

Book Review

Carmen Levick, University of Sheffield

Shakespeare's Influence on Karl Marx: The Shakespearean Roots of Marxism. Christian A. Smith. London: Routledge, 2021. 314 pp. \$190 (cloth); \$52.95 (Ebook). ISBN 9780367559274; ISBN 9781003095767.

The curse and the privilege of Shakespeare scholars is to easily identify reflections of the Bard's work wherever they look. Many academic books have been written about Shakespeare's influence on literature, and many more will grace the shelves of university libraries. Christian Smith's *Shakespeare's Influence on Karl Marx* is valuable for more than just its addition to the "Shakespeare industry." It attempts, often successfully, a rare feat in contemporary scholarship: an intertextual and interlingual exploration of Shakespeare's impact on Marx's written work and political ideology. The title of the book itself contains a bold statement, noting the defining importance of Shakespeare in the birth of Marxism. While the argument of the book may not fully convince the reader of Shakespeare's essential influence on Marx, it provides important insights into the development of Marx's ideological thinking and writing process. The strong interdisciplinary character of this book will make it of interest to students and scholars of Shakespeare, the biography and philosophy of Marx, the history of philosophy, and the relations between literature and political economy.

Smith follows the chronological evolution of Marx's writing and spends the first three chapters discussing potential Shakespearean allusions in Marx's early texts, in addition to lengthy analyses of his relationships with his future wife, Jenny von Westphalen, her father, Ludwig von Westphalen, and the "little academy," a home school he frequented in the von Westphalen home. These initial chapters, "In Love in Shakespeare," "But Where Then? That Is the Question," and "Standing the World on Its Feet; The Rheinische Zeitung Articles," set the stage for the more inspiring work of the book's second half. They contain a large amount of historical data and lengthy quotations in both German and English, but the discussion of Shakespeare's influence at this early stage in Marx's development as a writer and thinker is more imaginative than it is supported by textual evidence. The author wonders, in frequent rhetorical questions, how aware of Shakespeare's language Marx might have been when using certain turns of phrase or ideas. The term "deep allusion," which recurs but remains unexplained theoretically, lends the first three chapters an overwhelmingly speculative character.

The tone of the book changes in chapter four, meaningfully entitled "The Point Is to Change It." Marked by Karl and Jenny's wedding, their move to Paris, and the first drafts of Marx's two explicitly communist es-

says: “On the Jewish Question” and “Introduction to a Critique of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*,” this chapter clearly demonstrates the importance of Smith’s work. The close reading of available texts, both Marx’s and Shakespeare’s; the accuracy of historical research; and the fluidity of argument allow for an inspired analysis of Shakespeare’s influence on Marx. One of the most convincing and successful sections of this chapter is the exploration of the role played by *The Merchant of Venice*, and Shylock in particular, in Marx’s “On the Jewish Question” and beyond, the play often acquiring a central place in Marx’s ideological makeup. The last two chapters are perhaps the most “Shakespearean,” as Smith sets out to disentangle the multiple layers of intertextuality clearly present in Marx’s work. Shakespeare plays an essential part in this analysis, especially in Marx’s best-known works, *Das Kapital* and *The Communist Manifesto*. The end of the volume observes a change of generations, with Shakespeare still clearly a central aspect of the Marxes’ everyday life. In August 1877, Eleanor Marx founded the Dogberry Club, a Shakespeare reading group, with her friend Clara Collett and later moved with her partner Edward Aveling to a cottage within walking distance of Shakespeare’s birthplace of Stratford-upon-Avon, studying at the Birthplace Library and often touring his house on Henley Street and his grave in Trinity Church.

These final sections are what really excite the reader, and the end of the book conveys a pronounced feeling that much more could be said about Marx’s late work and Shakespeare’s influence on it. Unfortunately, due to the sudden passing of Christian Smith, this line of inquiry will have to be continued by someone else. As it stands, his *Shakespeare’s Influence on Karl Marx*, however, represents a valuable contribution to Shakespeare studies and scholarship on the history of Marxist philosophy, highlighting the importance and excitement of close textual analysis and intertextual exploration.