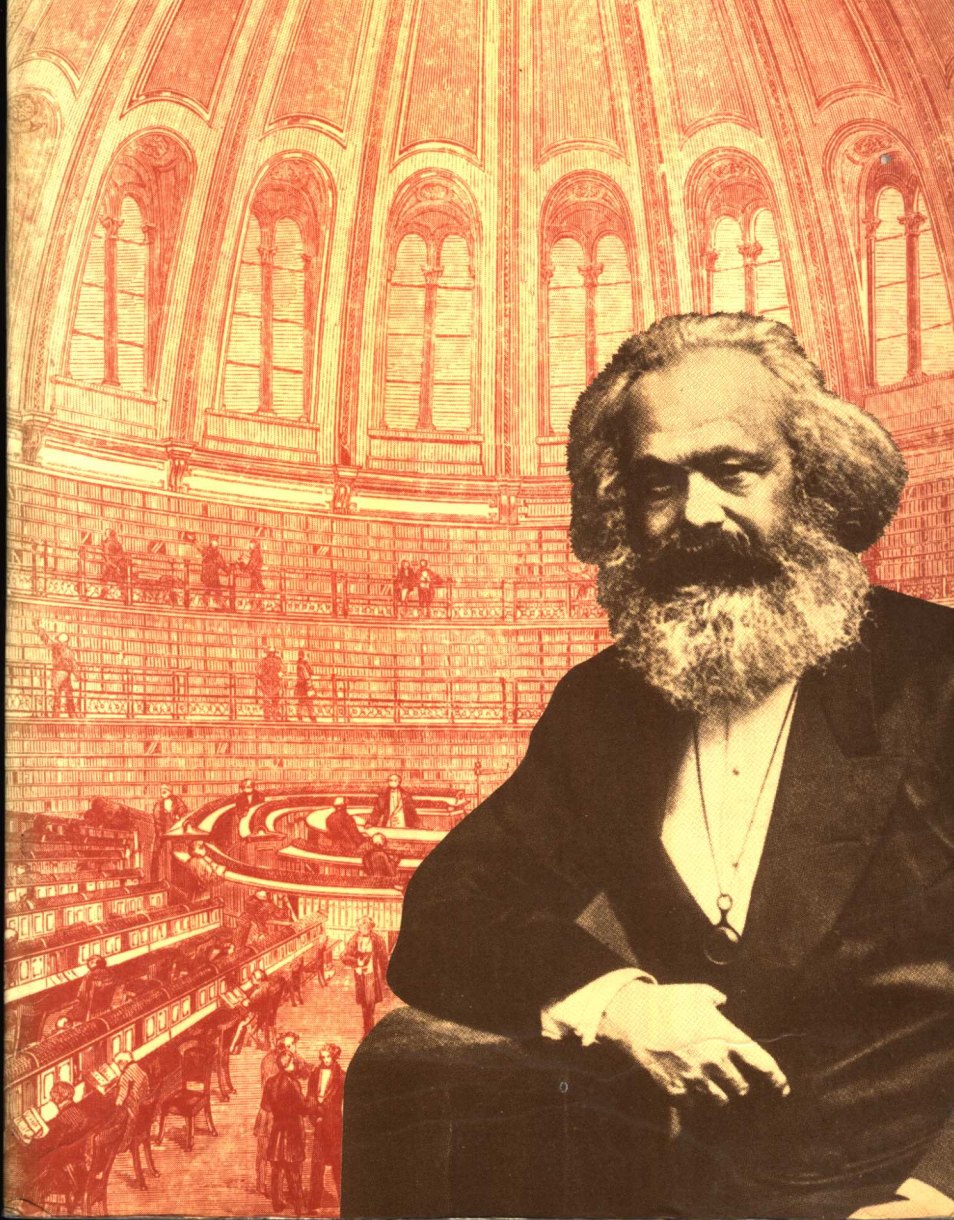


S.S.PRAWER KARL MARX AND WORLD LITERATURE



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S. S. PRAWER

I am a citizen of the world
(Marx to Paul Lafargue)

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**KARL MARX AND
WORLD LITERATURE**

FOR
PROFESSOR ELIZABETH M. WILKINSON
TEACHER, GUIDE, AND FRIEND

Preface

THIS is not a book about Marxism nor an attempt to construct yet another Marxist theory of literature. It seeks, instead, to present to the English reader, as fairly and fully as the author's own orientation allows, what Marx said about literature at various times in his life; what use he made of the many novels, poems, and plays which he read for enjoyment, recreation, or instruction; and how he introduced, into works not overtly concerned with literature, the terminology and concepts of literary criticism. The task seems necessary because mountains of commentary and elaboration are beginning to hide Marx's own words from view; because the standard compilations of his utterances on aesthetic matters tend to create confusion by mixing up pronouncements made at various times of his life, as well as pronouncements by Marx and by Engels;* and because only a small proportion of Marx's references to literary works has so far been recognized and made available in English. The present chronological scrutiny of Marx's dealings with literature hopes to make a modest contribution to the understanding of a mind that has helped—for good or ill—to shape our world; of the history of literary taste in the nineteenth century; of the genesis of Marxist literary theory and criticism; and of the way in which literature may be 'used' by men of great stature who are not, professionally and in the first instance, literary critics. Through full quotation, in English, from the entire corpus of Marx's work it hopes also to advance the debate about Marx's literary theories, tastes, and attitudes among English-speaking

* 'What is so very strange', Marx complains, in a letter to Engels, about a contemporary commentator, 'is to see how he treats the two of us as a singular: "Marx and Engels says" etc.' (1 Aug. 1856; *MEW* XXIX, 68). I would not deny, of course, that Marx and Engels came to think alike on many points, nor would I assert that it is possible to disentangle neatly what each of them contributed to collaborative works like *The German Ideology*.

readers whose approach differs from mine but who have not, so far, had access to more than a fraction of the relevant material.

In making my translations from Marx's German works I have profitably and gratefully consulted existing versions by Botto-
more, McLellan, Nicolaus, Livingstone, Milligan, Hook, Baxan-
dall, Dona Torr, and many others—including, of course, Engels
and the anonymous translators of the *Selected Works* published in
Moscow. Of the *Collected Works* in English (*MECW*) only
volume I had appeared when my manuscript went to press. I am
also grateful to Dr. M. W. H. Schreuder of the Internationaal
Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis, Amsterdam, Professor Dr. R.
Dlubek of the Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus beim ZK der
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Professor Roy Pascal, Mr. T. J. Reed, Mr. Paul Foote, Mr.
James Bolton, and Mr. T. F. Eagleton for helpful criticism and
advice.

List of Abbreviations

The following abbreviations have been used in notes and references:

- BM** *Marx and Engels on Literature and Art. A Selection of Writings*, ed. L. Baxandall and S. Morawski (St. Louis, Milwaukee, 1973).
- BR** Karl Marx, *Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy*, ed. T. Bottomore and M. Rubel (Harmondsworth, 1963).
- CM** *Karl Marx on Colonialism and Modernization. His Despatches and Other Writings on China, India, Mexico, The Middle East and North Africa*, ed. S. Avineri (Anchor Books, New York, 1969).
- EPM** *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, trans. M. Milligan, ed. D. J. Struik (London, 1973).
- ET** *Karl Marx: Early Texts*, trans. and ed. D. McLellan (Oxford, 1972).
- G** Karl Marx, *Grundrisse der politischen Ökonomie* (Rohentwurf) (Berlin, 1953).
- Gespräche** *Gespräche mit Marx und Engels*, ed. H. M. Enzensberger (Frankfurt, 1973).
- GI** Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*, ed. C. J. Arthur (London, 1970).
- GM** D. McLellan, *Marx's Grundrisse* (Paladin, London, 1973).
- GN** Karl Marx, *Grundrisse. Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy* (Rough Draft), trans. M. Nicolaus (The Pelican Marx Library) (Harmondsworth, 1973).
- K** Karl Marx, *Das Kapital. Kritik der politischen Ökonomie* (vols. XXIII-XXV of MEW).
- KMP** *Karl Marx privat. Unbekannte Briefe*, ed. W. Schwerbrock (Munich, 1962).
- L** Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, *Über Kunst und Literatur. Eine Sammlung aus ihren Schriften*, ed. M. Lifshits (Berlin, 1948).
- Manuskripte** *Manuskripte über die polnische Frage (1863-1864)*, ed. W. Conze and D. Hertz-Eichenrode (The Hague, 1961).
- MECW** Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works* (Moscow, New York, and London, 1975 ff.).

- MEGA** Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, *Historisch-kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. D. Ryazanov and V. Adoratski (Frankfurt, Berlin, Moscow, 1927-35).
- METEC** *Marx and Engels through the Eyes of their Contemporaries* (Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1972).
- MEW** Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, *Werke*. Herausgegeben vom Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus beim ZK der SED (Berlin, 1956-68).
- MEW EB** Supplementary Volumes [*Ergänzungsbände*] of *MEW*.
- Nachlaß** *Aus dem literarischen Nachlaß von Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, und Ferdinand Lassalle, I: Gesammelte Schriften von Karl Marx und Friedrich Engels von März 1841 bis März 1844*, ed. F. Mehring (Stuttgart, 1902).
- NOZ** *Neue Oder-Zeitung*.
- NRZ** *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*.
- NYDT** *New-York Daily Tribune*.
- OB** Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Articles on Britain* (Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1971).
- PP** *The People's Paper*.
- PS** Karl Marx, *Politische Schriften*, ed. H. J. Lieber (Stuttgart, 1960).
- R** *Neue Rheinische Zeitung: Politisch-ökonomische Revue*, redigiert von Karl Marx, ed. K. Bittel (Berlin, 1955).
- RZ** *Rheinische Zeitung*.
- SDH** Karl Marx, *Secret Diplomatic History of the Eighteenth Century and The Story of the Life of Lord Palmerston*, ed. L. Hutchinson (London, 1969).
- SW** Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works in Three Volumes* (Moscow, 1969).
- TM** *Theorien über den Mehrwert*. Vierter Band des *Kapitals* (vols. XXVI i, ii, iii of *MEW*).
- ÜKL** Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, *Über Kunst und Literatur*, ed. M. Kliem (Berlin, 1967).

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I · Prometheus

'Prometheus is the foremost saint and martyr in
the philosopher's calendar'

(MEW EB I, 265)

(i)

THERE is much in Marx's early life which might have seemed to predestine him for a literary career. As his daughter Eleanor recalled in later years:

He was a unique, an unrivalled story-teller. I have heard my aunts say that as a little boy he was a terrible tyrant to his sisters, whom he would 'drive' down the Markusberg at Trier full speed, as his horses, and worse, would insist on their eating the 'cakes' he made with dirty dough and dirtier hands. But they stood the 'driving' and ate the 'cakes' without a murmur, for the sake of the stories Karl would tell them as a reward for their virtue.¹

His fellow pupils at school feared him because of the ease with which he composed satirical verses and lampoons. He was introduced to Ovid, Cicero, and Tacitus at school, as well as to Homer, Sophocles, Plato, and Thucydides; a gifted teacher, Vitus Loers, who had published commentaries on Ovid, succeeded in arousing in his pupil an enthusiasm for that poet which brought in its wake attempts to translate the *libri tristium* into German verse, and admiring references to the same work in later life. A taste for the eighteenth-century German classics was nourished by his father (who held up Schiller, in particular, for his son's admiration); while the Marx family's neighbour at Trier, Karl Marx's later father-in-law Ludwig von Westphalen, induced him to share his own admiration for Shakespeare. 'He never tired', Eleanor told Wilhelm Liebknecht, 'of telling us

¹ BM 147.

about old Baron von Westphalen and his wonderful knowledge of Shakespeare and Homer. He could recite whole cantos of Homer from beginning to end, and most of Shakespeare's plays he knew by heart in English and in German alike.' Marx's father, on the other hand, Eleanor adds, 'was a proper "Frenchman" of the eighteenth century. He knew his Voltaire and his Rousseau by heart as old von Westphalen knew his Homer and Shakespeare.'² The young Marx's school reports praise his performance in literary subjects and his ability as a translator, though his German essays are said to be 'marred by an exaggerated striving after unusual picturesque expression'.³

In an essay he wrote for his school-leaving examination, Marx addressed himself, in 1835, to the subject: 'A Young Man's Reflections on the Choice of a Career'; and among the careers there envisaged that of a *Dichter*, a writer of imaginative literature, figures at least in passing. The career a young man should choose, the young Marx declares in 1835, should be

one that is most consonant with our dignity, one that is based on ideas of whose truth we are wholly convinced, one that offers us largest scope in working for humanity and approaching that general goal towards which each profession offers only one of the means: the goal of perfection . . . If he works only for himself he can become a famous scholar, a great sage, an excellent imaginative writer [*Dichter*], but never a perfected, a truly great man.⁴

Two related themes are here lightly touched which will recur in Marx's later work. The first of these is the urge to become more than just a professional man, even if the profession chosen be that of a poet—the urge to work for others, to benefit humanity at large. This connects with a second theme, familiar to the age of Goethe, a theme given memorable expression in Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* novels, in Schiller's *Aesthetic Education of Man*, and in Hölderlin's *Hyperion*: the yearning for fullness of development, for overcoming the limitations imposed by that division of labour without which no modern society can function. There is nothing highly original in such sentiments; many boys at the

² Mohr and General. *Erinnerungen an Marx und Engels* (Berlin, 1970), pp. 157–8.

³ D. McLellan, *Marx before Marxism* (Harmondsworth, 1972), pp. 50–2; P. Demetz, *Marx, Engels und die Dichter* (Frankfurt and Berlin, 1969), p. 52; *MEGA I*, 1 (2), 167.

⁴ *MEGA I*, 1 (2), 164; *MEW EB I*, 593–4.

end of their school career will have had similar thoughts. The same is true of Marx's reflections, in this same school-leaving essay, on the different kinds of limitation that inevitably circumscribe a man's choice of profession. Some of these are due to individual and physical factors; but Marx also stresses the *social* determinations which force a young man to fit himself into a pre-existent framework: 'To some extent our social relations have already begun before we are in a position to determine them.'⁵ By itself this observation too is unremarkable enough. But it was Marx who made it; and if we look at it in the context of his whole career we can at least sympathize with the (often ridiculed) view of Franz Mehring, who thought he saw the germ of Marxism in this one sentence from a school-leaving exercise. Mehring might, in fact, have employed his hindsight further by pointing to the way in which the Latin essay Marx wrote at the same time and for the same purpose sought to explain the Romans' alleged neglect of the arts and education before the Punic wars by their absorption in agriculture. Eloquence, the young Marx goes on to explain, was deemed unnecessary, for men spoke with few words about what had to be done, and regarded the content of their speech rather than elegance of form; nor did Roman history, in this early time, need rhetorical elaboration, for it only recorded things done, and confined itself to the compilation of annals.⁶ Marx was often to speak, in later years, of what linked intellectual and artistic pursuits to a nation's economy; and the place of rhetorical elaboration and polished writing in historiography was to occupy him more than once as he tried to assess the relation of 'belletristic' virtues to the pursuit of truth.

As a university student, first at Bonn and later at Berlin (1835-41) Marx spent a good deal of time on the study not only of history, philosophy, and law, but also of literature. He heard lectures by A. W. Schlegel on Homer and Propertius, by F. G. Welcker on Greek and Latin mythology, and by Bruno Bauer on Isaiah; he copied out extracts from the aesthetic writings of Lessing, Solger, and Winckelmann; he tried to keep up with

⁵ MEW EB I, 592.

⁶ MEW EB I, 595 and MECW I, 640. The school-leaving exercises are reprinted in their original languages and with teachers' comments and corrections in MEGA I, 1 (2), 164-82.

what was new in literature (*alles Neueste der Literatur*);⁷ he schooled his style by translating from Tacitus and Ovid; he joined a rhymers' club to which the poets Emanuel Geibel and Karl Grün also belonged; and he wrote a good deal of poetry. In a letter to his father, dated 10 November 1837, in which he drew the sum of his experiences so far, Marx noted a natural affinity between moments of change and the lyric mood: 'At such moments . . . an individual becomes lyrical, for every metamorphosis is partly a swansong, partly the overture of a great new poem that is trying to find its right proportions amid brilliant colours that are not yet distinct.'⁸ Here all the arts are impressed to yield metaphors that help the young Marx to convey his feelings: literature ('lyrical', 'a great new poem'), music ('overture'), the visual arts ('brilliant colours').

Among the poems Marx wrote in the mood on which he here looks back there are some that reflect directly on the processes of artistic inspiration. The second of two dedicatory poems to his father (*Widmung. An den Vater*) provides a characteristic example:

Dichtung

Schöpferähnlich strömten Flammen
 Rieselnd mir aus Deiner Brust,
 Hochweit schlugen sie zusammen,
 Und ich nährt' sie in der Brust.
 Strahlend stand Dein Bild, wie Aeolsklingen,
 Deckt die Gluten sanft mit Liebesschwingen.

Rauschen hört' ich's, sah es blinken,
 Ferne Himmel zogen hin,
 Tauchten auf, hinabzusinken,
 Sanken, höher aufzuflehn.
 Als der innre Kampf sich nun geschlichtet,
 Blickt' ich Schmerz und Lust im Lied verdichtet.

Schmiegend an der Formen Milde,
 Steht die Seele festgebannt,
 Aus mir schwollen die Gebilde,
 Aus Dir waren sie entbrannt.
 Geistig lösen sie die Liebesglieder,
 Sprühn sie voll im Schöpferbusen wieder.

⁷ MEW EB I, 8.

⁸ MEW EB I, 3.

Poetry

Creator-like, flames streamed,
 Purling, from your breast to mine,
 High, wide, they tongued together
 And I nourished them in my breast.
 Your image stood bright, like Aeolian sound;
 Gently it covered the glow with pinions of love.

I heard murmuring sounds, I saw a gleam,
 Faraway skies drifted along,
 Emerged to sight, sank down again,
 Sank only to rise higher still.
 When the inner struggle came to rest
 I saw pain and joy concentrated in song.

Nestling against gentle forms
 The soul stands rapt,
 These forms grew out of me,
 Your fire quickened them.
 In spirit they unbend loving limbs,
 They scintillate again, brightly, in their creator's
 bosom.⁹

From this fantastic compliment to a father four thoughts emerge: (a) that the 'flames' of inspiration come to the poet from outside, but that he has to nourish them; (b) that the poetic process begins as turmoil from which, at last, a concentrated poem emerges; (c) that in the finished work of art, pain and pleasure are alike contained; (d) that the finished poem fascinates the soul through the gentle power of form, and that this is a *sensual* fascination (conveyed by the sexual imagery of the final stanza).

The young Marx here tries to speak of poetry from the inside, as a poet who has himself experienced inspiration. But the evidence of the poem itself, with its cliché images deriving from Schiller¹⁰ and German Romantic poetry, with its mechanical, inert rhythms, and with its clumsy formulations, brands this as a delusion. Nor do we find anything in the thoughts conveyed

⁹ *MEW EB* I, 603. My prose-translations aim at reproducing the literal sense of the words as closely as possible. Verse-translations, which sometimes improve on the original, may be found in *MECW* I, 517-615.

¹⁰ The Schillerian strain in Marx's early poetry is described and illustrated in M. Lifshits's *The Philosophy of Art of Karl Marx*, trans. R. B. Winn (reprinted London, 1973), p. 17.

which is not familiar aesthetic currency. These impressions are confirmed by a sonnet sequence addressed to the poet's future wife (*Schlußsonette. An Jenny*). Here the 'lyric I' sees his poems as inspired by love, as speaking of that love to its object, as exciting a reflection of the beloved which, in its turn, inspires him to deed and word (though also to feelings of tender sadness):

Dann darf ich kühner ringen, streiten,
Dann klingt mein Lied verklärt und freier,
Dann wagt sich höher mein Gesang,
Dann weint vor Wehmut meine Leier.

Then I may strive and battle more boldly,
Then my song rings out, transfigured and more free,
Then my singing dares to take higher flights,
Then my lyre weeps with tender sadness.¹¹

The young poet is aware that neither his feelings nor his expressions are sufficiently clear and defined:

Doch wie sollen Worte richtig zwängen,
Selber Nebelrauch und Schall.
Was unendlich ist, wie Geistesdrängen,
Wie du selber und das All.

But how can words—themselves but
Misty smoke and sound—force into shape
What is infinite, like the thrust of the spirit,
Like yourself, like the universe.¹²

What such love-poems *can* do, however, is help to bridge the distance between those who are physically apart, and form a link between them; their moving appeal to one beloved reader, the final compliment has it, is the one reason why they exist:

Doch ach! ich will ja nichts als Tränen,
Will nur, Du sollst dem Sange lauschen,
Verklärung ihm verleihn und Zier,
Dann mag er dumpf im Nichts verlauschen.

But alas! all I want is tears;
All I want is that *you* should listen to this song,
That you should transfigure and adorn it—
Then it may darkly die away into nothingness.¹³

¹¹ MEW EB I, 614.

¹² Nachlaß I, 27.

¹³ MEW EB I, 615.

These conventional compliments (Petrarchism via the gentle, melancholy purlings of the eighteenth-century *Göttinger Hain* poets) have proved prophetically true: Marx's early poetry *has* remained a family affair, of little interest to the wider world outside.

There are other, more romantic images of wild-eyed minstrels, inspired singers in these early verses: the dialogue-poem 'The Minstrel' (*Der Spielmann*), for instance, which shares with 'Night-Love' (*Nachtliebe*) the distinction of having been actually published in Marx's lifetime, though only in a very obscure journal:

„Spielmann, zerreiß't dir das Herz mit Spott,
Die Kunst, die lieh Dir ein lichter Gott,
Sollst ziehn, sollst sprüh'n auf Klangeswellen,
Zum Sternentanz hinanzuschwellen!“

„Was, was! Ich stech', stech' ohne Fehle
Blutswarz den Säbel in deine Seele,
Gott kennt sie nicht, Gott acht' nicht der Kunst;
Die stieg in den Kopf aus Höllendunst . . .“

'Minstrel, your mockery tears your very heart,
Your art was bestowed on you by a god of light;
You must roam the world, must scintillate on waves of sound,
Must strive upwards to the dance of the stars.'

'“What are you saying? Without fail I thrust
My sabre, black with blood, into your soul.
God does not know it; God thinks nothing of art;
Art ascended to the head from the fumes of hell.”'¹⁴

Here we meet the two conflicting views of inspiration familiar to the German Romantics, from Wackenroder to E. T. A. Hoffmann: art as the gift of heaven, leading upwards; art as the gift of hell, dragging down into madness, alienation, death. The mockery and self-division which characterize the minstrel of Marx's poem ('Spielmann, zerreiß't dir das Herz mit Spott') recall Heine more than any other German poet—in particular the *Dream-Picture* section (*Traumbilder*) which opens Heine's *Book of Songs*.¹⁵

¹⁴ MEW EB I, 604.

¹⁵ Cf. N. Reeves, 'Heine and the Young Marx', *Oxford German Studies*, vii (1973), 47–52. W. M. Johnston has seen in this poem 'Marx's sharpest expression of the