



Karl Marx: A Life

By Francis Wheen



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"A brilliant book, by a superb author, about a necessary man."?Christopher Hitchens

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In this stunning book, the first comprehensive biography of Marx since the end of the Cold War, Francis Wheen gives us not a socialist ogre but a fascinating, ultimately humane man, while still examining the criticisms of his detractors. A study in contradictions, Karl Marx was at once a reserved scholar, a fiery agitator, and a gregarious socialite, while his intellect and ideology were once described as "Rousseau, Voltaire, and Hegel fused into one person." He lived both at the center and on the fringes of his age, and his oratory and writing continue to change the contemporary world. In his entertaining, offbeat style, Wheen offers an eminently readable biography of one of history's most unforgettable figures. "Wheen's portrait of Marx's life is artfully shaped and makes delectable reading."?New York Times "A magnificent portrait of Marx.... Bravo!"?A. N. Wilson "[E]xpertly researched, admirably objective, eminently humane, and plenty entertaining."?Boston Book Review



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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Karl Marx, whose influence on modern times has been compared to that of Jesus Christ, spent most of his lifetime in obscurity. Penniless, exiled in London, estranged from relations, and on the run from most of the police forces of Europe, his ambitions as a revolutionary were frequently thwarted, and his major writings on politics and economics remained unpublished (in some cases until after the Second World War). He has not lacked biographers, but even the most distinguished have been more interested in the evolution of his ideas than any other aspect of his life. Francis Wheen's fresh, lively, and moving biography of Marx considers the whole man--brain, beard, and the rest of his body. Unencumbered by ideological point scoring, this is a very readable, humorous, and sympathetic account. Wheen has an ear for juicy gossip and an eye for original detail. Marx comes across as a hell-raising bohemian, an intellectual bully, and a perceptive critic of capitalist chaos, but also a family man of Victorian conformity (personally vetting his daughters' suitors), Victorian ailments (carbuncles above all), and Victorian weaknesses (notably alcohol, tobacco, and, on occasion, his housekeeper). But there is great pathos, too, as Marx witnessed the deaths of four of his six children. For those readers who feel Marxism has given Marx a bad name, this is a rewarding and enlightening book. --*Miles Taylor, Amazon.co.uk*

From Publishers Weekly

"It is time to strip away the mythology," writes Wheen, "and try to rediscover Karl Marx the man." In the first major biography of Marx since the end of the Cold War, Wheen does just that as he looks for the man lurking behind the myths of both enemies and disciples, the misinterpretations and the academic jargon. What he finds is somebody who will suit nobody's purposes--Marx, Wheen argues, lived his life messily. He was neither a clearheaded revolutionary nor an unrepentant hypocrite, but he wasn't the anti-Christ either. More or less incapable of holding down a steady, salaried job, he mooched off of his selfless wife, Jenny (an aristocrat fallen on hard times), and his well-to-do ideological partner, Friedrich Engels, and spent his time obsessively writing unreadable, unmarketable economics tracts. He also spent a good deal of time preaching the imminent revolution of the masses (with whom he appears to have had little affinity). Following Marx from his childhood in Trier, Germany, through his exile in London, Wheen, a columnist for the British Guardian, takes readers from hovel to grand house, from the International Working Man's Association to Capital, from obscurity to notoriety and back again. (Only 11 mourners attended Marx's funeral.) The narrative veers unsteadily from scorn to admiration for the bearded philosopher. Wheen begins by jeering at Marx's cantakerousness and ends by lauding him as a prophet and a brave survivor of poverty and exile. In the end, Wheen's breezy, colorful portrayal is as eccentric as its subject. 16 pages of illustrations not seen by PW.

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From Library Journal

Little about Marx was left undiscovered by David McLellan's highly regarded *Karl Marx: His Life and Thought* (LJ 3/1/74), but left-leaning British journalist Wheen attempts to add some new understanding. Wheen does correct a small error that McLellan advanced about Charles Darwin's nonrelationship with Marx, but otherwise his book is notable less for the quality of the scholarshipDwhich is solid enoughDthan for his deft portraiture. Wheen's Marx is often charming and likableDand just as often not. An earlier generation of biographers depicted an impoverished Marx dependent upon the generosity of collaborator Frederick Engels, but Wheen demonstrates that Marx actually led a bourgeois lifestyle beyond his meansDmostly for the sake of his daughters, whom he adored. Engels seemed to regard Marx almost as a fortunate younger sibling would a brilliant but unlucky older brother. Wheen's book is engagingly written,

but his editors have done him a disservice by retaining an overabundance of British colloquialisms that simply do not travel well across the pond. Still, Wheen's compelling depiction of the truly historic Marx-Engels friendship combines with a bold prose style to commend his book to serious academic and public libraries. D. Scott H. Silverman, Bryn Mawr Coll. Lib., PA
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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Johnny Harper:

Have you spare time for a day? What do you do when you have considerably more or little spare time? Yep, you can choose the suitable activity to get spend your time. Any person spent all their spare time to take a move, shopping, or went to the particular Mall. How about open or maybe read a book allowed Karl Marx: A Life? Maybe it is to get best activity for you. You recognize beside you can spend your time using your favorite's book, you can smarter than before. Do you agree with its opinion or you have some other opinion?

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Eliza Gold:

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Yolanda Sartain:

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