

## 沙葉新：馬克思秘史

# The Secret History of Marx: Prelude

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On the stage is the solitary form of Marx's grave.

The base of the grave is rectangular with a raised platform of grey granite on which is set a square, marble plaque recording the birth and death dates of Marx. On the gravestone the following words are carved, "Workers of the world, Unite!" Below this are the words, "Philosophers have used different means to explain the world, but the thing is to change it." Below the tombstone stands a bronze bust of Marx<sup>1</sup> around which a number of wreaths and baskets of flowers have been placed.

The curtain rises revealing Marx on the platform of his own grave, sitting in a posture reminiscent of Rodin's 'The Thinker'.

MARX: (*looking around*) Why so many flowers? Oh, I see, it's been a hundred years! (*addressing the audience in a familiar tone*) Did you put them here? Thank you. Unfortunately, I didn't know any of you when I was alive; and, of course, you've never seen me. Even though many of my believers have said they are 'going to see Marx' just before they die; I haven't met any of them. If I had, I certainly would have expressed my gratitude. (*feeling his pockets for cigarettes*) I would be even more grateful if, in the future, you put some boxes of cigars on my grave. After all, I am a materialist, so you should present me with material things.

<sup>1</sup>The bust is actually on top of the tombstone, not at its base.

(*The PLAYWRIGHT enters holding two sprigs of plum blossom.*)

PLAYWRIGHT: Comrade Marx, I have some cigarettes.

MARX: (*delighted*) Ooh? Excellent. You're a materialist, I see.

(*The PLAYWRIGHT hands MARX a cigarette and lights it for him*)

MARX: (*drawing deeply*) Thank you.

PLAYWRIGHT: (*presenting the flowers*) These are for you.

MARX: Plum blossom! That's Chinese; are you Chinese?

PLAYWRIGHT: That's right.

MARX: China's a mysterious land. I wrote a lot of articles about the Opium Wars and the Taiping Rebellion back then. I've always thought a lot of the Chinese.

PLAYWRIGHT: Comrade Marx, would it be all right if we had a talk?

MARX: Certainly.

PLAYWRIGHT: You see, I'm a playwright.

MARX: Really, like Shakespeare. I adore Shakespeare; he's eclipsed all other writers in my mind. I'm honoured to have an opportunity to talk with one of Shakespeare's colleagues.

PLAYWRIGHT: What I'd like to talk about with you is your life, work and struggle.

MARX: Ah, an interview for professional purposes.

PLAYWRIGHT: I'm thinking of writing a play about you.

MARX: About me?

PLAYWRIGHT: You're the mentor of the proletarian revolution, the author of the bible of the

workers—*Das Kapital*—and a great man.

MARX: No, you are greater than me. After all, I only wrote *Das Kapital*, you want to write *Marx*!

PLAYWRIGHT: You mean to say that I'm taking on more than I can cope with.

MARX: Not at all. I see you don't understand my joke. What I mean is that it will be harder for you to write *Marx* than it was for me to write *Das Kapital*.

PLAYWRIGHT: But why?

MARX: Engels said here at my grave: 'Marx is the most despised and vilified man of our age. All governments, be they autocracies or republics, expelled him; capitalists, whether conservative or absolute democrats, vied with each other to libel and denigrate him.' They decried me as a pitiless God of Thunder, a spirit over Europe, a devil who was scheming to annihilate everything held sacred by man.

PLAYWRIGHT: But you never wanted your enemies to praise you.

MARX: Certainly not. But then even some of my friends thought me to be proud, violent, eccentric, morbid and completely without compassion.

PLAYWRIGHT: Didn't that hurt you?

MARX: As my compatriot and the father of German literature Lessing said, 'I do not crave the approbation of others; yet, though the cold indifference with which I am regarded by those worldly men who find in me no worth whatsoever causes me no terrible grief, it does fill me with feelings of lassitude and dejection.' But, then again, I was more detached than Lessing ever was. I didn't give a thought to the apathy and calumny of my contemporaries, for what I wanted was the recognition of future generations.

PLAYWRIGHT: Well, you have achieved that. If that were not the case then there would not be so many flowers here on your grave. Your portrait hangs in countries throughout the world, your works are published in dozens of languages, and the proletarian political party that you and Engels founded has developed into communist parties with millions of members on all of the continents of the world. The prestige you have today is unparalleled.

MARX: If that is so then it is going to be even

more difficult for you to write about me.

PLAYWRIGHT: And why do you say that?

MARX: People in my day slandered me, giving me no 'face' at all; while the people of today have showered me with overwhelming praise, so much so that my face has been buried in cosmetics. But that isn't the real me. I want to make a point of reminding those who praise me: you must depict historical figures in all honesty and entirely in accordance with historical reality. You must beware not to fall into the trap of bourgeois historians and make idols out of your heroes—all done up in platform-shoes and with haloes around their heads. Actually, I'm a normal person, just like anybody else.

PLAYWRIGHT: Don't worry, I'm no bourgeois historian; I'm a Marxist.

MARX: Oh, are you? (*taking a gold-rimmed monocle out of his pocket, puts it to his eye and studies the PLAYWRIGHT from head to toe*) A Marxist, eh? I'm not a Marxist.

PLAYWRIGHT: (*Shocked*) What? Oh, oh, I see; that's because there are so many false Marxists: the May student movement in Paris in 1968; the recent activities of the Red Brigade in Italy; and even the various religious groups that claim to be your followers. So . . .

MARX: So it is no surprise that Hegel said only one of his students understood him, and even his understanding wasn't completely accurate. Do you have a proper understanding of me?

PLAYWRIGHT: I'll do my utmost to have one.

MARX: Don't you perhaps think that the philosophy and political ideas I expressed a century ago are stale and out-of-date? Or that they are incapable of explaining the new phenomena that have appeared in socialist and capitalist society?

PLAYWRIGHT: In my opinion, your basic principles still hold true.

MARX: That means you still believe in me?

PLAYWRIGHT: Yes, I do.

MARX: Thank you! Well, then, what were you thinking of writing about me?

PLAYWRIGHT: Your wife Jenny once said that she could write a secret history about the writing of *Das Kapital* . . .

MARX: So that's it—you want to write a secret history? Jenny also said that such a history

- would reveal all of the anxieties, worries and fretting . . . it's quite a tragedy.
- PLAYWRIGHT: You're not against tragedies, are you?
- MARX: No. After all, Aristotle said tragedy can purify the soul.
- PLAYWRIGHT: Then please tell me your secret history.
- MARX: Let me first say that this so-called secret history is nothing more than the record of the trivia of everyday existence and family life; a collection of minor episodes dispersed through the major struggle.
- PLAYWRIGHT: But that's exactly what I want to find out about. Because in your involvement in social, economic and political activities you were Marx the Revolutionary; but Marx the Man disappears entirely, or at least becomes very blurred, in the shadow of those all-important and epoch-making activities. It may well be that in your secret history, amidst the everyday trivia, the episodic and private detail, you will reveal your personality to me, and that your character, inner world and feelings will become clearer to all of us; enabling us to get closer to you.
- MARX: I can only hope that will be the case. Would you happen to have another cigarette?
- PLAYWRIGHT: Yes, yes.
- MARX: (*taking the cigarette*) Let's begin with something that happened in 1894.
- (*The PLAYWRIGHT takes out a tape-recorder*)
- MARX: What's that?
- PLAYWRIGHT: It's called a tape-recorder.
- MARX: A tape-recorder?
- PLAYWRIGHT: Yes, it can record everything you say.
- MARX: (*fiddling with the machine with great interest*) Things certainly have changed; you can even record my voice. Do you want me to sit closer?
- PLAYWRIGHT: No, that's just fine where you are. Please go on.
- MARX: (*staring at the recorder*) One day in May 1849, the European revolution was coming to an end, and Engels and I were living in Cologne, editing the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* . . .<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup>For the full text of this play, see *October* 十月, No. 3, 1983, pp. 4-37.