Valuable." - New York Herald Tribune "A triumph of biography" | "a clear and fluent style, a powerful picture of one of the most influential men in European History." - Will Durant "Few writers have come closer to capturing the spiritual essence of their subject" - Harrison Salisbury "A gripping wide-read chronicle, narrated with a wealth of detail, colour and documentation. Once you become enmeshed in the book's tentacles of intrigue, it takes you by the throat" - Saturday Review Syndicate

Robert Payne (1911-1983) had over a hundred books published on a wide range of subjects during his lifetime. Critics raved about his vast erudition, his magic power over words, and that rare ability to capture the spiritual essence of his subject. The Russian series, in particular The Life and Death of Lenin and The Rise and Fall of Stalin, raised his reputation as biographer to enormous stature.

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Customer Reviews

The book is about 40 yr. old, but the writer is very gifted and this is my third book of his. You will enjoy it.

This is strange book to review. I found the text very inconsistent, at times interesting and insightful....and at other times confusing and lackluster. This is not a biography, nor is it a history of the Stalinist Soviet Union. Rather it is a deep character study of a very strange man and his actions. . The author approaches his subject from many vantage points, but the themes and conclusions are always the same. The author is compelled to continually include entire letters and quotations, some of which can be enlightening while others appear distracting and superfluous. I also felt that Stalin's motivations (except for unfeeling cruelty) were not fully explained, in spite of the length of the text. Although I did learn new things about a very unusual tyrant, I felt that the narrative was somehow incomplete and not fully developed. Overall, the book was informative in spots but redundant in other areas. I guess the word I'm looking for is inconsistent.

I certainly don't want to be insensitive to the memory of the millions of people who were victimized by Stalin...but what appalled me when reading this book was not so much his cruelty as his incredible stupidity. In these pages he comes across as a clownish oaf, and his bumbling ineptness during the Second World War almost led to the premature destruction of the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, incredibly, Stalin seemed to actually believe the mythology that he created about himself...as a dictator he believed he could shape reality into whatever he wanted it to be, and thus he made himself out to be the hero of the Revolution, the savior of Russia, the greatest leader who ever lived. Since no one dared to contradict these fantasies, he inevitably came to believe them. The mystery is not that such an evil man could rise to power, but that such an abominably stupid

man could become the most powerful man in the world. Fate seems to have a very sick sense of humor.

Payne does not know how to winnow the wheat from the chaff. Given that there is too much unimportant, unexplained detail, the book would have been better if it were strictly chronological.

Lots on what happened, but scant insight on why. Author appears to believe that long quotations enhance verisimilitude, but it rather adds only tedium. One does however gain some understanding of tyrannical absolutism from this account of Stalin's dreadful reign. No mention of the great physicists imprisoned by Stalin through Beria, the great theoretician Lev Landau, one of the pioneers of liquid crystal displays Freederscz, and others, plus the critical development of the Soviet atomic bomb. But then few biographers know much about these history-changing events, leaving expositions decidedly lacking.

I have read several bios on Stalin and I found this one to be the most accessible. So much has been written about him that it's hard to know where to begin. In my opinion, Robert Payne's book is a good place to start.

I also read this author's biography of Lenin. Some parts repetitive but I learned a lot about communism. I can't understand how anyone today would want to overthrow a democracy for communism. Communism does not work in the real world.

Overall the book gives an overview of the life of Stalin. I learnt a lot of things that I had not known previously. In agreement with other reviews I believe that sometimes the opinion of the author drives the reader to conclusions and I had rather come to my own conclusions. Especially the theory around Stalin's death seems a bit improvised. Another difficult issue when reading the book is the amazing amount of figures in the story line. It is sometimes difficult to put all figures in the right perspective. But again I enjoyed reading the book so 4 stars!

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