I.

In 1851, Karl Marx assured friends that his ‘big book,’ the book that would make all other examinations of political economy instantly obsolete, was almost finished. He explained that he was ‘so far advanced that I will have finished the whole economic stuff in five weeks’ time. And having done that, I shall complete the political economy at home.’ True, there were the quotidian distractions to deal with, the ‘constant interruptions of a practical kind’ that stole time, attention, and energy from his *magnum opus*. ‘But,’ he quickly added, ‘for all that, the thing is rapidly approaching completion.’ After all, ‘There comes a time when one has forcibly to break it off.’¹

Sixteen years later, Marx had still not decided that he had reached the point where he could break off work on his project. The practical delays had mounted with each passing year. There were debts to pay (or avoid); physical ailment, which manifested itself most painfully in excruciating carbuncles, to overcome; family crises—including undesirable suitors for his daughter, the death of a beloved son, and an affair with his maid that resulted in the birth of another, significantly less beloved, son—to struggle through; and countless other ‘interruptions’ that this devoted lover of Shakespeare would have recognized as ‘The heart-ache and thousand natural shocks/That flesh is heir to.’²

These were private concerns. For his public audience, Marx had a different justification for his tardiness. He explained in the preface of his 1859 work *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* that ‘the time at my disposal [was] curtailed by the imperative necessity of earning a living’. For eight years—the same

¹ Quoted in Francis Wheen, *Karl Marx* (London: Fourth Estate, 1999), 188.
amount of time that Marx had been assuring his friends that his big book was nearly finished—Marx had satisfied this necessity by writing for ‘the leading English-American newspaper, the New York Tribune’. Unfortunately, his writing for the Tribune ‘compelled an extraordinary scattering of my studies, since,’ Marx assured his readers, ‘I occupy myself with newspaper correspondence proper only in exceptional cases’. His writing for the Tribune was journalism; his writing in the Critique was ‘science’. The hierarchy was clear.

At the same time that Marx distanced himself from journalism he also acknowledged its importance to his intellectual development. He had hoped to pursue an academic career. But the example of his mentor Bruno Bauer, dismissed at the orders of Friedrich Wilhelm IV from his position at the University of Bonn for the atheistic slant of his writings on the New Testament, convinced Marx that securing an academic position would be impossible. So in 1842 he turned to journalism and found himself, as he described it in the Preface, ‘in the embarrassing position of having to discuss what is known as material interests’. This direct engagement with ‘material interests’ set Marx on the path that eventually carried him to Communism and historical materialism (a term he himself never actually used). It was in the offices of the Rheinische Zeitung, a liberal newspaper Marx edited for less than a year, that he first met Engels, who occasionally contributed to the journal. Like his work for the Tribune, the forty-four articles Marx wrote for the Rheinische Zeitung, which he also edited, have been all but ignored by scholars.

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The *Tribune* and the *Rheinische Zeitung* are only two of the papers Marx and Engels wrote for in the 1840s and 1850s. There were at least seventeen others, including the *Deutsch–Französische Jahrbücher, Vorwärts, the Neue Rheinische Zeitung, Die Revolution, the Telegraph für Deutschland, the New Moral World, the Northern Star, the Deutsch-Brüsseler Zeitung, La Réforme, the People’s Paper, the Morning Advertiser, Die Reform, the Neue Oder Zeitung, the Free Press, Das Volk, the New York Criminal-Zeitung, and the Zuid Afrikaan*. That list does not include the (frequent) letters to the editor of any number of papers.

The number of articles written for the *Tribune* alone is impressive. After writing the first six entries in ‘Revolution and Counter-Revolution’ in 1851 the two penned at least 25 articles in 1852, 80 in 1853, 88 in 1854, 46 in 1855, 24 in 1856 49 in 1857, 65 in 1858, 62 in 1859, 38 in 1860, and two more in 1861. Over ten years, Marx wrote at least 350 columns for the *Tribune*. He collaborated with Engels on twelve more, while Engels himself authored 125. When Engels wrote the columns himself, he discussed the subjects at length with Marx, often working from an outline his partner had provided. The columns take up seven volumes of the *Collected Works* and run to about four thousand pages, and it is almost certain that there are more. Scholars have used Marx and Engels’s correspondence to prove that the *Tribune* published more than one hundred of their columns as unsigned editorials. The odds are high that the *Tribune* ran even more of the columns as their own, making a determination of the exact number of articles Marx and Engels wrote impossible.

Marx’s productivity resulted partly from financial exigency. Throughout the 1850s, the column was Marx’s most important source of income, on par with Engels’s
eleemosynary relief. At the height of his popularity with the Tribune, Marx earned five
pounds per column, making him, in the words of Charles Dana, the paper’s managing
editor, ‘not only one of the most highly valued, but one of the best paid contributors
attached to the journal’. With the Tribune’s help, Marx could provide, at least for a day
or two twice a week, his family with something close to the life he knew they deserved.

But his journalism was more than a financial life preserver. Marx could not
contain his pride when one of his columns made its way from the pages of the Tribune to
the House of Commons, where a MP quoted from an article of his denouncing a recent
budget proposal. He pronounced the reaction to his columns ‘gratifying’ and bragged
about ‘the name I was making for myself among the Yankees,’ not least because of the
leverage this growing name recognition gave him when demanding increased payments
for his work.

Marx was not always pleased with his work for the Tribune. He raged to Engels
that it was ‘nauseating to be condemned to count it a blessing when taken aboard by a
blotting paper vendor such as this’. He complained about being compelled ‘to crush up
bones, grind them and make them into soup like paupers in the workhouse’. He described
his work as ‘newspaper muck’ that ‘in the final analysis is nothing’. And these are only a
few of the attacks, many of which included an outpouring of multilingual profanity, that
Marx launched on his own work over the decade. Usually, they appeared after the paper
rejected one of his many requests for a raise.

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4 Quoted in McLellan, Marx, 263.
5 MECW, vol. XII 544.
6 MECW, vol. XXXIX, 439.
7 MECW, vol. XL, 93.
8 MECW, vol. XXXIX, 227.
In the century and a half since Marx expressed his scorn for his journalism, scholars have consented to this judgment by their silence. While libraries of articles, monographs, and books have appeared on Marx as an economist, or historian, or philosopher, or aesthetic critic, or biologist, to name a few of the many occupations he appears to have held, little has been written about Marx as a journalist. At the height of the Cold War, *American Heritage* published an article by a biographer Horace Greeley, the Tribune’s editor in chief, titled ‘When Karl Marx Worked for Horace Greeley’. Though the article’s insight into the Tribune’s place in America society is helpful, it is most interested in using Marx’s harsh comments on Russia as a cudgel with which to bludgeon the Soviet Union. A few journalists, most notably Murray Kempton in the 1960s and Christopher Hitchens only last year, have written with admiration about Marx’s forays in their profession. Few articles dedicated solely to the columns have appeared in scholarly journals, and those that do hardly exhaust the subject. The columns themselves have appeared in several collections of Marx’s work. These collections, though, are usually oriented around a single subject like ‘Marx and America’ or ‘Marx and Colonialism’. Out of necessity, the editors rip the columns from their context and jumble them together with excerpts of work written for different audiences and serving different purposes. In David McLellan’s biography, the standard biography of Marx in English, analysis of Marx’s relationship with the Tribune takes up four pages out the book’s nearly five hundred.

The sheer number of words Marx wrote for the Tribune exceeds significantly what scholars have written about Marx and the Tribune. More important than the quantity
of the columns, though, is their quality. Francis Wheen, a biographer of Marx and prominent journalist in his own right, has argued, that ‘Even if he had done noting else, Marx would deserve to be remembered as one of the great nineteenth century journalists.’ The claim is provocative, but it is also correct. The scope of Marx and Engels columns runs the length of capitalism’s empire. They cover England, Spain, India, Austria, Turkey, Prussia, Greece, Italy, China, France, and America, to name a few. They discuss high politics and low, war and diplomacy, the latest trade reports and the most sophisticated economic theory, the coarsest union-hall rhetoric and the most academic German philosophy, contemporary affairs and history stretching back, at times, three millennia. Their tone touches every key in the emotional register. Marx and Engels are, by turns, angry, cynical, optimistic, stoic, and even funny (at least they try to be). There is also, for some reason, a three-part history of the rifle.

Coming up with thousands of words on a new subject twice a week is a difficult task, even for authors of Engels and Marx’s intellectual caliber. It is no surprise, then, that not all of his work for the Tribune is memorable. At times, though, it reached a high enough level of quality that Marx saw fit to steal from his newspaper muck for his big book, which is why excerpts from the columns appear scattered throughout Das Kapital. But Marx’s journalism often did not fit within the scope of Kapital and was denied reception by the audience that the book ultimately found. So while countless scholars have devoted countless hours to studying Marx’s canonical texts, some of his best work has been ignored.

There are practical reasons for this omission. Obscured by the prominence of *Kapital*’s multiple volumes, along with the massive size of the rest of Marx and Engels’s corpus, the columns are difficult to see. Moreover, when the quality of writing can vary dramatically within a single column, distinguishing the muck from the more lasting material requires a considerable investment of time and energy.

While researching Marx and Engels’s journalism poses a peculiar set of problems, understanding why scholars who have performed extraordinary research in other aspects of Marx and Engels have paid so little attention to their journalism requires a deeper explanation than ‘it’s too hard’. In *Considerations on Western Marxism* Perry Anderson supplies, unintentionally, a convincing explanation. The book presents a history of western Marxism in three acts. Marx and Engels dominate the first act. It lasts until the end of the nineteenth century. In the second, Lenin and Trotsky take the stage. In the third, figures like Adorno, Sartre, and Althusser play key roles. The center of Anderson’s analysis, and the key difference between the stages of Marxism’s development, is the ‘extraordinary unity of theory and practice’ Marx and Engels forged in their thought, a unity unknown in the prior history of Western philosophy.12 Lenin and Trotsky carried on this tradition, writing brilliant works of historical materialism while waging war against aristocratic oppressors.

But this, Anderson explains, is not the history of the third wave of Marxism, which he calls Western Marxism. ‘The hidden hallmark of Western Marxism,’ he writes, is ‘that it is a product of defeat.’13 It developed seriously only after World War II, when a liberal bourgeois order built on the nation-state and nationalism had never been stronger.

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13 Anderson, *Considerations*, 42.
The unity of theory and practice Marx and Lenin found in their lives could not exist in a world so thoroughly dominated by the liberal bourgeois. Marxists retreated from the discipline’s traditional concerns with economics and politics. They sought refuge in philosophy and aesthetics, the highest echelons of the superstructure. A change in style followed this change in substance. Where many had sought to emulate Marx, who labored to make his prose as lucid as possible even when discussing the most abstruse subjects, the new generation of Western Marxists reveled in a recondite vocabulary that, in Anderson’s felicitous phrase, was characterized by a ‘surplus above the necessary minimum quotient of verbal complexity’. Marxism’s intellectual development was an inversion of Marx’s own progression from philosophy to economics. Marxists had long tried to change the world, Adorno and company proclaimed. The time had come to interpret it.

The trends outlined by Anderson in the 1970s continued in subsequent decades. The broad movement of the past seventy fives years of Marxist scholarship has been away from politics and economics and towards more abstract concerns. In other words, Marxist scholarship has lost interest with precisely the issues that preoccupied Marx and Engels in their journalism. Despite their numerous strengths, the columns are not philosophical exegeses or aesthetic treatises. They are Marx and Engels’s imperfect attempts to evaluate the world—politics, war, diplomacy, oppression, prosperity, depression, peace, repression, and revolution—as it was, not as they wished it would be.

Anderson lays part of the blame for recent developments in Marxist scholarship—and he clearly sees the development as blameworthy—on Marx himself. He argues that while Marx understood the central reality of his time, namely the importance, dynamism,
and dominance of capitalism, better than any of his contemporaries, on almost every other significant issue, he demonstrated ‘an incomprehension of much of the nature of the later epoch through which he lived’.\(^\text{15}\) The roster of gaps in Marx’s analysis is daunting. They include the significance of nationalism, the role of politics in organizing a revolutionary movement, the utility of extra-political tactics in organizing a revolutionary movement, and the dynamics of a liberal bourgeois state—all subjects fundamental to the post-war world.

A review of Marx and Engels’s writings for the *Tribune* would have shown Anderson that on all these points he is incorrect. Beneath the contradictions that flow unavoidably from day-by-day analysis, Marx and Engels offered a coherent portrait of their times. By 1850, they argued, capitalism had spread across the globe, creating a world economy that stretched from India to America. The heart of this empire was in Europe. In the colonies, capital relied on brutal repression to carry out its dictates. In the metropole, a subtler combination of tactics, including the specious unity created by the cover of nationalism, preserved order. The combined forces of military conflict, economic crisis, and a growing revolutionary movement ensured the quick demise of this seemingly invincible system. In preparation for the revolution, though, Marx and Engels provided advice on how best to achieve reform within the current structure. These articles for the *Tribune* sketch an outline of Marx and Engels’s positions on central concerns of their time, and of ours.

Anderson is correct, however, in arguing that a close connection between theory and practice was the distinguishing fact of Marx and Engels’s thought and of the first two eras of Marxism more generally. Here, the columns are an invaluable resource. For much

\(^{15}\) Anderson, *Considerations*, 115.
of Marx’s life, his writings were suppressed. Even the Manifesto was not widely available until decades after it was first published. ‘Between 1850 and 1870,’ as Gareth Stedman Jones has observed, ‘the Manifesto was remembered by no more than a few hundred German-speaking veterans of the 1848 revolutions.’

By contrast, the Tribune, which had daily, weekly, and semi-weekly editions, reached an audience of more than 300,000 people a week. Marx and Engels’ columns were printed as pamphlets across America and England. A pamphlet on Palmerston whose contents first appeared in the Tribune required a second edition after it sold out its first run of 15,000 copies, making it Marx’s best-selling work of the 1850s. To the extent that Marx and Engels achieved an ‘extraordinary unity’ in their research and his activism, one of the most successful instances of this harmony came in their writing for the Tribune.

Though the audiences for the Manifesto and the Tribune differed, the worldview that animates the writing in both does not. In the first section of the Manifesto Marx and Engels offer a history of the world in some 4,000 words. The second part adumbrates the Communists’ demands, while the third provides a critical overview of competing socialist schools. In the fourth section Marx and Engels explain Communism’s relationship to radical parties in Europe and America before drawing their proclamation to a hasty conclusion.

This outline cannot convey the richness of a work that from its first line—‘A spectre is haunting Europe…’—to its last—‘WORKINGMEN OF ALL COUNTRIES UNITE!’—reminds its readers that, however ignominious its early career, the Communist Manifesto eventually became one of the most influential political documents in the history of the world. But history can bury the text, making it difficult to see what exactly

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16 Jones, 16.
Marx and Engels are doing in it. The familiarity of its words breeds, if not contempt, then at least a complacent ignorance. Reading the *Manifesto* with the columns offers one of the few opportunities to view the document in a new light, or at least highlight different aspects of the text.

Two themes in the *Manifesto* appear with special frequency in the columns. The first is a historical argument about the nature of the bourgeoisie’s triumph. At a time when developed capitalism was largely confined to an island on the corner of Europe, Marx and Engels contended that the bourgeoisie had created a ‘world market’ that stretched from China to America. The establishment of this market was the central economic fact of modern economic history. ‘The East-Indian and Chinese markets, the colonization of America, trade with the colonies’ all spurred a rise of demand that the feudal system could not satisfy, leading to the creation of the manufacturing system. But the world market’s demand ‘kept ever growing’ and soon outstripped the capacity of the manufacturing system. By necessity ‘steam and machinery revolutionized industrial production’ and ‘the giant, Modern Industry,’ replaced the comparatively dwarfish (and uncapitalized) manufacturing system. The historical development of the bourgeois ends here, with their only remaining task being to struggle vainly against the rise of the proletariat.

The encomiums Marx and Engels offered to the bourgeois in the first section of the *Manifesto* have been much commented upon. ‘It has accomplished wonders far surpassing Egyptian pyramids’ and so on. But the character of these achievements has received less attention. The epic achievement of the bourgeois is the creation of a world market. The bourgeoisie ‘creates a world after its own image’ by ‘compel[ling] all
nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production’. In the process of constructing a new world the bourgeoisie fashion a new kind of person, one with ‘new wants, requiring for their satisfaction the products of distant lands and climes’. Those countries (‘the barbarian’ states of ‘the East’) that seek to follow in the path of economically advanced countries (‘the civilized’ states of ‘the West’) become more, not less, reliant on the most bourgeois economies. The result: ‘In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal inter-dependence of nations’. These ties of dependence bind the world market ever tighter, soon making it impossible for a nation to break free without sparking a revolution. Which is exactly what Marx and Engels anticipated. The workers, after all, had ‘a world to win’.

The second theme that the journalism highlights in the Manifesto is methodological. The chief advantage, according to Marx and Engels, that the Communists have over other socialist parties is analytical clarity. Only they ‘clearly understand the line of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement’. This clarity gives the communists a global vision that allows them to see ‘the common interests of the entire proletariat independently of all nationality’ and is therefore essential to any successful attempt at organizing a revolutionary party. It was also essential to Marx’s journalism, which is why he returns to the theme time and again throughout the columns.

Despite similarities between the Tribune columns and the Manifesto, significant differences remain. Some of the discrepancies stemmed from Marx and Engels simply changing their minds, a tendency to which Marx was especially prone. Marx began
studying economics seriously in 1844, only four years before the release of the
*Manifesto*. Over the course of another decade of studying, it was inevitable that new
readings would convince him to modify his positions. On a host of other issues, from the
nature of the coming revolution to the character of the relationship between Europe and
‘the East,’ a combination of new reading and new events forced Marx and Engels to
reconsider earlier positions.

The most important difference between the *Manifesto* and the journalism derives
not from any changes in Marx and Engels’s thought but from a difference in form. The
*Manifesto* is schematic. It is impossible to explain world history in fewer than 5,000
words and be anything else. In a small example, the name of not one person appears in
the first two sections of the *Manifesto*. Instead the action takes place between the stock
figures of ‘the bourgeois,’ ‘the proletariat,’ and ‘the Communist,’ as if it were the Marxist
equivalent of a medieval morality play pitting Vice against Virtue. The columns for the
*Tribune*, by contrast, abound with proper nouns. There, Marx combined an attention to
specific circumstances with the broader perspective sketched in the *Manifesto*. This small
distinction illuminates a larger contrast between the texts. In their journalism Marx and
Engels had the space to explore the actions of individual people. It is the difference
between an author’s outline and her finished novel.

Much of the debate on Marx in the literature over the past three decades has
focused on the extent to which an early, supposedly humanist Marx differed from a late,
supposed scientific Marx. Lukács and Sartre, to name only two of the most prominent
examples, provided inspiration for those who focused on the humanist Marx, which they
located primarily in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* of 1844. In
contradistinction, Althusser and his followers emphasized the superiority of the works completed after an ‘epistemological break’ that occurred in Marx’s thought in 1845. (At first, Althusser pushes back the date of the epistemological break in later works.) *Kapital* was typically cited as the great achievement of Marx’s scientific period, the moment where Marx escaped from the influence of early models like Hegel and Feurbach and posed a new ‘problematic’ for the social sciences, one that stressed the ways in which power relations control what can be known, making the late Marx radically more materialist and determinist than the early Marx. Althusser’s Marx was basically a proto-structuralist whose work succeeded to the degree that it anticipated certain trends in French scholarship of the 1960s.

In his 2002 introduction to the Penguin edition of the *Manifesto*, which totals 187 pages to the *Manifesto*’s forty, Gareth Stedman Jones embraces the distinction between early and late Marx, again marking the divide between the two in 1845. But what Althusser regarded as a triumph Jones indicts as the source of Marxism’s ultimate failure. The assurance that the market would be inevitably abolished and replaced with a superior system, even if the details of that system could never be precisely outlined in advance, proved to be a ‘slimly secured and, as it turned out, uncashable cheque’ responsible for the bloody legacy of twentieth century Communism. Determinism concealed Marx’s ‘failure to produce a theory of modern Communism’. This failure inevitably, as it were, followed from Marx’s desire to abolish ‘the subjection of modern man to chance,’ a fundamental feature of market society. Because Marx could not accept a large role for chance, he could not accept the market. And so he retreated, at first into the pseudo-science of *Kapital* with its discussions of inherent use-values, and eventually into the
history of pre-capitalist society, where he hoped, perhaps, to find an alternate path to the
Communist future.

The Marx familiar to readers of the Tribune bears little resemblance to the Marx of the Manuscripts or of Kapital. Instead, the Tribune’s Marx resembles the author of The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon, which first appeared in a German-language newspaper published in New York, home to the Tribune. There is a possibility, in fact, that some readers of his column in the Tribune remembered a passage from early in the Brumaire. ‘Men make their own history,’ Marx wrote, ‘but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past.’

Marx’s journalism, does not fit easily within the confines of the early Marx or the late. It shows a man charting the ways in which men work within the limitations of their own time to change their world. The broad structures of the Manifesto are present throughout the columns, and some of the economic systems present in Kapital appear over the course of the decade. But events forced Marx to complicate his theories and to correct himself, even if he often felt that events mostly confirm his earlier assertions. In his journalism Marx portrayed the interplay—dialectic, if one prefers—between individuals and the institutions that structure their lives. Meanwhile, the Hegelian and Feurbachian theories of his early work engaged in a dialectical relationship of their own with the economic theories that dominated his later work. Marx was making history too.

II.

Readers of the Tribune would have noticed that the 25 October 1851 edition of the paper was special. It was heftier than usual—twelve pages long, not the standard
eight. The paper needed the space, an editorial declared, because it contained ‘articles from some foreign contributors that are especially worthy of attention’. A report on ‘the daily and domestic life of the Turks’ promised to be fascinating. Closer to home, there were articles on an abusive Philadelphia landlord, a temperance rally in New York’s eighth ward, and on mounting pressure encouraging Daniel Webster to run for the presidency.¹⁷

Perhaps most intriguing was an examination of ‘Germany by one of the clearest and most vigorous writers that country has produced—no matter what may be the judgment of the critical upon his public opinions in the sphere of political and social philosophy.’ According to one reader, the article, titled ‘Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Germany’ went ‘deep—very deep for me’.¹⁸ Despite these difficulties, the reader wanted to know more about the writer, Karl Marx.

Technically, though, Marx was not the author. He was not fluent in English and did not have confidence in his ability to write it. Engels had written the article, which became a twenty-part series, at Marx’s request. The two discussed the subject extensively, and the article represented Marx’s views accurately. But the true authorship was kept a secret from the editors of the Tribune, who ran the article under Marx’s byline. Engels and Marx kept the secret so well that the real author was not known until the release of their correspondence well into the twentieth century.

¹⁸ Both quoted in Hale, ‘Worked’.
However opposed Marx and Engels were to the division of labor in capitalist society, they exploited it skillfully in their writing for the *Tribune*. For the first year, Marx penned the columns reporting on British and European politics and economics, while Engels concentrated on the diplomatic and military conflict with Turkey. This established a pattern the two would stick with for their tenure at the *Tribune*. Marx explored politics, economics, history, and what he called ‘diplomatic gossip,’ generally focused on Europe, while retaining license to cover any subject in any part of the world he found of interest.\(^{19}\) Engels, meanwhile, concentrated almost exclusively on military conflict, becoming the *Tribune’s* de facto war correspondent. More than 100 of his 125 columns focus entirely on the subject. They move easily between military theory and the latest reports from the battlefront, although they are of less general interest than Marx’s work, which usually has a broader scope and is less dependent on breaking news. This division was never enforced strictly, and Engels filed several columns for Marx on non-military affairs. Often, these articles were even more fervently supportive of the revolution than Marx’s own submissions.

From the start, in ‘Revolution and Counter-Revolution,’ Marx and Engels made their political sympathies clear. It is no surprise that they provoked so much interest in their American audience. As Sean Wilentz, among many others, has demonstrated, nineteenth century Americans ‘lived in a different mental universe from ours.’\(^{20}\) The republicanism that had framed the founding fathers’ worldview endured after the Revolution. It encouraged Americans to see economic and social conflict as the result of

\(^{19}\) Marx, *MECW*, xii 528

failures in political institutions. This did not prevent economic and cultural issues from dominating political discussions. The Democratic Party had risen to power by promising to redress growing economic inequality. The Whig Party trumpeted the importance of upholding cultural values. The Tribune generally followed the Whig party line. They were, in the words of one observer, ‘Anti-Slavery, Anti-War, Anti-Rum, Anti-Tobacco, Anti-Seduction, Anti-Grogshops, Anti-Brothels, [and] Anti-Gambling Houses’.21 Whether Democrat or Whig, Americans agreed that their problems stemmed from an incomplete realization of democracy. What exactly constituted democracy proved a source of intense disagreements, but the need for more democracy was rarely contested.

‘Revolution and Counter-Revolution’ offered a different point of view. It argued that Germany’s recent political turmoil was the result of economic conflict, specifically of conflict between classes. A superannuated aristocracy-cum-bureaucracy clung to power while fighting off a rising bourgeoisie torn between its desire to wield an influence appropriate to its growing importance in society and its fear of launching a social revolution that would unleash the revolutionary sentiments growing in the proletariat. The German proletariat had not developed nearly as much as its British and French compatriots, but it grew stronger by the day. Well-meaning bourgeois liberals had tried to encourage democracy by establishing a parliament, but they were misled by their belief that political progress could proceed without fundamental economic reform. What the bourgeoisie had failed to accomplish, Engels confidently predicted, the proletariat—eventually—would.

21 Quoted in Deuesen, Greeley, 51.
And this was only in the first twenty articles. Over the next decade, Marx and Engels would challenge their audience with arguments that differed substantially from anything in the mainstream of American political dialogue.

At first, part of the challenge would come from the structure of the articles. The early columns jumble together up to ten completely unrelated topics within the space of a few thousand words. One column, for instance, begins with the release of a report on public hangings in England in 1849, moves to an explication of Kant and Hegel’s views of capital punishment, where Marx observes ‘that German idealism here, as in most other instances, has but given a transcendental sanction to the rules of existing society,’ proceeds to mockery of ‘the abstraction of “free will,”’ offers its own justification for punishment, criticizes a new pamphlet released claiming that Napoleon did not wish to invade England during the French Revolution, downplays the importance of a proposed electoral reform bill proposed in parliament, announces that a bad harvest will result in economic crisis, that this crisis will compel the Bank of England to lower the discount rate, and concludes with the prediction that William Gladstone will resign as Chancellor of the Exchequer after a quarrel over the income tax and be succeeded by Francis Baring. The effect is similar to reading a blog today. The number of subjects diminishes their individual importance. The implicit assumption seems to be that readers will care about a subject because Marx cares about it. Although there is an element of self-indulgence, or at least a willful rejection of self-control, the element of surprise in reading these early columns, and the excitements that takes over the prose when Marx grabs onto a topic he cares about, is part of their charm.

At the end of his ten years writing for the *Tribune*, though, Marx had grown as a journalist. His columns still covered an astonishing variety of topics, but they restrained themselves to one topic per column. Marx based these columns on extensive research, and it shows. They follow a single subject, for instance Louis Napoleon’s diplomacy, and reach a powerful conclusion, in this case that Napoleon needs the threat of war to maintain order at home, regardless of the unpopularity this earns him with the ‘peace-mongers’ among the bourgeoisie. Some columns occasionally fall into the old pattern, but they are uniformly mediocre. Instead of offering a coherent thesis based on extensive research, Marx pastes together clips from various newspapers until he, at last, meets his word count.

Marx’s writing seems like the work of four journalists, not one. There is the financial reporter who provided straightforward accounts of trade statistics, budget proposals, monetary policy, and trends within various industries. There is the political reporter who elucidated election results, parliamentary maneuvering, and arcane complexities of European politics for his American readers. There is the diplomatic reporter who runs a magnifying glass over official speeches to descry minute quivers in international policy and who revels in the release of documents from diplomats relating to the controversies of earlier decades. With Engels’s assistance, there is also the military reporter whose articles gives the impression that he devotes most of his day to sitting anxiously by the telegraph waiting for updates on battlefield conditions. Together, these four journalists provided their American readers with an informative compilation of the news most important to contemporary Europe.

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23 Marx, *MECW*, xii 583-587.
The columns draw a sharp distinction between news and opinion while providing ample amounts of both. Each reporter has a counterpart who unites interpretation and polemic. The financial, political, diplomatic, and military updates give way to prophecies of financial, political, diplomatic, and military catastrophes that were both imminent and ineluctable. Marx led his columns with news updates because they provided the ostensible justification for his topic selection. It also helped get the grubby business of reporting out of the way early on so that he could devote thousands of words to using new facts to validate old arguments.

Ombudsman could be added to the list of his duties. Marx forced other journalists, albeit without their knowledge or consent, to obey the same fact-value distinction he maintained for himself. His sharp observations were partly the result of necessity. Like most people, newspapers were one of his chief sources of information. Unlike most people, Marx spent a considerable amount of time checking what newspapers reported against official records and the first-hand accounts of a network of friends scattered across Europe. A former editor himself, he knew the ways in which news could manipulated to suit the interests of those reporting it, or the financials supporters of those reporting it. When he reported on an event, he often presented his own version only after summarizing accounts from as many as five other sources. In one column, he provides an enemies’ list that comprises ‘The Times, The Post, The Herald, The Economist, The Saturday Review, in fact the whole of the fashionable, hireling press of London.’ His disdain never stopped him from extracting information from these papers. Marx needed the press the way a cannibal needs people.
The *Times* of London and the *Economist* were his favorite targets. To Marx, the *Economist*, or rather, ‘the grave and profound *Economist,*’ was a purveyor of platitudes and shibboleths about the justice of capitalism that soothed the occasionally anxious conscience of capital These nostrums insulted his belief in justice and his belief in accuracy. The *Times*’s influence on policy made the paper his *bête-noire*. He credited the paper with a unique ability to ‘manufactur[e] a public opinion,’ especially on foreign affairs. Other countries recognized the importance of the *Times*, giving it ‘the position of being the national paper of England, that is to say, of representing the English mind to Foreign nations’. The paper’s close relation with Lord Palmerston only strengthened Marx’s scorn.

It was Marx’s hatred of Palmerston that inspired him to experiment with the format of his columns for the first time. In 1853, after he had written regularly for the *Tribune* for two years, Marx dedicated eight columns in a row to attacking Palmerston. He fills the first with faint praise, building Palmerston up just enough that the subsequent demolition will be even more spectacular. The subsequent seven columns then detail the ways Palmerston has used his talents as ‘the unflinching and persevering advocate of Russian interests’. This sparks a series of ad hominen attacks that goes on for thousands of words, each of which contributes to a portrait of Palmerston as a spineless lackey slavishly fulfilling the Russian governments every velleity.

Marx’s treatment of Palmerston was lenient when compared with his six part series of Lord John Russell, whose concentrated vituperation makes up for its comparative brevity. In the first column, Marx writes that Russell’s public life ‘has been lived on false pretenses’. In it, he ‘has not produced a single idea worth mentioning’ or
even a ‘true emotion’. His public actions have been ‘petty like the man himself’. He thrives not on successful legislation but on parliamentary ‘abortion’. The next five columns elaborate on these points in great detail.

Marx did not use multi-part columns only for the airing of personal attacks. He also wrote multi-column series on, for instance, the history of Spain. In these columns, along with his lengthy investigations of many other countries, he comes across as a scholar trying to provide a usable past for contemporary radicals while writing in an accessible style. They summarize five centuries of history then explore the relevance of this history for the present. Marx learned Spanish and devoted months to devouring everything he could find in the British library on Spanish history for his nine columns. Marx does not acknowledge the constraints these limited resources imposed on him, and his ambition seems almost absurd today. But attentive readers came away with a better sense of Spanish history after reading his columns than they had before.

Scholarly as his writing could be, Marx seems to have wanted his columns to be more than academic. Edmund Wilson has argued that Marx’s prose resembles a great nineteenth century novelist’s, more Charles Dickens than Thomas Malthus.\(^{24}\) The columns provide ample support for this argument. Marx himself praised ‘[t]he present splendid brotherhood of fiction-writers in England, 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’.\(^{25}\) It seems likely that Marx thought himself a member of that brotherhood.


\(^{25}\) Marx, \textit{Tribune}, 143.
In a small but telling example, he shared the genre’s love of epically long lists. A typical example comes in the course of a column detailing the ways in which politicians conceal simple aspects of the budget with recondite economic terminology. Marx mocked those who concea[l] the trivial maneuvers of creating various denominations of stocks—the commutation of old stocks into new ones, the diminishing the interest and raising the nominal capital, the raising the interest and reducing the capital, the installing of premiums, of bonus, priority-shares, the distinctions between redeemable and irredeemable annuities, the artificial graduation in the facility of transferring the various descriptions of paper…

He deployed this trope more than once.

The paragraph-long list was only one device of many that careful readers of the column would become familiar with. Marx was as fond of the distended sentence as he was of the list. Occasionally, his sentences go for hundreds of words without a break. Devotees of arts and letters could look forward to apposite references to Herodotus, Sophocles, Virgil, Shakespeare, and Goethe, among many others, often quoted in the original, sometimes with a translation provided, sometimes without. Windy sentences and erudite quotations are fundamental ingredients of unreadable prose, so Marx’s readers were lucky that he could recognize when he had tested their patience and would reward them for their suffering with a caustic one-liner. In one article, for instance, he objects to the argument that starvation benefits the poor by reducing their number with the observation that “the famine” is quite as radical a remedy against Pauperism as arsenic is against rats’.

Marx repeated his favorite rhetorical moves with such frequency that they came to seem more like tics. Occasional use of alliteration and chiasmus can electrify prose. Marx

[26 Marx, MECW, xi 357.]
used both in his writing such much that he electrocutes it. The combination of the two is especially painful: ‘Palmerston’s person being proclaimed a policy, no wonder his adversaries have made it a policy to sift his person.’ There are unique moments in history. But it is probably not true that ‘History exhibits no example of a more cruel irony’ than the founding of the Credit Mobilier, or that ‘Never in the whole annals of representative government has an administration been turned out half as ignominiously,’ as was Palmerston’s, or that ‘in all military history there is no more signal failure than this Crimean campaign,’ or that ‘History has, perhaps, never exhibited any other man—so great in pettiness’ as Russell. The examples could continue. The combined impression of these declarations minimizes their individual effect and makes Marx seem like the boy who cried Clio. Marx’s attempts at humor can fall flat, especially when he thinks it enough to call his opponents impotent, or paralyzed, or womanly, or some combination of the three as he too often does. His columns leading up to the Crimean War almost always begin with the exclamation ‘At last’ followed by news indicating that war is near. Obviously, desire for information on such an important subject was considerable, but after the phrase’s tenth appearance Marx could have taken pity on his readers and deployed a new locution.

Over 500 columns a few mistakes are bound to arise. Creating a compelling first sentence for a story is difficult for many writers, and for Marx that captivating sentence sometimes never came. He begins one article with the less than gripping announcement that a recently released document on a treaty between England ‘adds, on the whole, but little to the information that had already been conveyed through different other channels’. Do tell. Marx, Engels, and the Tribune editors never devised a consistent policy for
authorial reference in the columns. Sometimes the observations are made by an ‘I,’ at other times by a ‘we’. Marx’s fondness for balance in his prose resulted in clunky phrases, as when he condemned Russell for grasping the ‘oligarchical knack and not the historical tack’. Segues proved especially troublesome for him, as when, after relating news about a recent attack, his report declared that ‘Although the bombardment of Odessa…excites the public mind, there is another bombardment which, at this very moment, works upon it still more powerfully—namely, the bombardment of the public purse.’ The repetition frustrates and the analogy probably made readers feel that they were under bombardment from bad writing.

Luckily for the Tribune’s readers, the peaks in the columns compensated for the troughs. Marx’s novelistic capacities flourished when paired with an appropriate subject. When writing about the June Days Uprising he described ‘fighting [that] went on for several days with an exasperation unequalled in the history of modern civil warfare’. Here, his invocation of history actually works. After days of fighting, the stakes of the battle were clear: ‘it became evident to every one that this was the great decisive battle which would, if the insurrection were victorious, deluge the whole continent with renewed revolutions’. Marx’s narrative of the combat has a propulsive momentum because his description invests the readers in the struggle of individual revolutionaries while giving the conflict epic importance. He brought this same energy to discussion of abstract concepts. When discussing the Opium Wars, Marx depicted one empire, China, ‘containing almost one-third of the human race, vegetating in the teeth of time,’ passing away when confronted with Britain, ‘the representative of overwhelming modern society’. The almost poetic imagery—as curious as the phrases are, there is something
wonderful about ‘vegetating in the teeth of time’ and ‘overwhelming modern society’—convey the strangeness of the world that was passing and the other being born. Even in mediocre columns there are glorious apercus: ‘There is something in human history like retribution,’ or ‘Nothing is easier than to be an idealist on behalf of other people.’

Fondness for the craft of writing aside, Marx ensured that his stylistic development did not come at the expense of clarity. He never hesitated to inundate his readers with statistics or charts, especially on economic topics. One column noted that ‘of wool there were exported to Holland, in 1858, 277,342 lbs. against 254,493 lbs in 1857; but the former realized but a value of £24,949, while the latter had brought £25,563; and for 1,505,621 lbs. exported to France in 1858, as against 1,444,322 lbs. exported in 1857, the value returned amounts but to £103,235…’ It is preceded by a lengthy chart of exports from the United Kingdom to the United States in 1857 and 1858.27

Before numbers can anesthetize his audience, Marx grounded his statistics in the stories of individuals, usually the victims of capitalism. He ended one column that focused on a recent outburst of commercial prosperity in England with the story, quoted at length from the Northampton Journal, of an unknown man who starved to death after being discovered in, and expelled from, a farmer’s barn. Marx demanded that his readers empathize with the dying man, that they imagine ‘his wretched appeals…his seven days fast—his brutal abandonment by his fellow men…and the patient miserable death of the worn-out man’. After finishing the narrative, Marx noted that the man ‘invaded the rights of property, when he sought shelter in the shed and in the lone barn!!!’ He finished the column with a quote from the Economist lauding the universal benefits of free trade.28

27 Marx, MECW, xv 522.
28 Marx, MECW, xi 476.
This mixture of pathos, moral outrage, gallows humor, and cool reason recurs throughout the columns. Often, though, the rage that courses through their writing overwhelms every other emotion. To Marx and Engels, capitalists resembled nothing so much as ‘vampyres, fattening on the life-blood of the young’.29 In an even more heated tone, Marx compared the capitalist to ‘that hideous, pagan idol, who would not drink the nectar but from the skulls of the slain’.30 One wonders what a Tribune reader perusing the morning paper on his way to work made of that declamation.

29 Marx, MECW, xv 253.
30 Marx, MECW, xii 222.