

## BOOK REVIEWS

GABRIEL, MARY. *Love and Capital. Karl and Jenny Marx and the Birth of a Revolution*. Little, Brown and Company, New York [etc.] 2011. lviii, 707 pp. Ill. £25.00; doi:10.1017/S0020859012000247

Common knowledge, better known as *Wikipedia*, states that Karl Marx (1818–1883) “is widely thought of as one of the most influential thinkers in history, who has had a significant influence on both world politics and intellectual thought”.<sup>1</sup> In 1999, ten years after socialism was declared dead, Marx was voted the top “thinker of the millennium” in a BBC poll. It is remarkable then that no proper biography has yet been written of this important historical figure. The publication of *Love and Capital* by Mary Gabriel in 2011 has done nothing to change this fact.

There are, of course, many biographies of Karl Marx. They started to be published even while Marx was alive. A Dutch booklet by Arnold Kerdijk (1879) is believed to be the first substantial one. Kerdijk was a liberal, and Marx was not pleased. Until c.1989 every biography of Karl Marx had to be ideologically biased in one way or another. A biographer of Marx could choose between a hagiography, or the opposite. After 1989, you might have expected someone to make an effort to start with a clean sheet, take a fresh look at the many available – and possibly new – sources, and write a decent scholarly biography of the man. But we are still waiting.

*Love and Capital* by Mary Gabriel is not just a biography of Karl Marx, as its subtitle makes clear: the book deals with Marx’s wife Jenny von Westphalen too. It aims, using all the paraphernalia of a scholarly work, including footnotes and lists of sources, to tell the “Marx family story”. In her “Preface” Gabriel claims that “in English there was not one book that told the full story of the Marx family”. What she fails to state is that there are actually many publications, in English and in other languages, that tell small or major parts of this “full story”, enough to provide her with everything she might have needed. So, *pace* Gabriel, a fair number of these publications already tell “the bittersweet drama” of Marx’s wife and daughters. Gabriel claims to have unearthed many new facts by gathering “thousands of pages of letters that the Marx family wrote each other and their associates [...]”. Many of these were located in archives in Moscow and had never been published in English”. Again, however, many of them have been published in other languages, and in most cases it would not have been necessary to travel to Moscow to consult them: indeed, microfilms of many of these documents are kept at the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam. On page 681 Gabriel lists archival material she consulted in Amsterdam and in the Russian State Archive of Social and Political History in Moscow. The lists are exactly the same, because both institutions have exchanged microfilm copies of the archival material they hold.

Honesty about the sources used is a prerequisite for any scholarly activity, as is accuracy. Even before we reach Gabriel’s “Preface” (pp. lv–lviii) much has already gone wrong as far as accuracy is concerned. Page li shows a map of the German Confederation in 1848. There might have been a village called Karlsbad in the west of this Confederation, but

1. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karl\\_Marx](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karl_Marx); last accessed 2 May 2012.

the real Karlsbad (Karlovy Vary) should be on the map near Prague in Bohemia. The next map, on pages lii–liii, shows Europe in the same year, 1848, but with a country that did not come into existence until 1905: Norway. Pages xv–xliii contain a lengthy “character list”, featuring some 350 names of people who apparently played a role in the life of Karl and Jenny Marx. But do they play a role in the book? More than 100 of these names do not appear in the index. What role could Alfred Linnell (“English law clerk killed during the November 1887 police crackdown in London that followed the Bloody Sunday melee”; p. xxvii) possibly have played in the life of Jenny Marx, who died in 1881, or of Karl Marx, who died in 1883? And how are we supposed to discover whatever his role was if the index fails to list him?

Gabriel’s “Preface” ends with some very peculiar remarks that disqualify any scholarly ambitions Gabriel might have had. “[S]ome of the correspondence contained racist remarks, which I have not included in the book because [...] they were not germane to the story, and [...] they were entirely consistent with the norm at that period”, Gabriel states. She suspects that these remarks (on Jews and slaves) “would have unduly distracted the reader” (p. lviii), thus underestimating the same reader and showing how political correctness (or, in other words, ideological bias) prevents Gabriel from doing a proper scholarly or even journalistic job.

One very strange fact about this biography is that it gives no dates of birth for either Karl or Jenny Marx. On page 17 we note that “in 1818, [Marx’s parents] had another boy, this one named Karl”. It would have been quite easy to add “on 5 May”, and you would not even have needed to add a source, as Gabriel does. Her source for Marx’s birth in general is a random biography: Saul K. Padover’s *Karl Marx: An Intimate Biography*.<sup>2</sup> Marx’s mother, by the way, was called Henriette, not Henrietta, a mistake one often comes across, but not a mistake one expects in a biography claiming to have consulted thousands of archival sources.

In general, Gabriel’s use of sources is peculiar. If you want to tell the “full story” to an English-reading audience because there are not enough English sources that tell the story you want to tell, you will have to turn to non-English sources. But the 190 titles in the “Books and Journals” section of the “Bibliography” (pp. 681–688) of *Love and Capital* include fewer than twenty non-English sources. Incidentally, the “Books and Journals” list shows how many decent English studies on Marx and his family and related subjects have been published over the years. But it also shows how many sources, German ones for example, Gabriel missed. A quick look in the catalogue of a specialized institute, or even on *Wikipedia*, makes clear how many sources, on Jenny Marx for instance, were overlooked.

Other important sources for Marx and his family have similarly been overlooked or omitted. If Gabriel had cared to read the major source on Marx’s Dutch relatives (available in Dutch and German and published by the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam and by the Karl Marx Haus in Trier, both institutions she visited and consulted), she would not have referred to Marx’s cousin “Antoinette, known as Nanette”, because Nanette Philips was never, except in unreliable older sources, referred to as “Antoinette”. There is not a single source either in Jan Gielkens, *Was ik maar weer in Bommel. Karl Marx en zijn Nederlandse verwanten* (Amsterdam, 1997) and *Karl Marx und seine niederländischen Verwandten. Eine kommentierte Quellenedition* (Trier [2000]), or in other publications that suggests the more than friendly, familial relationship between Marx and Nanette that Gabriel does. She could have found references to these books in another omitted source: the published volumes of correspondence

2. Saul K. Padover, *Karl Marx: An Intimate Biography* (New York, 1980).

comprising the *Karl Marx Friedrich Engels Gesamtausgabe* (MEGA), an unfinished, ongoing, but well-documented edition. The MEGA is not, as Gabriel claims (pp. 681–682), an ongoing project that started in 1927. That year saw the first attempt at a complete Marx–Engels edition, but the project was called *Historisch-kritische Gesamtausgabe. Werke, Schriften, Briefe*, and it was abandoned for political reasons in the 1930s.

*Love and Capital* is certainly well written, and it paints a plausible portrait of Karl Marx, his wife, his family, his political activities, and his peculiarities. But the portrait Gabriel paints is neither new nor surprising; it is the result of the journalistic merging of scores of biographies, thus creating a common denominator. For a general audience *Love and Capital* might be interesting, but this general audience will not be aware that they are reading a kind of fiction. Given its many flaws, one can only conclude that as a scholarly enterprise *Love and Capital* is a project gone wrong.

Jan Gielkens

JERRAM, LEIF. *Streetlife. The Untold History of Europe's Twentieth Century*. Oxford University Press, Oxford [etc.] 2011. x, 477 pp. Ill. £18.99; doi:10.1017/S0020859012000259

In the last two decades, space has gained importance as an explanatory factor in historical research. Historians have emphasized the importance of space not only as the background against which history took place, but also as a valuable and important point of research in itself. In detailed studies they have shown the importance for minority groups of receiving access to public space, and analysed the distribution of social inequality in a specific geographical area.<sup>1</sup>

In *Streetlife: An Untold History of Europe's Twentieth Century*, Leif Jerram takes this “spatial turn” a step further. His point of departure is the observation that while twentieth-century history has been written from many perspectives, little has actually been written about “where” this history took place. Although the “crime scene” of history can tell us much about how changes actually came about, the location is only seldom a point of historical research. Jerram argues with enthusiasm that the success of female emancipation or political revolution depends not exclusively on ideas or laws, but just as much on events on the street. Therefore, to better understand how political, cultural, and social changes took place we have to look at the physical locations and reconstruct what actually happened. According to Jerram, the crucial location of important cultural, political, and social developments was the city, or more precisely the streets, bars, and homes of the quickly expanding metropolis. He argues that both the city and physical locations are inadequately studied in the literature on twentieth-century history. Jerram is not the first historian to use this perspective, and not all his results are new, but he is the first to employ it so widely, and he makes this theoretical viewpoint accessible for a wider audience. Based on Russian, French, German, and English historiography and sociological reports, he successfully integrates a number of large themes analysed at street level. The result is an appealing, personal, and provocative book.

1. For a short introduction and some interesting case studies, see Simon Gunn and Robert J. Morris (eds), *Identities in Space: Contested Terrains in the Western City since 1850* (Aldershot, 2001).