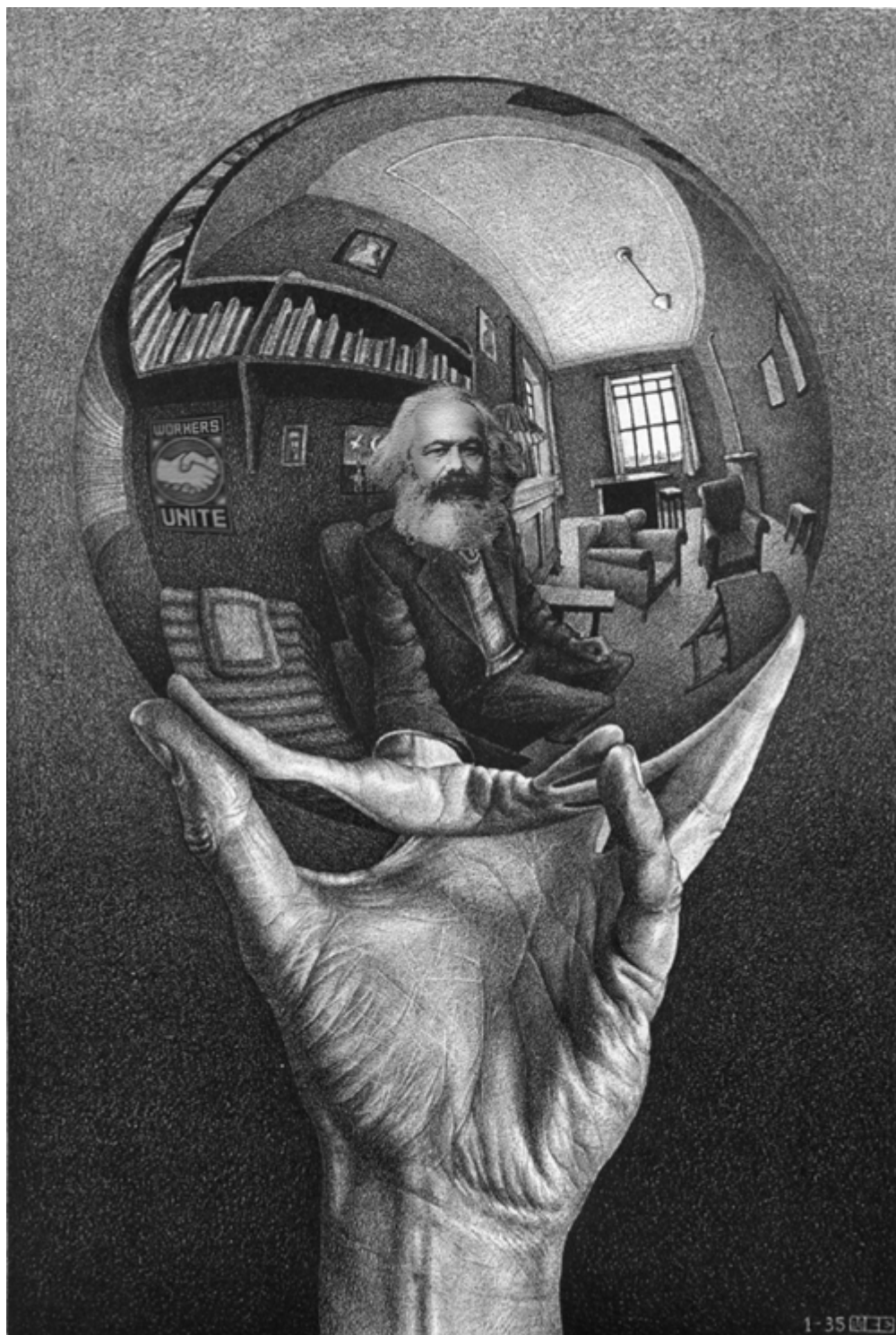


# The Return of Marx

by [Robert Gear](#) (October 2018)



In August of 1578, an army of Portuguese soldiers aided by volunteers and mercenaries under the young king, Sebastião, was routed by a large Moorish army at the battle of Alcácer-Kebir, Morocco. The defeat was an overwhelming tragedy for Portugal.

According to historian [H. Morse Stephens](#):

There was not a noble family which had not lost more than one of its representatives, not a patriot who failed to see that ruin was staring his country in the face. Deprived of soldiers, resources, and reputation at one fell blow, the Portuguese nation seemed stunned at the extent of its calamity.

Sebastião was presumed dead, although various conflicting stories of his demise circulated.

Many Portuguese refused to believe that their sovereign was dead. The belief that the "Principe Encuberto" or Hidden Prince would reappear took on an almost religious significance. A sect of fanatics, "os Sebastianistas," waited for his imminent return and the consequent revival of Portuguese greatness.

Similar folkloric convictions about deceased monarchs, real or mythical, have enriched several national chronicles. Examples include that of Frederick Barbarossa, drowned while en route

to recapture the Holy Land during the Third Crusade. A legend arose that Red Beard was sleeping in a mountain cave in Thuringia. He would awake when ravens flying around the mountain departed. He would then restore Germany to its ancient greatness. Similar beliefs attended other ancient kings including, for example, Arthur, "the once and future king." Collectively, such idols of old are sometimes known as "sleeping heroes."

In more recent times, a similar conviction arose about a twentieth century cultural icon, Elvis Presley, incidentally, often referred to as "The King," at least by his fans. Of course, Elvis lives on in supermarket tabloids and has been variously "spotted" in locales as varied as Memphis International Airport, Kalamazoo, Michigan and the lunar surface. Most of us would agree, I hope, that such an incarnation, especially in this latter locale is extremely unlikely. I say, "most of us," since, although such belief would show an astounding degree of scientific idiocy, it is removed only in kind, not in degree, from the *moral* idiocies of those who believe in resurrecting the ideas of Karl "barrel-of-fun" Marx. Indeed, there are still those who deem him more than a footnote of fatuity. They yearn for his ideas to rise again like the sleeping heroes of old to recreate the joy and brotherhood so amply demonstrated by the caprices of their twentieth century "achievements."

Despite the failures of "scientific socialism" and the incalculable suffering perpetrated by this particular vile jelly, somehow the diabolical truth doesn't leach through into the imagination of a wide swathe of humanity.

Every so often, the thoughts of this 19th Century scholar,

beavering away like a non-fictional Edward Casaubon (George Eliot's consummate evocation of dried-up pedantry), slither their way into the consciousness of college-age recruits. The words amount to a sine wave of malignancy threading in and out along the *x axis* of time, entangling the often undeveloped frontal lobes of unwary sophomores. Truly, snake imagery is apt; the thoughts of Marx and his respectable and long-suffering best buddy are like a kind of unending Anaconda Plan intent on squeezing good judgment out of its victims.

The recent celebrations around the 200th anniversary of Karl Marx's birth rouse us almost to incredulity. For example, The Humanities Center of Carnegie Mellon University has held laudatory [symposia](#)