

Article

Beyond Anything Realism Can Represent? Monstrous Crime in Marx's Victorian Novel

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Abstract: This article reads Karl Marx's *Capital* (volume 1, 1867) as the *Bildungsroman* of a congenital criminal: its eponymous character, Capital. Following Friedrich Engels's *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845), Marx detects and dissects capitalism's crimes. *Capital* has been called Marx's 'Victorian novel' and compared to English realism's triple-deckers. Yet his indispensable informants include factory inspectors whose reports, according to Fredric Jameson, provide testimony beyond anything realism can represent. How, then, does Marx's apparently realist aesthetic convey Capital's criminal deeds and criminogenic drive? To address this matter, the article examines the Gothicism of Marx's realism. It highlights his development of Engels's Gothic realism, demonstrates how *Capital* begins *in media res*—its first sentence presenting an immense, monstrous collection of evidence of Capital's cannibalism—and links this opening crime scene to Marx's portrayal of the 1863 case of Mary Anne Walkley. Murdered in her workplace, Walkley inhabits an underworld overpopulated by fellow workers killed by wage-labour. The article argues that, because actuality under the rule of Capital is structurally and monstrously criminal, Marx's Gothic constitutes a realistic medium to represent criminal monsters and structures.

Keywords: Karl Marx (1818–1883); Friedrich Engels (1820–1895); Capital; work; crime; realism; Gothic; *Bildung*; monstrosity; social murder



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1. KILLING NO MURDER

Marx teaches us to decipher the hieroglyphics written on the seemingly ahistorical body of the commodity and to penetrate into the productive hell concealed by the words of economics, just as Balzac taught us to decipher a history on a wall or an outfit and enter the underground circles that contain the secret of social appearances. (Rancière [2003] 2007, p. 17)

'I am up to my eyebrows in English newspapers and books upon which I am drawing for my book on the condition of the English proletarians', Friedrich Engels wrote to Karl Marx in November 1844. 'I accuse the English bourgeoisie before the entire world of murder, robbery and other crimes on a massive scale' (vol. 38, p. 10).¹ Engels was writing *The Condition of the Working Class in England: From Personal Observation and Authentic Sources* (1845). Authentic sources for his criminal indictment included Blue Books—periodical collections of reports of the British Parliament, named for the colour of their paper covers. These governmental publications, ostensibly non-fictional and fact-based, could involve fictional devices and effects. For barrister J. Toulmin Smith, their writers and readers were ghoulish: 'The pictures of horror artfully put together in the pages of blue books are greedily devoured' (J. T. Smith 1849, p. 172). For Marx, Blue Books revealed recurrent living nightmares that outdid popular fiction; the description of London printers' and tailors' workshops in the fourth and sixth *Public Health Reports* (1862 and 1864) 'surpasses the most

loathsome phantasies of our romance writers' (vol. 35, p. 468). For Engels, his own pictures of horror realistically reflected horrific new realities. 'Everything which here arouses horror and indignation', he wrote of Manchester's working-class quarters—'this Hell upon Earth'—'is of recent origin, belongs to the *industrial epoch*' (vol. 4, p. 355).² Andrew Merrifield calls *Condition* 'a classic piece of urban realism', yet his exegesis invokes the katabasis and the fantastic voyage: 'For page upon page, Engels [ventures] deeper down the abyss, vividly evoking the horror' (Andrew Merrifield 2002, pp. 33, 36–37). 'Plunging into a Dantesque underworld, an infernal capitalist abyss' (p. 37), Engels used the Gothic in his descriptions and conceptualisation of English capitalism's true crimes up to the early Victorian period. His and Marx's gravitation to Gothic language affirms 'its compatibility with scientific intentions, a commitment to the truth, as best one understands it, about the historical depth of a given social situation' (Arac [1979] 1989, p. 125).

Engels's *Condition* and Marx's *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* (volume 1, 1867) are audaciously polyvocal. They do, and symbolically do in, *Capital* in different voices.³ Their works 'force attention upon the crimes of murderous capital', in Kristin Grogan's words, 'through acts of documentary ventriloquism' (Grogan 2021, p. 131; see Hartley 2021) that involve dialogical collages of voluminous official and unofficial sources. Like Engels, as well as Charles Dickens and John Ruskin, Marx part-buried himself in Blue Books (S. M. Smith 1970; Kornbluh 2010, p. 16). He treated them 'as the most important and weighty documents for the study of the capitalist mode of production' (Lafargue 1890, n.p.). His critique of capitalism required 'testimony. He made his case for prosecuting capitalist production by summoning evidence of people who were closer to the crime scene' (Andy Merrifield 2020, pp. 41–42). When his daughters contributed research assistance, he pointed them not toward "'theoretical discourses'" but right into the crimes of the capitalist mode of production as revealed in the Blue Books' (Linebaugh 2014, p. 70). To historicise English factory legislation for *Capital*, Chapter 10, "The Working Day", he devoured 'a whole library of "Blue Books" containing reports of commissions and factory Inspectors in England and Scotland' (Lafargue). As his indispensable informants included those inspectors, 'whose reports furnish a testimony beyond anything the realisms or naturalisms are able to convey' (Jameson 2011, p. 119), how did Marx himself represent capitalist crimes?

Following Engels, his strategy entailed updating Dante's *Inferno* (1320) (McNally 2011, pp. 134–38; Roberts 2017) and interfusing 'realism' and 'fantasy', or rather, cannily galvanising their given interfusion. Scare quoting these categories intimates their overlapping, unstable and indefinite definitions, then and now. Although Marx's aesthetic 'may, without distortion, be called a "realist" aesthetic', it neither entailed 'a direct and unmediated reflection of social and historical circumstance' nor excluded fantasy; 'he found apt symbols for human experience in such "fantastic" works' as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (Prawer 1976, pp. 373, 410–11). He handled his materials 'as adroitly as the great novelists of his generation. Only this wasn't fiction' (Andy Merrifield 2020, p. 43). He also read them. 'The present splendid brotherhood of fiction-writers in England', he informed readers of the *New-York Daily Tribune* (1 August 1854), numbered 'Dickens and Thackeray, Miss Brontë and Mrs. Gaskell', 'whose graphic and eloquent pages have issued to the world more political and social truths than have been uttered by all the professional politicians, publicists and moralists put together' (vol. 13, p. 664). Marx's appreciation of fiction's capacity to tell truth and story together was echoed by Engels in his famous letter to novelist Margaret Harkness in April 1888—from Honoré de Balzac's *La Comédie humaine*, which 'gives us a most wonderfully realistic history' of France from 1816 to 1848, 'I have learned more than from all the professed historians, economists and statisticians of the period together' (vol. 48, p. 168).

While parts of *Capital* manifest ‘a genre of *fantastic realism*’ (McNally 2011, p. 172), the whole is like a voluminous novelisation of Marx’s eleventh thesis on Feuerbach (1845): ‘The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point is to *change* it’ (vol. 5, p. 8). For Anna Kornbluh, ‘*Capital* is animated by abyssal questions of origin. Like the triple-deckers of English realism, it endeavors to describe the world in order to change it’ (Kornbluh 2010, p. 20).⁴ From being a philosopher who announced the revolutionary supersession of philosophy by the proletariat’s ‘*dissolution of the hitherto existing world order*’ (vol. 3, p. 187), Marx became the unauthorised but authoritative novelist-biographer not so much of ‘personified capital, the capitalist’ (vol. 35, p. 587), as of Capital *per se*. In Kornbluh’s reading, *Capital*’s title names its ‘ur-person’, analogous to big-name characters in Victorian literature: ‘Capital is the subject of *Capital*, as David Copperfield or Jane Eyre or Daniel Deronda are the subjects of *David Copperfield*, *Jane Eyre*, and *Daniel Deronda*’ (p. 24). In Marx’s ‘story of Capital’s becoming-subject’, the trope of personification’s artificiality foregrounds ‘the artifice and instability of this subject’, ‘the fissures and crises in its course of becoming, in its adventure of *Bildung*’ (p. 24). Referring to *Bleak House* (1853) and the Dickensian narrator prompting the ‘synthesis of plots, settings, and characters’ into a ‘whole’, Kornbluh emphasises how *Capital* can be read ‘as a specifically Victorian novel, one which asserts its own wholeness’ (p. 33, n. 4). Its wholeness, its re-creation of the world of Capital’s globalising *Bildung*, and thus its instantiation of ‘worlding realism’ (Goodlad 2016), is a confrontational emulation of Capital’s incessant creation and destruction of a world after its own monstrous image and real monstrosity.

Given *Capital*’s rich monster imagery, David Harvey warns ‘Capitalism may be monstrous, but it is not a rigid monster’; ‘Capital is not a thing, but a process’ (Harvey 2010, p. 262). Nevertheless, Marx portrays Capital as a person and a living-dead ‘thing’, whose ‘monstrous self-development’ (Hartley 2021, p. 80) produces and profits from normalised crime, such as killing workers by overwork (*Überarbeit*).⁵ Indeed, ‘this terrifying *Bildung*’ (p. 80) demanded the conventionalisation and recurrence of workplace crimes. Quoting W. G. Carson’s classic 1979 study of 1830s British class struggles, Steve Tombs states that ‘factory crime came to be represented and seen as “conventional”—subject to widely accepted “rationalisations and justifications” and “routinely integrated with otherwise reputable activity”—a view which holds enormous power to this day’ and ‘stands as the greatest obstacle to the more effective intrusion of the criminal law into the workplace’ (Tombs and Carson 2005, p. 103). For capitalists, Marx reflected, ‘It was a matter of proving that KILLING was NO MURDER when it occurred for the sake of profit’ (vol. 37, p. 93).⁶ ‘*Capital* is enlivened by a prodigious novelistic drive’ (Murphet 2021, p. 116), not least because Marx splendidly repurposed the totalising medium of the Victorian realist novel to plot the prodigality of Capital, whose going bust, as much as its booming becoming, lays waste to workers’ lives: ‘capital does not *live* only on labour. A lord, at once aristocratic and barbarous, it drags with it into the grave the corpses of its slaves, whole hecatombs of workers who perish in the crises’ (vol. 9, p. 228). Marx also articulated a revolutionary theory of ‘the nightmares of capitalism’, as Jon Greenaway recently argued, ‘not simply as something monstrous but as a horror that can *end*’ (Greenaway 2024, p. 13). As capitalism daily breeds shocks and nightmares for all subaltern classes, so, inversely, histories and visions of popular awakening and communist uprising ‘animate the nightmares of the ruling classes’ (McNally 2011, p. 259). This partly explains why Marx and Engels chose to meet the bourgeois ‘nursery tale [*Märchen*] of the Spectre of Communism with a Manifesto’, namely, *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), itself written as a Gothic fairy tale (*Märchen*)—‘Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communistic revolution’ (vol. 6, pp. 481, 519)—and why attention to the politics, poetics and reception of literary genre counts in the fight to awake from and end capitalist nightmares.

This article regards *Capital* as the *Bildungsroman* of a congenital criminal, namely, Capital, to examine Marx's Gothic-realist handling of Capital's criminal deeds. Capital is criminogenic because it possesses, or, rather, is possessed by, 'one single life impulse, the tendency to create value and surplus value', an impersonal impulse that is vampiric: 'Capital is dead labour, that, vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks' (vol. 35, p. 241). In effect, the article partially elaborates Francis Wheen's proposal that *Capital* 'can be read as a vast Gothic novel whose heroes are enslaved and consumed by the monster they created' (Wheen 2006). Marx's portrayals of two crime scenes are examined: the evidence of Capital's systemic cannibalism as it appears in *Capital*'s first sentence and, relatedly, the workspace of a 20-year-old milliner, Mary Anne Walkley, who was killed by overwork in June 1863.⁷

Overwhelmed by work, Walkley died in her sleep at her place of employment, in Marx's words, 'one of the best millinery establishments in London' (vol. 35, p. 262). Her mistress was Elizabeth Isaacson, known as Madame Elise, a court dressmaker whose garments were labelled: 'By Special Appointment/Dressmaker / To H.R.H. The Princess of Wales / Elise / 170 Regent Street London' (V&A 2009). Walkley's death was publicised by a letter written by a workmate to *The Times* (17 June 1863), signed 'A Tired Dressmaker': 'I am a dressmaker living in a large West-end house of business. I work in a crowded room with 28 others. This morning one of my companions was found dead in her bed, and we all of us think that the long hours and close confinement had had a great deal to do with her end' (qtd in Halbert 2014, p. 51). An inquest held on 20 June saw the coroner derided. In letters to *The Times* (22 June), 'M.D.' complained, 'Can any sane man, with the depositions of the inquest before him, doubt the fact that this girl was murdered?' and 'A.' claimed: 'The same horrible and disgraceful story has been repeated over and over again [...] in these poisonous workrooms' (qtd in Halbert 2014, pp. 51–52). A writer for *The Spectator* (27 June) stated: 'It is as well as natural that a case like that of the girl worked to death the other day in the employ of Madame Elise should excite a peculiar horror. Men and women die every day of overwork [albeit] without a miserere from the press'; in this case, the public horror was admixed with disgust: 'Mr. Isaacson, the proprietor of the establishment—"Madame Elise" being Mrs. Isaacson—has defended himself in a letter as grotesque as any Dickens ever composed' (*The Spectator* 1863, p. 2170). Alluding to the deadly 'stifling' of Walkley and her fellow millinery workers, *Punch, or The London Charivari* (4 July) conjured 'the spectres' of 'suffocated sempstresses [...] who slave—we mean to say, who serve in these establishments'; they are expected 'to work all day and night whenever press of business calls for it', deprived of 'the food that feeds their lungs, and for want of this it happens now and then, that they are suffocated [in] close and crowded rooms' and 'found dead in their beds'—'So the tale is told, and so it will be repeated' (*Punch, or The London Charivari* 1863, p. 4). *The English Woman's Journal* (1 August) noted that Walkley's 'sad fate had caused her to be recently almost as much spoken of as if she had died an actual martyr' and her case 'has been kept before the public by articles and letters in most of the influential journals' (*The English Woman's Journal* 1863, pp. 426, 432). Marx made a critical intervention in the representation of Walkley's case and an enduring contribution to its history—according to a contemporary writer, he immortalised Walkley (Yates 2009)—by embroiling it in the overlapping and interanimated realms of realism and the Gothic within his word-historic critique of political economy. For *Capital* is both like an English realist novel and a premier Gothic volume of world literature.

Section 2 discusses the Gothic realism of *Condition*, Engels's investigation of Capital's structural murderousness, and his pioneering study's elaboration by Marx. The hybrid term 'Gothic realism' recalls the innovative styles of Thomas Carlyle and Dickens. Marx and Engels intently read and were influenced by Carlyle and Dickens.⁸ *Capital*'s generic

smash-ups, compounds and disintegrations, for instance, compare with Dickens's hybrid experiments, as in *Great Expectations* (1861); the Gothic 'haunts the realism of this novel, with spectral and fantastic elements defining its generic hybridity' (Comyn 2018, p. 94). 'Gothic realism' echoes, in particular, Carlyle's formulation 'our real-phantasmagory' in *Past and Present* (Carlyle 1843, p. 108). Engels reviewed this proto-manifesto in 1844 and later enthused over Carlyle's pre-1848 oeuvre: 'Carlyle treated the English language as though it were completely raw material which he had to cast utterly afresh. Obsolete expressions and words were sought out again and new ones invented' (vol. 10, p. 302). Carlyle's invention of 'real-phantasmagory' encapsulated his perception that a morbid interfusion of ordinariness and the phantasmic functioned as an everyday 'condition of England' (p. 1). This is foregrounded in his opening passage's treatment of the opposition between rich and poor, satiated and starving, in terms of a metastasising maleficence: 'some baleful fiat as of Enchantment has gone forth' (p. 1). Carlyle prefigured Marx's explorations and expressions of 'the magic of the bourgeoisie' (vol. 4, p. 283), 'new-fangled sources of wealth, by some strange weird spell, [turning] into sources of want' (vol. 14, p. 655), and Capital's 'enchanted, perverted, topsy-turvy world' (vol. 37, p. 817). While the conjunction of the Gothic and realism reflects some conformity and convergence between these modes of representation, 'Gothic realism', as I see it practiced in Marx and Engels, is a literary compaction and refraction of social division, class struggle and shocking collision; in Marx's words, 'a society founded on the *opposition* of classes [culminates] in brutal *contradiction*, the shock of body against body' (vol. 6, p. 212). This is registered by Maurice Blanchot's warning and wonderment that the 'communist voice' is, among other things, '*at once* tacit and violent, political and scholarly' and 'total and fragmentary'; 'Marx does not live comfortably with this plurality of languages, which always collide and disarticulate themselves in him. Even if these languages seem to converge toward the same end point, they could not be retranslated into each other [...] and oblige those who have to sustain the reading (the practice) of them to submit themselves to ceaseless recasting' (Blanchot 1997, p. 100). Especially in *Capital*, a factor underlying the unstable, shifting and shock-inducing dynamic between the Gothic and realism is Marx's emulation of what in 1837 (vol. 1, p. 18) he called Hegel's *groteske Felsenmelodie*: 'grotesque and rocky melody', in Keston Sutherland's translation (Sutherland 2015, p. 2). Both Engels in *Condition* and Marx in *Capital* ceaselessly cast their readings of our real-phantasmagory away from Carlyle's medievalist Romantic anti-capitalism, and towards revolutionary communist confrontation with Capital and its bourgeois representatives.

Section 3 considers how *Capital* begins *in media res*: 'We find ourselves precisely in the middle of a *gothic novel*' (Bellofiore 2022, p. 199). Marx's first sentence presents, but obscurely, an immense, monstrous collection of evidence of Capital's cannibalism; it becomes appallingly clear only upon revisiting the sentence after reading the whole of Marx's novel. This opening crime scene is linked to his theory of the fetish character (*Fetischcharakter*) of commodities, which is fundamental to critiquing 'the fantasies shaping the phantom-like fabric of social reality' (Vergara 2023, p. 192). Section 4 focuses on the causes of Walkley's death and on Marx's evocation of her shade: murdered in her workplace, she now inhabits an underworld overpopulated by workers killed by wage-labour. It connects her death to the fetish character and cannibalism of the commodity form to demonstrate her killing's inseparability from the first crime scene. The article argues that, because actuality under the rule of Capital is structurally and monstrously criminal, Marx's Gothic works as a realistic medium to represent the criminal monsters and structures constituted by Capital.

2. Gothic Engels and Gothic Marx

There is significant literature comprising the subfield of Gothic Marxism (e.g., [Moretti](#) ([1978] 1983), [Suvin](#) (1982), [Baldick](#) (1987), [Monleón](#) (1990), [Cohen](#) (1993), [Palmer](#) (2000), [Miéville](#) (2002, 2013), [Shaviro](#) (2002), [Löwy](#) (2009), [Larsen](#) (2010), [McNally](#) (2011), [Tomba](#) (2013), [Fisher](#) (2014), [Turl](#) (2015), [Gilman-Opalsky](#) (2016), [Greenaway](#) (2017, 2024), [Rowcroft](#) (2019), [Tally](#) (2019), [Marks](#) (2020), [Zukas](#) (2020), [Althofer](#) (2022b) and [Jones](#) (2022)). Much of it illuminates Marx's Gothic poetics (e.g., [Wilson](#) (1940), [Johnson](#) (1947), [Hyman](#) (1961), [Angenot and Suvin](#) (1980), [Fletcher](#) (1996), [Neocleous](#) (2003, 2005), [Policante](#) (2010), [Lewis](#) (2011), [Sutherland](#) (2011, 2019b), [Martin](#) (2015), [Reddeman](#) (2015), [Steven](#) (2017, 2022), [Hill](#) (2019), [Riley](#) (2021) and [Althofer and Musgrove](#) (2024)), and some Engels's (e.g., [Hyman](#) (1962), [Kehler](#) (2008), [Althofer](#) (2020, 2022a) and [Marshall](#) (2021)). Since Fredric Jameson deplored 'that boring and exhausted paradigm, the gothic' ([Jameson](#) 1991, p. 289), and Jacques Derrida published *Spectres de Marx* (1993), Gothic Marxism has burgeoned. To date, its principal focus has been Marx's sustained use of 'the gothic mode as a vital explanatory framework for representing capital' ([Rowcroft](#) 2019, p. 191). 'Capitalism is a horror story', as Mark Steven aphorises; 'capitalist accumulation is, in all its forms, a catastrophically exploitative relationship between human beings [that] requires the productive grist of blood, brain, and bodies' ([Steven](#) 2022, pp. 29, 30–31). In essence, to adapt Franco Berardi's terminology, all capitalism is 'intimately Splatter'—*Splatterkapitalismus*; every commodity, made and haunted by human pith, 'the splatter-commodity' ([Berardi](#) 2009, pp. 53–54; see [Steven](#) 2017). Capital's principal ideology, political economy, avows, Marx observed, 'the eternal Nature-ordained necessity for capitalist production' (vol. 35, p. 450). In actuality, its rancid mode of production is an infernal force and monstrous fraud 'contrary to nature' ([Roberts](#) 2017, p. 104). Marxist critique of Capital must use and intensify Gothic horror to realistically convey not only how Capital mangles workpeople physically and psychologically, but also how it will stay haunted by its own grisliness, among other things, until its blessed end.

Left to its own vampiric drive and devices, Capital would grind down the human forever, condemning the future to intensified repetitions of past and present bourgeois society: a hellscape freighted with crimes accumulated on an immense scale. Recently, Ben [Ware](#) (2024) developed Marx's personification of Capital as 'a mechanical monster [*ein mechanisches Ungeheuer*] whose body fills whole factories, and whose demon power [*dämonische Kraft*] breaks out into the fast and furious whirl', or whirling dance (*Wirbeltanz*), 'of his countless working organs' (vol. 35, pp. 384–85). Ware outlines a dialectic, or macabre dance, of 'demonic capitalism' and 'the revolutionary demonic'; the former 'entails the devastation of the earth and the possible annihilation of human life itself', the latter 'marks the point at which collective humanity might begin to exist in the first place' (p. 60 EPUB). *Capital's* recurring monster analogies carry, as Julian Murphet claims, 'the ultimate vision of horror'—'one of a self-perpetuating, inhuman system of technological "dead labour" in which the working class is obliged to reproduce itself as a class on a structural basis in a process of self-genocide' ([Murphet](#) 2016, p. 663).

Drug consumption is a condition of working-class 'self-genocide'. Both *Condition* and *Capital* argue that opiates enfeeble, estrange and deaden English working-class children and families in the interests of Capital expanding its human field of exploitation. The narco-Gothic and Capital's necropolitical economy are integrated internationally too. Marx alluded to the English opium trade when he observed that 'the extension of the Asiatic markets is enforced by "destruction of the human race" (the wholesale extinction of Indian hand-loom weavers)' (vol. 35, p. 462). 'Fanatically bent on making value expand itself', the capitalist, he argued, 'ruthlessly forces the human race to produce for production's sake' (p. 588). To that never-ending end, the capitalist will force drugs upon the worker

to prolong her productive labour. Before Mary Anne Walkley died, ‘her failing labour power [*Arbeitskraft*] was revived by occasional supplies of sherry, port, or coffee’ (p. 261). ‘The modern gothic’, Jameson claims, ‘depends absolutely in its central operation on the construction of *evil*’ (Jameson 1991, p. 290). Marx’s Gothic is modern (Fletcher 1996; Osborne 2005, pp. 16–17) but does not attribute crime to ‘evil’ capitalists. He used irony, satire, sarcasm and ‘kersey snort[s] of derision’ (Johnson 1947, p. 243) against individual capitalists and capitalist representatives; in Walkley’s case, he ridiculed her employer’s reputation for respectability: ‘employed in a highly respectable dress-making establishment, exploited by a lady with the pleasant name of Elise’ (vol. 35, p. 261). Although Capital is demonic, capitalists are not demonised, despite their dehumanised and dehumanising actions.

In his preface to *Capital*’s first (German) edition, Marx gave readers notice of his methodology and of the visual evocativeness of his writing: ‘I paint the capitalist and the landlord in no sense *couleur de rose* [*keineswegs in rosigem Licht*]. But here individuals are dealt with only in so far as they are the personifications of economic categories, embodiments of particular class relations and class interests. My standpoint’, he continued, ‘can less than any other make the individual responsible for relations whose creature he socially remains, however much he may subjectively raise himself above them’ (vol. 35, p. 10). In a Victorian working-class parody, *Miner’s Catechism* (1844), the catechumen Peter Poverty is obliged to repeat the ten commandments of ‘my master, who is a Coal Owner’. No. IV reads in part, ‘I, thy Master, want as much work out of thee as possible’, and no. VI in full: ‘Thou shalt work thyself to death and commit self-murder’ (qtd in Vicinus 1974, pp. 76–77). For Marx, however, the poor creature Walkley did not murder herself, nor did the bourgeois creature her mistress individually kill her. In the life-and-death class struggle between *dämonische Kraft* and *Arbeitskraft*, a realistic representation of Capital’s crimes necessitates a relational and structural investigation of its monstrous, self-perpetuating system, whose immanent tendency is to compel as much work as possible, *in extremis* and *ad infinitum*.

Marx and Engels also portrayed workers dying through underwork and unemployment, from poverty, hunger, exposure and disease. *Condition* is in parts a pre-Marxist work, and its conceptual apparatus is affected by methodological individualism, such as the tendency to demonise the individual bourgeois and his lethal money-greed. Nonetheless, Engels prefigured Marx’s structurally mediated approach to Capital’s immanent murderousness by articulating a generative theory of ‘social murder’—a theory that has been recently revived (Medvedyuk et al. 2021; Verso Books 2024). He outlined a hitherto unnamed crime so unprecedented, so institutionalised and so imponderable as to seem undetectable. Speaking of paupers starving to death, he reported that English workers and working-class activists, particularly Chartists, ‘call this “social murder”, and accuse our whole society’—here, ‘society’ means the English bourgeoisie—‘of perpetrating this crime perpetually’ (vol. 4, p. 330). Bourgeois society ‘places hundreds of proletarians in such a position that they inevitably meet a too early and an unnatural death’ (p. 393). Because the bourgeoisie places proletarians ‘under conditions in which they cannot live’, knows that they ‘must perish, and yet permits these conditions to remain, its deed is murder just as surely as the deed of the single individual’ (pp. 393–94).

According to Ernst Bloch, ‘the detective novel requires a process of collecting evidence, penetrating backward to a past crime’ (Bloch 1988, p. 266). Marx and Engels also searched forward and saw future crime. Evidence that they collected and produced to detect Capital’s typical crimes and *modus operandi* justified their forecast of its perpetual criminality, tending toward, in Marx’s words, ‘the coming degradation and final depopulation of the human race’ (vol. 35, p. 275), should Capital itself not be expropriated and extinguished. Berardi’s reflections, based on Roberto Saviano’s *Gomorra* (2006), that prior to neoliberalism crime was ‘a marginal function of the capitalist system’, that ‘capitalism has turned into

a criminal system' and that 'the production of instruments of mass destruction have become irreplaceable techniques of economic competition' (Berardi 2009, pp. 52–53), require qualification. In Marx and Engels's Gothic-realist representations of Capital's homicidal and torturous monstrosity, capitalism was never not criminal, crime has always been central to capitalist reality, and, concomitantly, as they argue in *The Communist Manifesto*, the production of instruments of mass destruction is inherent to economic competition because capitalism is at one and the same time a global mode of production and a global mode of destruction. Following *Condition* and the *Manifesto*, Engels theorised at length how Capital endogenously proliferates mechanisms of mass destruction and extermination (Streeck 2020).

Engels edited Florence Kelley-Wischnewetzky's English translation of *Condition* in 1887. 'Realism', he told Harkness the following year, 'implies, beside truth of detail, the truthful reproduction of typical characters under typical circumstances' (vol. 48, p. 167). Even if this statement 'sent literary Marxist criticism down an overly referential, antifigurative path' (Kornbluh 2019, p. 46), Engels's own writing in *Condition*, both his original German and the English he authorised, took many figurative turns, not least to evoke Capital's bloody infinity—its structural disposition to serial murder *en masse* in perpetuity. The germinal role of his 'experiments with exploring urban space' (Kornbluh, p. 50) concerns not only urban realism, to reprise Merrifield, but also Urban Gothic. Ethnographically and imaginatively, he reconstructed Manchester's 'macrostructure' and, within the 'dark, dense belt formed by Manchester's working class and their dwellings', discovered a kind of 'corresponding microstructure' (Marcus 1974, pp. 178–79). He detected class-based apartheid, *avant la lettre*, in 'the very spatial stuff of the city': 'insulated corridors of transit between the suburbs and the central city' for bourgeois commuters 'effectively hid what lay just behind, the poor man's world of the dark, congested courts and lanes'—'terra incognita' (Schwarzbach 1982, p. 80)—inhabited by savage proletarians the bourgeoisie needed to architecturally sequester, constrict and control.⁹ Engels's counter-forensic explorations haunt such contemporary non-fiction and fiction as Eyal Weizman's *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation* (2007) and China Miéville's *The City and The City* (2009). In other words, his investigative, aesthetic and truth practices relate not only to the tradition and theory of 'critical realism', which dates back through his letter to Harkness and was most systemically expounded and applied by Georg Lukács (1971), but also to 'a category of literary and artistic creation that could be identified as "critical irrationalism"' (Löwy 2007, p. 193) or 'critical unrealism' (Sayre and Löwy 1984; see Greenaway 2024, pp. 26–33).

Engels's *truth of detail*, then, relates to the Gothic and realism. The denotative verisimilitude of his 'naming the patent medicines that contain laudanum and are thus responsible for the deaths of children' (Hyman 1962, p. 53) and of Marx mentioning Walkley's drinking of alcohol and caffeine, and so their recognition that drug use can be a telling clue to Capital's typical predations, link their analyses to the subgenre that Carol Margaret Davison has termed 'the Gothic pharmography—a work that chronicles the process of drug/alcohol seduction and addiction' (Davison 2009, p. 205). In *Condition*, drugs serve in the arsenal that makes workers 'weak and resigned to their fate, obedient and faithful to the vampire property-holding class' (vol. 4, p. 526). 'As though', Engels ironised, the English bourgeoisie 'rendered the proletarians a service in first sucking out their very life-blood' (p. 564) and then in reviving them by supplies of palliatives. Here, 'capitalist realism', 'in which agency is dissolved in a phantasmagoric haze of psychic and physical intoxicants' (Fisher 2009, p. 73), flips into 'the Gothic everyday' (Werner 2018).

Engels reused the vampire motif in "The English Ten Hours' Bill" (1850). Marx quoted this article in *Capital* to underscore Capital's own shocking addiction and insatiability: 'The prolongation of the working day beyond the limits of the natural day, into the night, only

acts as a palliative. It quenches only in a slight degree the vampire thirst for the living blood of labour'; therefore, 'the vampire will not lose its hold [Engels wrote] "so long as there is a muscle, a nerve, a drop of blood to be exploited"' (vol. 35, pp. 263, 306). These details of *anatomical realism* (see Poovey 1995, pp. 27–28; and Krishnamurty 2000, pp. 431–33) perform 'the work of bodily affect': by engaging vampirism as 'a gothic technology that graphically illustrates and appeals to the sensations', *Condition* exemplifies how, as Grace Kehler argues, 'Victorian attempts at social reform'—actually, in Engels's case, arguments for social revolution—'were routed through the visceral, sensible knowledge of the body' (Kehler 2008, p. 437), especially the suffering, mortified body of the worker.

Engels adapted other Gothic tropes to illuminate horrific truths about Capital's terrorisation of the proletariat. The tropes of viviseptulture and torture convey the physical and psychological agonies of factory work: 'condemnation to be buried alive in the mill, to give constant attention to the tireless machine is felt as the keenest torture by the operatives, and its action upon mind and body is in the long run stunting in the highest degree' (vol. 4, p. 466). Also in his Gothic, feudal castles and dungeons seem transfigured into workhouses and factories. During one of his Dantesque walking tours of Manchester, a workhouse, 'like a citadel, looks threateningly down from behind its high walls and parapets on the hilltop, upon the working-people's quarter below' (p. 352). Engels's image of this looming edifice intimates that Capital oversees, siphons and despoils people's quiddities. It looks forward to analogous structures in diverse Gothic-realist texts, such as Stoker's, Kafka's and Peake's uncanny castles, and the vaporising pyramidoids in Orwell. More immediately, the whole formal and conceptual architecture of *Condition* itself formed the ichnography of Marx's *magnum opus*.

Capital is 'an immense structure, dark and strong like the old Trier basilica', swimming in 'mists' and 'septentrional lights' (Wilson 1940, p. 289), Marx's 'theory is a haunted house of spectres and vampires' (Miéville 2002, p. 46), and he guides us through Capital's 'House of Terror', namely, 'a gigantic "Workhouse" for the industrial worker [that] is called the Factory' (vol. 35, p. 282). All this is partly because Marx built upon themes, theories and narrative designs developed by Engels (Hyman 1962, p. 52; Blackledge 2019; Althofer 2020). Engels recalled his original intention to deal with the condition of the working class in England 'in a single chapter of a more comprehensive work on the social history of England. However, the importance of that subject soon made it necessary for me to investigate it separately' (vol. 4, p. 302). Likewise, because capitalism 'is a social system that suppresses its own crimes and is based on making its own past invisible' (Lotz 2020, p. 83), Marx required the monumental, multivolume framework of *Capital* to make Capital's *Bildung* visible and legible. In his refuge in mid-Victorian England, 'the realist novel, with its narrative panoramas of bourgeois society', was the 'closest historical cognate' to his stupendous project (Lütticken 2017, p. 230).

In July 1865, Marx told Engels that 'the advantage of my writings is that they are an artistic whole', and in February 1867, just before sending the manuscript of *Capital* for publication, he commended Balzac's story "The Unknown Masterpiece" (1831) to Engels (vol. 42, pp. 173, 348). Marx partly identified with Balzac's artist-hero, Frenhofer, whose quest is to produce a painting as realistic as possible. Frenhofer obsessively reworks a single canvas for over a decade, eventually declaring triumph: 'There is such depth of color upon that canvas, the air is so true, that you cannot distinguish it from the air about us. Where is art? lost, vanished!' His art has become so real, apparently inapparent or artless, that it is invisible, having merged with its subject and thus melted into the air. Another painter, however, perceives only a bad picture, a bizarre, swirling muddle: 'I can see nothing there but colors piled upon one another in confusion, and held in restraint by a multitude of confused lines which form a wall of painting' (Balzac [1831] 1899, pp. 41–42). Balzac spoke

to Marx's aspiration and anxiety, in the facture of his own artistic whole, to represent, aesthetically, truthfully and critically, 'the air' of the second nature of the capitalist world that surrounded and suffused his lived experience: a hazy phantasmagoria of psychic and physical pollutants.

For the English edition of *The Communist Manifesto*, authorised by Engels in 1888, Samuel Moore poetically turned Marx's phrase *Alles Ständische und Stehende verdampft* into 'All that is solid melts into air' (vol. 6, p. 487). A more literal translation of *verdampfen* is 'to evaporate', 'to become vapor, which is to say *atmos*, the substance of atmosphere' (Taylor 2016, p. 45). For Jesse Oak Taylor, 'modernity is haunted' and 'its ghost leaves carbon footprints': "'Air'" is no longer synonymous with "outside," a space of nothingness or a void into which solidity passes, never to return. It has become instead an expansive interior, a state of suspension, a haunted house' (pp. 4, 45). Engels had suggested that fossil capitalism hangs in the atmosphere, poisonously, heavily and hauntingly. In *Letters from Wuppertal* (1839), he wrote about his native region, Rhineland's industrialised Wupper valley, which was known as the German Manchester (*das deutsche Manchester*). His letters reported on workrooms 'where people breathe in more coal fumes than oxygen—and in the majority of cases beginning already at the age of six' (vol. 2, p. 9)—meaning that burnt fossilised plant matter permeated workers, scourging them the inside out, often from a young age. In *Condition*, he observed that Bradford was regularly 'enveloped in a grey cloud of coal smoke' (vol. 4, p. 343) and the atmosphere of Manchester's working-class dwellings was 'laden and darkened by the smoke' (p. 361). An industrial by-product of all large English cities was 'the harmful influence of an abnormal atmosphere in the working-people's quarters, where [...] everything combines to poison the air' (p. 395). Engels's oppressive cityscapes, in which carbon bootprints stamp on workers' bodies, respiration and neighbourhoods, adumbrated the future, everywhere; the present global atmosphere is overladen and poisoned by the combined ghosts of smoke past.

Marx also surveyed the air inside bourgeois society. His *Paris Manuscripts* (1844) refer to workers' lungs, dwellings and workplaces 'contaminated with the pestilential breath of civilisation' (vol. 3, p. 307)—condemnation to live burial within capitalist atmosphere. Reading the *Manifesto* with regard to breathing Capital, which harrows and suffocates life force, shows that Marx and Engels anticipated Peter Sloterdijk's conceptualisation of 'atmoterrorism' in *Luftbeben* (2002) and Donatella Di Cesare's 'capitalist asphyxia' in *Immunodemocracy* (2020) (see Althofer 2022b, pp. 108–12). The condition of air is a key attribute of the crime scenes in *Capital*. A foggy realm (*Nebelregion*) appearing to cover up Capital's cannibalism is discussed in the next section. How Capital's constriction of breathing-room or airspace (*Luftraum*) contributed to Walkley's death is discussed in Section 4. Capital leaves its footprints, its fingerprints, its whole monstrous impression on the air. In other words, then, asphyxial air is another of the monstrous forms assumed by Capital.

Marx and Engels's critical attention to the atmospheric conditions of class struggle and human survival helps us to decipher industrial-capitalist history on Frenhofer's 'wall of painting', an abstraction akin to an image that Engels recast from *Past and Present* to encapsulate the world remade by capitalist fiat: 'the furious vortex of disorder and chaos' (vol. 3, p. 459). The welter of paint that perplexes Frenhofer's fellow artist delineates a miasmatic labyrinth, such as capitalist industry was making of the Parisian environment at the time Balzac was writing, despite the story's setting in 1612. Frenhofer's painting sounds like a Gothic-realist picture of both the process and the consequence of Capital supplanting the city's pre-industrial air with the second nature of its noxious exhalations and ungrounding, dismantling and melting the human corporeal bases able to distinguish

between the conditions of existence necessary for human life and the needs of Capital's *Bildung*, which inflict conditions guaranteed to beget human destruction.

3. Still Life of a Crime Scene

Dickens, David Masson observed in 1859, 'can paint a haggard scene of low city life, so as to remind one of some of the Dutch artists' (Masson 1859, p. 242). Dickens could also paint fresh scenes of metropolitan commerce. In *The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby* (1839), he portrayed the new industrialised world of commodity consumption with a nod to 'old' Dutch art. His title character views 'a strange procession' of 'quickly-changing and ever-varying objects'; London's 'noisy, bustling, crowded streets', lit by 'brightly-burning lamps', are 'illuminated besides with the brilliant flood that streamed from the windows of the shops' piled with commodities 'in rich and glittering profusion', 'clothes for the newly-born, drugs for the sick, coffins for the dead': 'Life and death went hand in hand' in a 'motley dance like the fantastic groups of the old Dutch painter' (Dickens 1839, pp. 307–8). Illustrating 'Commodity Gothicism' (Lootens 2016), Dickens's description also recalls the German artist Hans Holbein's *Totentanz* (*Dance of Death*) woodcut series (1523–1525) and evokes the materials and illusions of a phantasmagoria show, akin to Marx's account of the visual effect of the commodity form's fetish character: 'a definite social relation between men, that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic [*phantasmagorische*] form of a relation between things' (vol. 35, p. 83). For Masson, 'Dickens is a novelist of the Ideal or Romantic school', not 'the Real school', who 'transports' characters, like Nicholas Nickleby, 'into a world of semi-fantastic conditions, where the laws need not be those of ordinary probability' (pp. 248–49). However, fantasy, or phantasmagoria, is a realist means to represent the surface appearance and phenomenology of everyday life under Capital, and elucidate the productive death-dance, the whirling dance of the mechanical monster, giving rise to profuse goods. Behind the window-framed still life of commodities, the monster of capitalist production.

The first sentence of *Capital*, Chapter 1, "Commodities", is analogous to a Dutch still-life painting and doubles as an image of a crime scene, but these impressions are inapparent on first reading. Marx's German reads, *Der Reichtum der Gesellschaften, in welchen kapitalistische Produktionsweise herrscht, erscheint als eine 'ungeheure Warensammlung', die einzelne Ware als seine Elementarform*.¹⁰ In the standard translation by Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, 'The wealth of those societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails, presents itself as "an immense accumulation of commodities", its unit being a single commodity' (vol. 35, p. 45).¹¹ Marx used the ambiguous verb *erscheint*, 'appears', or Moore and Aveling's 'presents': 'This is indeed nothing but an appearance, the surface mirage of a market system' (Jameson 2011, p. 43). He chose divalent nouns. *Reichtum* can be translated as 'richness' and 'wealth'. If the concepts of richness and wealth are not sharply differentiated in English, still richness has 'a broader meaning: a rich tapestry, an enriching conversation, a rich life or experience, a rich diversity of colour' (Holloway 2015, p. 5). *Warensammlung* denotes 'collection' and 'accumulation'. Capitalist societies presenting their *Reichtum* as an immense collection of things reminds us of a still-life subgenre, the *Pronkstilleven*. *Pronk* blends 'rich', 'sumptuous' and 'ostentatious'. The *Pronk* still life emblematised the rise of Dutch mercantilism, the ascendant bourgeoisie and its proclivity to exhibit its treasures. This relates to Kornbluh's unpacking of Marx's neologism *Schatzbildung*: 'hoarding', the standard translation, does not convey the 'aesthetic consequence' of 'the union of *Schatz* and *Bildung*, of treasure and growth, education, maturation', and 'the substantification of *Bildung* from *Bild*, images, figures', which imply Capital's 'loving of imaging—of treasuring development, creation, shaping, and, indeed,

aestheticization' (Kornbluh 2010, p. 26). Marx recast this love in terms of the brute nature of Capital, its preying on and stilling of human life.

Coruscating paintings of bourgeois possessions are surface appearances, makeovers, of market structures, forces and outcomes, and other economic brutalities. As historicised later in *Capital*, Dutch capitalism accumulated riches by barbarism. Marx characterised the Dutch conquest of the East Indies by 'their system of stealing men, to get slaves for Java': 'The young people stolen, were thrown into the secret dungeons of Celebes, until they were ready for sending to the slave-ships' (vol. 35, p. 740). He also regarded the Dutch subaltern classes; 'by 1648, the people of Holland were more overworked, poorer and more brutally oppressed than those of all the rest of Europe put together' (p. 742). Dutch Capital is a rampant monster, like Capital *per se*, blood-spattered and -spattering, but this is not readily apparent in Marx's first sentence. However, the letter of his writing furnishes a clue that the superficial appearance of *Reichtum* is itself evidence that crime has been committed, for *ungeheure* means 'monstrous' as well as 'immense'.¹² In English, the senses of 'immensity' and 'monstrosity' merge in 'enormity', like the enormity or flagrant horror of Dutch colonial criminality, which lies not just behind, but within, the *Reichtum* portrayed and the pleonexia evidenced by the *Pronkstilleven*.

'Dutch paintings, offering the silent, intimate expression of a way of life' (Rancière [2003] 2007, p. 14), thus enable a novel approach to interpreting *Capital*'s 'visual weirdliness', to borrow one of Masson's descriptions of Dickens's prose (p. 243). Hegel's lectures on aesthetics may have influenced Marx's decision to put his literary *Pronkstilleven* in a prominent position. As 'what occurs on the canvas is', in Jacques Rancière's reading of Hegel's study of Dutch painting, 'an autonomy of pictorial presence' (p. 77), so Marx relates the illusory autonomisation of the commodity. He pictures, then pulls apart, its appearance of autonomy above and beyond Capital's way of life and death. Following his first sentence's rich polysemy, his minute analysis of the commodity turns on first appearances, ambiguities and uncanny affects. At the end of Chapter 1, in the section "The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof", he implied that rendering the commodity as it appears 'in reality' means ascending the hierarchy of genres, from the lowly still life to the lofty atmospherics of religious iconography: 'A commodity appears [*scheint*], at first sight, a very trivial thing, and easily understood. Its analysis shows that it is, in reality, a very queer thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties' (vol. 35, p. 81). Therefore, 'to find an analogy, we must have recourse to the mist-enveloped regions of the religious world'—*die Nebelregion der religiösen Welt*—where 'productions of the human brain appear as independent beings endowed with life, and entering into relation both with one another and the human race' (p. 83). Existential estrangement in this nebulous or foggy realm—*Nebel* also translates to 'fog'—is apparent in the presentation of a seemingly ordinary table: 'so soon as it steps forth as a commodity, it is changed into something transcendent'; the table *qua* commodity 'not only stands with its feet on the ground, but, in relation to all other commodities, it stands on its head, and evolves out of its wooden brain grotesque ideas' (p. 82).

Marx's phenomenology of Capital's creation of a mystifying second nature recalls *Genesis* 2:6 in Martin Luther's translation: *ein Nebelging auf von der Erde und feuchtete alles Land*—a mist arose from the Earth and moistened all the land; in the King James Version, 'there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground'.¹³ Reading Marx further, it becomes apparent that the capitalist world is one initiated, and inundated forever after, by tempests of blood and gore. The concluding image of Chapter 31, "Genesis of the Industrial Capitalist", suggests that the *Nebelregion* is an emanation of the primal and daily-repeated irruption of capitalist accumulation: 'If money, according to [Marie] Augier, "comes into the world with a congenital blood stain on one cheek", capital comes dripping

from head to foot, from every pore, with blood and dirt' (vol. 35, p. 748). Moore and Engels's 'All that is solid melts into air' recalls Hamlet's imagined self-portrait of suicidal decorporealization as a kind of spontaneous deliquescence: 'O that this too too solid flesh would melt, / Thaw and resolve itself into a dew, / Or that the Everlasting had not fixed / His canon 'gainst self-slaughter' (Shakespeare [1603] 2003, 1.2.129–32). Melting flesh and pastoral bedewing euphemise putrefying flesh and bloody outpouring. Likewise, the misty regions into which commodity production resolves occult the production processes that flay and liquify workers into a flood of commodities.

Touching abyssal and visceral questions of origin, Marx shattered the sense of the commodity's autonomy from 'productions of the human brain'. For the commodity's 'brain' is constituted by the consumption of human brains and other body parts and powers. 'The mystical character of commodities does not originate', he argued, 'in their use value' (vol. 35, p. 82). Rather, their mysticism emerges from the apotheosis and aestheticisation of Capital's cannibalisation of working bodies; 'it is a physiological fact' that 'useful kinds of labour, or productive activities', like table- and dress-making, 'are functions of the human organism, and that each such function, whatever may be its nature or form, is essentially the expenditure of human brain, nerves, muscles, &c. [*und so weiter*]' (p. 82). Marx's list of body parts, receding into a mordantly throwaway expression, *und so weiter*, 'and so on', is 'a materialist reemphasis of the physical human experience at the origin of exchange value', which implicitly portrays the living brains, nerves and muscles of workers as 'ingredients at the feast of the capitalist. The capitalist', personifying Capital, 'is the great devourer of this undifferentiated human labour' (Sutherland 2011, pp. 43–44; see Fraser 2022). Capital's vampirism and cannibalism derive from its general form and process as, in Marx's designation, an *Auspumper*—'literally a pumper-out', undertaking 'the *Aussaugung* of the worker, literally the sucking out, or sucking hollow' (Sutherland 2019b, p. 205), of generations of short-lived, throwaway human beings, Marx wrote, 'rapidly replacing each other' (vol. 35, p. 275). *Capital's* first sentence can also be deciphered, then, as a Gothic satire on the *banketje* (banquet) subject of still-life painting. The immense, monstrous accumulation of commodities visualises the structural enormity of Capital's incessant feasting upon living labour.

In *Nicholas Nickleby*, London's noisy, crowded streets typify the market, or what Marx called 'the sphere of circulation', where the crimes of commodity production are inapparent. In *Great Expectations*, Dickens seems 'to suggest that any kind of market relations between human beings is robbery, or, worse, cannibalism' (Houston 1994, p. 164). He explores his protagonist Pip's vulnerability to 'the cannibalistic world of Victorian England' (p. 163; see Robinson 2017). As a marketable object, 'learning only to consume or be consumed' (p. 164), Pip's lesson is wrought upon his body. Witness his development from out-pumped, skeletal consumable—'Little more than skin and bone' (Dickens 1861, vol. 3, p. 322)—to plumped-up, devouring self, 'swelled' and 'gentlefolked' (vol. 2, p. 125). Similarly, Marx contrasts the worker's emaciated, fragmented body with the capitalist's *Hochbrust*, in Sutherland's translation, 'high, convex, swollen breast' (Sutherland 2015, p. 11), which bursts with the criminogenic drive to accumulation. This embodied class difference highlights the opposition between human life and the power of Capital. Marx quotes a senior physician of the North Staffordshire Infirmary describing the 'degenerescence' of potters: 'as a rule, stunted in growth, ill-shaped, and frequently ill-formed in the chest; they become prematurely old and are certainly short-lived' (vol. 35, p. 253). The potters' corporeal immiseration and short-livedness typify the reality that workers cannot have any expectation of a long, healthy life under the rule of Capital.

In *Capital*, then, Marx outright guides us to scenes of Capital's crimes. We depart circulation's 'noisy sphere, where everything takes place on the surface and in view of

all men', and descend 'into the hidden abode of production, on whose threshold there stares us in the face "No admittance except on business"'. Faced with this dramatic shift in perspective, 'we shall see, not only how capital produces, but how capital is produced. We shall at last force the secret of profit making' (vol. 35, p. 186), for the sake of which KILLING is NO MURDER. Marx's bridge-passage between, and coverage of both, the spheres of circulation and production manifests 'the grand omniscience of a Balzacian embrace' (Murphet 2021, pp. 115–16). The entry notice alludes to the inscription on hell's threshold in Dante, 'Abandon Every Hope, All You Who Enter Here', but we will witness sufferings worse than the punishments of his hell. In 1863, John Edward White of the Children's Employment Commission investigated the production of Lucifer matches and interviewed poisoned child workers who ate their irregular meals 'in the very workrooms that are', in Marx's digest of White's Blue Book, 'pestilent with phosphorus. Dante would have found the worst horrors of his Inferno surpassed in this manufacture' (vol. 35, p. 254). Marx will guide us through English workplaces that correspond with secret Dutch dungeons and Russian slaughterhouses. We will learn that capitalist production progresses always at workers' expense: '*Experimenta in corpore vili*, like those of anatomists on frogs, were formally made' (p. 460).¹⁴ Proletarians are as expendable and replaceable as frogs. For example, bourgeois physician, philosopher and ideologue Andrew Ure conducted galvanic experiments on the corpse of hanged murderer Matthew Clydesdale in 1818, and in *The Philosophy of Manufactures* (1835) exulted in the machine-driven choreography of proletarians even in 'the tadpole state', that is, child labourers (Ure qtd in Althofer 2022a, p. 188).

Marx transports us from the foggy sphere of circulation's obscure still lifes and religious fetishes to realistic pictures of Capital 'dissecting the labouring body' (McNally 2011, p. 17). As David McNally writes of Adriaen Adriaenszoon, the anonymised and anatomised subject of Rembrandt's *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp* (1632), who had stolen a coat: 'For that, he was convicted, executed and dissected. It is such struggles between life and death, bound up with our relations to things, that Marx tracks throughout *Capital*' (p. 267). Rembrandt's group portrait also serves as a symbolic *banketje* still life. It pictures bourgeois élites, members of Amsterdam's Guild of Surgeon-Anatomists, feasting their eyes as well as the aura of their corporate prestige on a vile body being scientifically carved by their *praelector* Tulp, who was also a magistrate and city treasurer. Their display of class power over a representative of the Dutch proletariat was something of an *hors d'oeuvre*: after Tulp concluded his lesson, literally inscribed and legible on Adriaenszoon's condemned body, Guild members attended an actual banquet, 'the traditional ritual of the privileged and the powerful, which sharply demarcates them from the hungry rabble whom they govern' (McNally 2011, p. 31). In Marx, proletarian hunger, satiable but barely satiated by the market, is dialectically united with and against the insatiability of Capital, whose prerogative is the vivisection and total consumption of the human body.

As revealed by scaling and descending *Capital*'s precipitous paths, the mysteries of the immense, runic mountain of commodities and the mist that circumfuses it in the first chapter are grounded in the never-done hurly-burly of Capital's industrial and social killing. That mountain and mist are real appearances of Capital's 'growing mountains of the industrially murdered and immiserated poor' (Jennison and Murphet 2019, p. 3). They arise inseparably, by means of Capital pulverizing and vaporising undifferentiated heaps of short-lived ingredients for its feasting.

4. Mary Anne Walkley

Dickens can 'photograph the interior of a hut or of a drawing-room; he can even be minute in his delineations of single articles of dress or of furniture' (Masson 1859, p. 242). Victorian literary critics such as Masson used 'the camera as a metaphor for realist fiction'

(Goodlad 2016, p. 189). Marx and Engels also figured ideology critique of bourgeois society in terms of lens-based media, such as the camera obscura, likening bourgeois ideology to reality inverted. Marx's images of spaces where articles of dress, furniture and other commodities are present suggest not merely inversion, but ontological phantasmagoria—our real-phantasmagory—having the air of reality and irreality, the everyday and the supernatural, at once. Like *Bleak House's* Inspector Bucket, Marx, 'the Dickensian sleuth searching for answers, the solver of mysteries, [strove] to cut through the fog' (Andy Merrifield 2020, p. 60). In *Capital*, 'the warm fog of mystery', the commodity form's 'miracles' and 'transubstantiations', and the quotidian consumption of commodities, all express cannibalism (Sutherland 2011, pp. 71, 75, 195, 201). Marx found that the fogbound regions of commodification fill the expansive interior of Capital's world. If in realist fiction, to use his words, 'the table continues to be that common, every-day thing, wood' (vol. 35, p. 82), then that fiction does not fully reflect and apprehend the reality of the everyday under Capital. For in actuality, as related above, when the table is enstaged as a commodity, it straightaway becomes transcendent, stands upside down and sprouts grotesque ideas out of its brain. 'The lived reality of capitalism is commodity fetishism', China Miéville observes: "'Real" life under capitalism is a fantasy' (Miéville 2002, pp. 41–42). As the fetish character of the commodity constitutes, in Marx's words, Capital's 'religion of everyday life' (vol. 37, p. 817), fantastic modes are necessary to realistically portray the phantasmagorical air of social reality.

As fetishism befogs cannibalism, workplaces where commodities are produced are portrayed realistically when their spaces, processes and atmospheres are accounted as thick with violence because they are imbued by Capital's monstrous duress, *Aussaugung* and its splattering of living labour. In *Capital*, Marx twice used the neologism *Arbeitsqual*, meaning 'work-torture', though the intensity of this signification is flattened by Moore and Aveling's translations to 'drudgery and toil' and 'torment of labour' (vol. 35, pp. 425, 638). The Dantesque inscription 'No admittance except on business' warns that the clandestine interior of production, where profit-making's secret is laid bare by workers bared, pulped and cannibalised, 'is quite simply hell on Earth' (Ware 2024, p. 58 EPUB).

The main precursor of Marx's multiple individualised yet typical portrayals of workplaces as torture chambers where workers are overworked, buried alive and suffocated is Engels. In *Condition*, he describes 'the extraordinary barbarity' of the bourgeoisie's exploitation of dressmakers and sewing-women (vol. 4, p. 498). By his reading, Blue Books on public health implied that these fabric workers effectively sewed their own burial shrouds: 'All the medical men interrogated by the commissioner agreed that no method of life could be invented better calculated to destroy health and induce early death' (p. 499). Crowded workrooms were also crowded lodgings, premonitions of crowded burial-grounds and scenes of crime constantly underway: 'These women usually live in little garret rooms in the utmost distress, where as many crowd together as the space can possibly admit' (p. 500). Hemmed into this hell, their mortal fabric becomes threadbare and tears apart: 'Here they sit bent over their work, sewing from four or five in the morning until midnight, destroying their health in a year or two and ending in an early grave' (p. 500). At this point, Engels mentioned Thomas Hood's "The Song of the Shirt", first published in *Punch* (London, 16 December 1843). Hood's popular verse—'It is not linen you're wearing out, / But human creatures' lives!'—epitomises Victorian seamstress literature. It evokes Capital's drive, in Marx's words, 'to spin [human labour] out to infinity' (vol. 30, p. 179)—'Work—work—work'—showing that its *Bildung* is 'reckless of the health or length of life of the labourer' (vol. 35, p. 275). Updating graveyard poetry for the age of social murder, and stitching together real industry, unreal fetish character and Gothic body-horror, Hood's verse, for all its sentimentalism, truthfully represents typical characters under typical circumstances.

Tables' thoughts, shirts' songs and worn-out workers are signs and wonders of Capital's annihilatory accumulation.

Capital maims and slaughters hecatombs of workers and then, Marx darkly mused, 'with the regularity of the seasons, issues its list of the killed and wounded in the industrial battle' (vol. 35, pp. 428–29). Even after the Factory Acts and Ten-Hour-Day Bill passed, domestic industry remained largely unregulated and structurally deadly. Detailing sacrifices in this sector, Marx sketched Mary Anne Walkley's death in one of London's 'best millinery establishments' (p. 262). We first encounter Walkley, unnamed at this point, in an underworld of undead workers, when Marx invokes the *nekya* in Book XI of the *Odyssey*. Contemporised with Blue Books, his necromantic scene echoes the likes of Dickens's death-dancing motley of commodities, but here the commodities are, or were, living people:

From the motley crowd of labourers of all callings, ages, sexes, that press on us more busily than the souls of the slain on Ulysses, on whom—without referring to the Blue Books under their arms—we see at a glance the mark of over-work, let us take two more figures whose striking contrast proves that before capital all men are alike—a milliner and a blacksmith. (p. 261)

He then summarised newspaper reports of the last days of the life, or living death, of the milliner, Walkley, in June 1863, at 'the height of the season' (p. 261); in fashion, 'what is called "the season"' saw 'the sudden placing of large orders that have to be executed in the shortest possible time' (p. 481; see [Leslie 2005](#), p. 80). London's dailies dealt with her death under 'the "sensational" heading, "Death from simple over-work"'. Capital's crimes and battle-lists being methodical, formulaic and frequent, reports of such deaths were commonplace. 'The old, often-told story'—here, Marx put a footnote to Engels's abovementioned vignette of superexploited fabric workers—'was once more recounted'. Walkley 'worked, on an average, 16½ hours, during the season often 30 hours, without a break' (p. 261). To fill orders for a ball in honour of the new Princess of Wales, she sewed 'without intermission for 26½ hours, with 60 other girls, 30 in one room, that only afforded 1/3 of the cubic feet of air required for them'; 'they slept in pairs in one of the stifling holes into which the bedroom was divided by partitions of board'; she 'fell ill on the Friday, died on Sunday', and a doctor, 'called too late to the deathbed', testified 'before the coroner's jury that "Mary Anne Walkley had died from long hours of work in an over-crowded workroom, and a too small and badly ventilated bedroom"' (pp. 261–62).

Walkley's long shifts were appallingly typical: 'the official working day means for each worker usually 12 hours by night or day. But the overwork beyond this amount is in many cases, to use the words of the English official report, "truly fearful"' (p. 265). Forced to execute the season's orders in short time, Walkley was effectively executed, her name added to one of Capital's seasonal body-counts and, in Marx's classical flourish, her soul sent to the underworld, to join the countless slain who jostle us for the posthumous justice of being recognised as they were not in life. Marx likely saw the *Punch* cartoon about Walkley's fate, "The Haunted Lady, Or 'The Ghost' in the Looking-Glass" (4 July 1863). It depicts a young woman wearing a new gown, who looks in a mirror, only to see the death-stricken seamstress who made the gown; behind her, a Madame La Modiste says, 'We would not have disappointed your ladyship, at any sacrifice, and the robe is finished à merveille'" (*Punch, or The London Charivari* 1863, p. 5).

Conveyed via 'his witnesses and the voices of those others who testify in dispassionate horror or pity', 'Marx's spatial form', in Jameson's outline, 'consists in the patient exploration of spaces'; a counter-forensic 'search which more and more minute moves from statistics and regions to towns, streets, houses, rooms, and finally that last glimpse of the nothingness in the back room' ([Jameson 2011](#), p. 126). Processed by Capital as nothing but exploitable, expendable and replaceable living labour power, Walkley's life force was

stifled and sucked into virtual nothingness. Her remains were ‘sensational’ stories and the articles of dress that she had made. Those articles can be imagined among the monstrous collection of commodities that opens *Capital*. For Sutherland, ‘The commodity packed full of dead labour makes over the living reality of labour in the compulsorily fetishistic vision of consumers living and eating under capitalism’ (Sutherland 2011, p. 195). In *Punch*, the ‘Haunted Lady’ is frightened by seeing the ‘Ghost’ of the worker who made the fashionable dress that she wears. In Marx, wearers of articles made by Walkley do not even glimpse, let alone glean, that they possess and are dressed in bodily traces of her living labour. In *Capital*’s criminal real world, she is incorporated into a deindividuated, undifferentiable mash of brains, nerves, muscles, &c. *Capital*’s regard for the memory of dead workers being shorter than their truncated lives, its lists of the battle dead and wounded become an updated variation on *damnatio memoriae*. In Marx’s solidaristic underworld, shadowing the hidden abode of production, Mary Anne Walkley retains or recovers at least the individual identity of her name.

A small, torturous sweatshop appeared to define and confine Walkley’s short working life, but Marx’s spatial form traces causes of her death back out to houses, streets, towns, industrial battles and statistics that expose *Capital*’s *Aussaugung*. Focussing on the airspace of her work-torture, Marx quoted a Dr. Letheby, Consulting Physician of the Board of Health: ‘The minimum of air for each adult ought to be in a sleeping room 300, and in a dwelling room 500 cubic feet’ (vol. 35, p. 261). He summarised Blue Books about the matter: ‘It has been stated over and over again that the English doctors are unanimous in declaring that where the work is continuous, 500 cubic feet is the very least space that should be allowed for each person’ (pp. 484–85). He recognised this statistical truth of detail and the general absence of that minimum of air as telltale evidence of *Capital*’s criminality on a massive scale: ‘The sanitary officers, the industrial inquiry commissioners, the factory inspectors, all harp, over and over again, upon the necessity for those 500 cubic feet, and upon the impossibility of wringing them out of capital’ (p. 485). Their official handwringing was at best ineffectual protest, at worst complicity with *Capital* wringing life from workers: ‘They thus, in fact, declare that consumption and other lung diseases among the workpeople are necessary conditions to the existence of capital’ (p. 485). In *Capital*, state officials are ‘Jekyll and Hyde characters’, ‘acting as both advocate and critic’ (Andy Merrifield 2020, p. 44). Marx quoted a factory inspector’s 1865 documentation of pottery workers ‘breathing through protracted days and often nights of labour, a mephitic atmosphere’ that rendered their occupation ‘pregnant with disease and death’ (p. 484). That work in bourgeois society births death and disease—a horror that was the gravamen of Gothic-realist fictions¹⁵ as well as factory reports—evidences *Capital*’s criminal but conventionalised short circuiting of the liminal spaces of womb and tomb.

Marx’s spatial form involved an intensive and extensive investigation of *Capital*’s expropriation and despoliation of breathing space for bare existence. He detected the coming obsolescence, if not extinction, of healthy air and space to live and breathe should *Capital*’s vampiric drive toward expanded self-valorisation continue unchecked on its infinite, criminal course. The Haunted House of his novelisation of the monstrous air and expanding airlessness of bourgeois society—vampirism drains and contaminates air as well as blood—is a critical-realist confrontation with the whole of bourgeois society. Not one occupation or workplace alone, but all of *Capital*’s Haunted House is pregnant with disease and death. However, its socially murderous conditions are made over by ever-present fog, ever-changing fashion, and the ideology that ‘KILLING is NO MURDER’ represents the only possible future.

The murderer Mademoiselle Hortense calls Inspector Bucket ‘a Devil’ (Dickens 1853, p. 523). Marx represents ‘the revolutionary demonic’, to recall Ware’s terms, whose detective

work is still on the always-hot case of ‘demonic capitalism’—killer Capital. Marx’s acute and affecting analysis of local instances, incessant recurrences and the global scales of Capital’s crimes effectively ‘causes the whole architectonic’ of capitalist space, to adapt Jameson’s Gothic-inflected styling of cognitive mapping, ‘to rise up in ghostly profile behind itself, as some ultimate dialectical barrier or invisible limit’ (Jameson 1991, p. 415). In figuring Capital’s spectral limit to unfettered human flourishing as a monster perpetually compelling blood sacrifice and oozing human remains, Marx insisted on the absolute need to fight to end the real horror story of capitalism.

Its horror story encompasses both the infliction of horrors upon workers and the erasure by and from bourgeois history of workers and capitalist horrors. One such history in miniature is the Victoria and Albert Museum’s online Object Record for an evening dress made on Madame Elise’s premises in about 1880 (accession number T.5 to B-1926; see V&A 2009). The record focuses on Madame Elise’s biography *en rose*, never hinting at the death and destruction that shadows this collection item. Whereas the *Punch* cartoon showed a trace of Walkley’s humanity—she is ‘The Ghost’ in the mirror—the museum’s omission of any mention of overworked dressmakers effectively murders even their ghosts. Elise has been appointed a prestigious afterlife, her now-anonymous staff denied one miserable mention of having had a life. When the V&A’s evening dress was made, workers like Walkley were still superexploited and their cohort was increasing. As Wilhelm Liebknecht protested in 1896: ‘And the seamstresses? Has their condition improved? Has the sweating system ceased to flourish? No, no! The number of victims has increased, and if Hood were to rise from his grave, he could add a few more verses to his “Song of the Shirt”’ (Liebknecht [1896] 1908, p. 171). The Object Record is as perfectly Victorian as the museum’s namesakes—the parents-in-law of the Princess of Wales, who bestowed an appointment upon Madam Elise—for it represents the prolongation as well as laundering of Capital’s Victorian-era killing of dressmakers. It reads as an epiphenomenon of ‘Capital’s self-narrative [which] is an endless (and origin-less) line of newly dressed-up versions of itself’ (Best 2024, p. 320 EPUB). Its documentation of the evening dress is less realist than Gothic. Rather than reference the real brutality behind the making of the Elise brand, it manifests the transgenerational grip of the dead/deadly hand of Capital by tacitly affirming murderous means of producing dresses and instituting its own museological fetishisation of a luxury commodity.

The challenge of doing justice to the memory of Walkley, a singular, unknowable person and, as singled out by Marx, a named representative of murdered generations of mostly unnamed workers, weighs on my writing. Does the approach of recounting her case within a theoretical exposition fail, or doom the very attempt, to recover a sense of her humanity? Does the empirical reality of Walkley’s suffering, drawn by Gothic imagery of Capital’s literally breath-taking *Bildung*, risk disappearance into abstractions such as the proletariat’s self-genocide and the commodity’s *Fetischcharakter*? Does the collective necessity for human self-development and proletarian self-emancipation, which are figures, grounds and horizons for theorising those abstractions in the first place, sharpen and intensify the urgency to end the brute reality and story of Capital by being characterised through individual working lives and deaths like Walkley’s?

5. Conclusions After Ruskin

‘And sometimes you will see fat crystals eating up thin ones, like great capitalists and little labourers’ (Ruskin 1890, p. 119). This fantastic snippet from *The Ethics of the Dust* (1866) indicates that John Ruskin was not above critically and comically refracting the real-world incidence of class war and cannibalism through the medium of grotesque realism. Yet his elitist eviscerations in *Fiction, Fair and Foul* (1880) recall J. Toulmin Smith’s deprecation

of Blue Book writers and readers, foully contriving and devouring horror-pictures. For Ruskin, the typical London reader demanded fiction that entertained ‘by varying to his fancy the modes, and defining for his dulness [sic] the horrors, of Death’, and Dickens evidenced ‘brain disease’ by supplying such fiction: ‘In the single novel of *Bleak House* there are nine deaths’ (Ruskin 1890, pp. 158–59, 164). What must Ruskin have made of *Hamlet*’s staggering kill count!

As mentioned above, *The Communist Manifesto*’s ‘All that is solid melts into air’ alludes to Hamlet’s wish that his solid flesh would melt and resolve itself into a dew, and that ‘the Everlasting’ had not forbidden ‘self-slaughter’. He pictures suicide as a foul-is-fair version of the pastoral—self-liquidated flesh as dewy naturalness—transgressing God’s commandment against killing. For Marx and Engels, Capital is the Everlasting of capitalist society. In *Capital*, Marx personifies and, alluding to Diderot, deifies Capital as ‘the strange God’ for whom KILLING was NO MURDER but sacred violence: ‘It proclaimed surplus value making as the sole end and aim of humanity’ (vol. 35, p. 742). It commands proletarian self-liquidation, in Murphet’s expression, ‘a process of self-genocide’, for capitalists to automatically and incessantly pursue the one commandment: ‘Accumulate, accumulate! That is Moses and the prophets!’ (p. 591). Rather than condemning self-slaughter, Capital commands and coerces workers, to recall Engels, to become compliant, fatalistic, and faithful to the vampiric bourgeoisie. It commands and coerces self-sacrifice, forcing living people to stake their lives to, and be alchemised into, dead labour. Yet it pictures its sanguinary exploitation and extraction as a rosy idyll. Marx related that, even as women workers who undertook aerial bleaching were having their skins abraded, reddened, inflamed and flayed by their work conditions, ‘Capital, in its memorials to Parliament, had painted them as floridly healthy, after the manner of Rubens [*in der Manier von Rubens*]’, as if soaking up an atmosphere of ‘cool meadow-fragrance’ (p. 301). In his portrayal of bleach-works, the realism of Blue Book facts, including minute delineations of room dimensions, contents, temperatures and air quality, seems inseparable from a shocking Gothic image language for work-tortured minds and bodies. In demonstrating how Capital’s Rubenesque paintings of working women in rude health shoddily veiled a criminal hellscape—an *écorché* of bodies, harrowed and roasted by heat stress—Marx also exemplified the ethical, polemical, and political affordances of Gothic realism. He did not paint the capitalist in *couleur de rose*, but rather, ranging between granular and grand scales, revealed Capital as everlastingly *trempe de sang*.

Imagine Ruskin reading *Capital* and trying to catalogue the numbers, modes and horrors of Capital’s list of the KILLED, but NOT MURDERED, in the industrial battle. Nonetheless, having coined ‘illth’ as the reverse of ‘wealth’ in the 1860s, Ruskin might have sympathised with Marx’s methodological standpoint, which detected forms of sensory collapse, brain disease and nightmarish death originating in Capital’s criminal mode of production. For instance, train ‘accidents’ were correlated with overwork and work-torture. One railway catastrophe occurred when the rail workers’ shift ‘lasted 40 or 50 hours without a break. They were ordinary men’, Marx affirmed: ‘At a certain point their labour power failed. Torpor seized them. Their brain ceased to think, their eyes to see’ (vol. 35, p. 260). On the other side of the class divide, the habitual consumption of human brains and bodies befouled ‘the capitalist brain’ (p. 440). Capitalists doubted the destructive effects of night work on child workers: ‘That such a question should furnish the material of serious controversy, shows plainly how capitalist production acts on the brain functions of capitalists and their retainers’ (p. 275, n. 3). On the nervous functions of human creatures, the brains of commodities continue to show, to adapt a Gothicism from Ruskin’s *Fiction*, ‘their sepulchral grasp for many and many a year’ (p. 162). So long as dead labour, Capital, in Marx’s words, ‘weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living’ (vol. 11, p. 103),

and on their body too, the Gothic will afford a critical-realist medium for apprehending life-and-death struggles in its criminally fetishistic system.

This article has preliminarily mapped relations between realism and the Gothic in Marx's and Engels's representations of Capital and its self-perpetuating criminality. It has also questioned, more implicitly than declaratively, the capacity of the Gothic and of realism to represent Capital and its crimes. Straining to realistically represent social murder in Manchester's proletarian quarters, Engels gestured to the liminality of the apparently unrepresentable each time he encountered an effect of capitalist inhumanity that he 'cannot describe in further detail' (vol. 4, p. 391)—or cannot describe at all. *Condition* is replete with such expressive turns: 'The filth and comfortlessness in the houses themselves it is impossible to describe' (p. 391). With echoes of Dante, his Sublime Gothic epithet for those quarters, 'this Hell upon Earth', like Marx's 'House of Terror' for 'the Factory', evokes crimes and crime scenes that are shockingly beyond, or abyssally beneath, what realism is able to convey. Conversely, Engels indicated that he *could* impart further realism and truth of detail about the dying, death or living-death he witnessed at every 'horrible spot' in Manchester, but 'if I should describe all the separate spots in detail I should never come to an end' (p. 361). A realist corpus detailing Capital's crimes and victims in Manchester alone, he thus suggested, is impossible because it would have to be interminable, reflecting the bloody omnipresence and endlessness of capitalist vampirism. However, like *The Communist Manifesto*'s Gothic collision with bourgeois bogey stories and its communist plot to put an end to bourgeois society, *Condition* and *Capital* drew on and developed a Gothic realism not to endlessly rehearse Capital's infinite *Bildung*, but to recast Capital's self-image and self-narrative of its natural everlastingness into revolutionary images, analyses and visions of Capital as a contingent monstrosity that can and must be ended.

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Notes

¹ All quotations of Marx and Engels are from their *Collected Works*, 50 vols. (Marx and Engels 2010).

² All emphases in quotations here are original.

³ Except when quoting, I follow Anna Kornbluh's (2010) capitalisation of 'Capital' to accentuate Marx's leitmotif of personification in *Capital*.

⁴ Cf. Ann Cvetkovich: 'Although *Capital*'s narrative strategies can be usefully illuminated by comparing it to the realist or social-problem novels of the Victorian period, it also bears a striking resemblance to the sensation novel. *Capital* can be read as a mystery novel strewn with dead bodies. The opening chapter provides a clue', 'a crime has been committed' and Marx is 'the detective' (pp. 172–73, 175). Cvetkovich's reading overstates realism's incapacities *apropos* sensationalism's affordances, and is susceptible to other criticisms (McNally 2011, p. 119, n. 17), but my study is indebted to it.

⁵ Marx (vol. 30, pp. 306–10) satirised the criminal's productive labour and, thereby, capitalist means and relations of production; the criminal's productions include novels (p. 309); see Wilson (1940, p. 291) and Sutherland (2019a, pp. 241–42).

⁶ Marx was alluding to *Killing No Murder* (1657), an appeal for Cromwell's assassination. His allusion echoed, *inter alia*, his quotation from T. J. Dunning's *Trades' Unions and Strikes* (1860): 'Capital eschews no profit [...] 100 per cent. [profit] will make it ready to trample on all human laws; 300 per cent., and there is not a crime at which it will scruple' (vol. 35, p. 748, n. 2).

⁷ In this period, 'milliner' denoted a dressmaker rather than a hatmaker. For discussion of the case, see Walkley (1981), and for a Marxist analysis, see Bieler and Morton (2021).

⁸ For Marx and Engels *apropos* Carlyle, see, e.g., Johnson (1947), Marcus (1974), Prawer (1976) and Althofer (2022a, 2022b); and for Dickens, see, e.g., Marcus (1974), Prawer (1976), Houston (2005), Murray and Schuler (2020) and Riley (2021).

⁹ Krishnamurty (2000) and Kovelakis (2003) discuss Engels's own bourgeois prejudice and his anti-Irish racism.

¹⁰ Marx quoted himself: *ungeheure Warensammlung* comes from *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859).

¹¹ Engels authorised and edited Moore and Aveling's translation (1887), which is based on *Capital*'s third German edition (1883).

- ¹² For the ‘monstrous’ nuance of *ungeheure*, see, e.g., Cvetkovich (1992, p. 175), Keenan (1997, pp. 103–5, 220 n. 9), Miéville (2002, p. 46), Shapiro (2008, p. 6), McNally (2011, p. 121), Tomba (2013, p. 99), and Althofer and Musgrove (2024, pp. 93–94).
- ¹³ Marx directly quoted Luther several times in *Capital*, e.g., ‘Taking the usurer, that old-fashioned but ever renewed specimen of the capitalist for his text [*An die Pfarrherrn, wider den Wucher zu predigen* (1540)], Luther shows very aptly that the love of power is an element in the desire to get rich. “[...] a usurer is a double-dyed thief and murderer [who] wants to be God over all men [and] would have the whole world perish of hunger and thirst, misery and want, so far as in him lies, so that he may have all to himself [...] Usury is a great huge monster, like a werewolf, who lays waste all”’ (vol. 35, pp. 588–89, n. 1). Earlier in *Capital*, Marx twice mentioned Capital’s ‘were-wolf hunger for surplus labour’ (pp. 251, 271).
- ¹⁴ *Fiat experimentum in corpore vili*: let the experiment be performed on a worthless body. See Althofer (2022a).
- ¹⁵ For example, Rebecca Harding Davis’s short story “Life in the Iron-Mills” (1861): ‘I dare make my meaning no clearer, but will only tell my story. It will, perhaps, seem to you as foul and dark as this thick vapor about us, and as pregnant with death’ (Davis 1861, p. 431). While this narrative is ‘a landmark in American literary realism’, its Gothic language and ‘ghosts function within Davis’s realism to make the material, hazardous air vivid and terrifying’ (Peterson 2019, pp. 40, 45). To borrow Franco Moretti’s rhetorical question: ‘one can dispel the fog, and decipher the message that was concealed underneath. But what if the fog were itself the message?’ (Moretti 2013, p. 143).

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