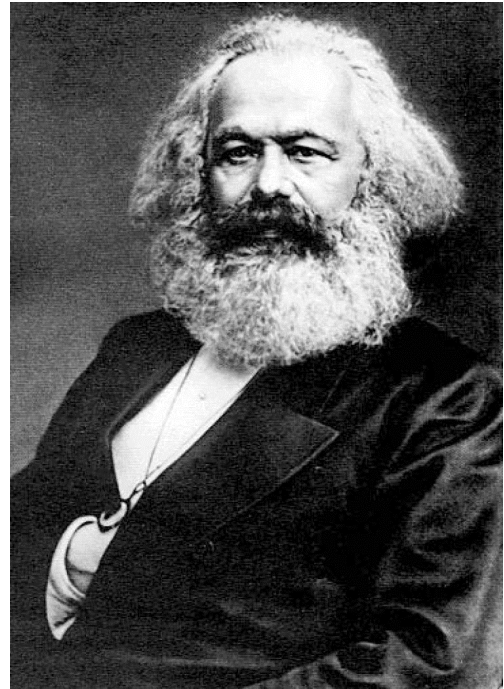


### A Man of His Time

By JONATHAN FREEDLAND



- 1 The Karl Marx depicted in Jonathan Sperber's absorbing, meticulously researched biography is a man never more passionate than when attacking his own side. He was saddled with perennial money problems, constantly plotting new, world-changing ventures yet having trouble with both deadlines and personal hygiene.
- 2 Still, it comes as a shock to realize that the ultimate leftist, the father of Communism itself, fits a recognizable pattern. So inflated and elevated is the global image of Marx, whether revered as a revolutionary icon or reviled as the wellspring of Soviet totalitarianism, that it's unsettling to encounter a genuine human being, a character one might come across today. If the Marx described by Sperber were around in 2013, he would be a compulsive blogger, and picking Twitter fights.
- 3 But that's cheating. The express purpose of *Karl Marx: A Nineteenth-Century Life* is to dispel the dominant notion of a timeless Marx — less man, more ideological canon — and relocate him where he lived and belonged, in his own time, not ours. Standing firm against the avalanche of studies claiming Marx as forever "our contemporary", Sperber sets out to depict instead "a figure of the past", not "a prophet of the present".
- 4 And he succeeds in the primary task of all biography, recreating a man who leaps off the page. We see his thought develop, but glimpse also the begging letters to his mother, requesting an advance on his inheritance, along with the enduring anxiety over whether he can provide for the wife he has loved since he was a teenager. We see the trips to the pawnbrokers, the pressure to maintain bourgeois living standards, "the show of respectability", as Marx put it to his closest friend and co-conspirator, Friedrich Engels.
- 5 The picture that emerges is a rounded, humane one. Marx is committed to revolution, without being a monomaniac. He is an intensely loving father, but also suffering what would now be diagnosed as a two-year depression following the death of his 8-year-old son Edgar. He is clearly also an infuriating colleague, stewing on book projects for years, only to fail to deliver. Engels, Sperber writes, therefore spent decades repeating the same message: 20

- 6 Besides the long, devoted marriage to Jenny, there is another love story: the partnership with Engels. After the great man's death, it was Engels who waded through Marx's scrawled notes to assemble, and publish posthumously, the final two volumes of *Das Kapital*. Engels was Aaron to Marx's Moses, able to speak in public and so make up for the deficiencies of his partner, who was burdened by both a strong Rhineland accent and a lisp.
- 7 All this is fascinating enough as human drama, but it has extra value. For the act of reclaiming Marx as a man, and a man of his time, alters the way we understand his ideas.
- 8 Plenty of scholars sweated through the 20th century trying to reconcile inconsistencies across the great sweep of Marx's writing, seeking to shape a coherent Marxism out of Marx. Sperber's approach is more pragmatic. He accepts that Marx was not a body of ideas, but a human being responding to events. In this context, it's telling that Marx's prime vocation was not as an academic but as a campaigning journalist: Sperber suggests Marx's two stints at the helm of a radical paper in Cologne represented his greatest periods of professional fulfillment. Accordingly, much of what the scholars have tried to brand as Marxist philosophy was instead contemporary commentary, reactive and therefore full of contradiction.
- 9 Thus in 1848 Marx could make a speech denouncing as "nonsense" the very idea of a revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat, even though that notion formed a core plank of Marxist doctrine. The old Communist academicians used to insist the text of that speech must have been a forgery, but Sperber believes in its authenticity. Marx delivered it to a Rhineland audience then demanding the broadest possible front against authoritarian Prussian rule. Pitting one Rhenish class against another made no sense in that place at that time, so "Marx repudiated his own writing." The book makes clear that, determined though Marx was to devise an overarching theory of political economy, he was, even in exile, forever preoccupied with German politics and fueled by a lifelong loathing of Prussian despotism. Whatever he wrote in the abstract was informed by the current and concrete.
- 10 Sperber forces us to look anew at a man whose influence lives on. And he also offers a useful template for how we might approach other great figures, especially the great thinkers of history — demystifying the words and deeds of those who too often are lazily deemed sacred. For all the books that have been written about America's founding fathers, for example, we still await the historian who will do for them what Jonathan Sperber has done for Karl Marx.

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## Tekst 6 A man of his time

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- 1p 16 How is Karl Marx presented in paragraphs 1 and 2?  
As someone who
- A does not deserve the high status historically accorded to him.
  - B is quite unlike the historical figure people either admire or despise.
  - C successfully managed to keep his personal life secret.
  - D suffered from the discrepancy between his political and private life.
  - E would have been happier had he lived in the twenty-first century.
- 1p 17 “perennial money problems” (alinea 1)  
In welke alinea wordt er verder ingegaan op dit probleem?  
Noteer het nummer van die alinea.
- 1p 18 What is said about *Karl Marx: A Nineteenth-Century Life* in paragraph 3?
- A It consolidates Marx’s reputation.
  - B It deflates the mythical image created of Marx.
  - C It demonstrates Marx’s attempts to lead a normal life.
  - D It is supported by a vast body of research.
- 1p 19 What is Sperber praised for in paragraph 4?
- A ignoring earlier historical research on Marx
  - B illustrating the relevance of the concept of poverty to Marxism
  - C providing a vivid description of Marx’s life
  - D proving that Marx conformed to middle class conventions
  - E refuting the notion of Marx as the fortunate revolutionary
- 1p 20 Which of the following fits the gap in paragraph 5?
- A Defeat the bourgeoisie!
  - B Get the work done!
  - C Start a revolution!
  - D Stop complaining!

- 1p 21 What becomes clear from paragraph 6 about the relationship between Marx and Engels?
- A It contributed to Marx's fame.
  - B It interfered with Marx's marriage.
  - C It was complicated by Marx's shortcomings.
  - D It was inspired by biblical example.
- 1p 22 Which of the following reflects the conclusion in the last sentence of paragraph 8?
- A Incompatibility of basic principles strengthened Marx's significance as a philosopher.
  - B Marx's critical attitude towards capitalism was inspired by his earlier experiences on the work floor.
  - C Marx's German roots are the underlying cause of his seemingly conflicting ideas.
  - D Statements voiced by Marx as a reporter in Germany did not always reflect his later philosophical ideas.
- 1p 23 What is the function of paragraph 9?
- A To emphasise that Marx's thoughts influenced the German political situation.
  - B To illustrate how Marx explained his view on class relations and social change.
  - C To prove that Marx's response to local political events has been interpreted wrongly.
  - D To support the scholars who rightly claim that Marx's 1848 speech was falsified.

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**Bronvermelding**

*Een opsomming van de in dit examen gebruikte bronnen, zoals teksten en afbeeldingen, is te vinden in het bij dit examen behorende correctievoorschrift, dat na afloop van het examen wordt gepubliceerd.*