

John Clare and Karl Marx

Gold is a mighty substitute – it buys  
The fool sufficient credit to seem wise,  
The coward laurels, virtue unto bawds,  
A mask for villainy and fame for lords;  
Buys knaves an office, traitors trust and power;  
Buys lies and oaths, and breaks them every hour;  
Buys cant its flattery, hypocrites their paint,  
Making a very devil seem a saint;  
Buys asses panegyrics and what not,  
And makes man worshipped and God forgot;  
In fact, buys all and everything, forsooth,  
But two poor outcasts – honesty and truth.

John Clare, 'The Parish: A Satire', 1820-24.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, what I *am* and *am capable* of is by no means determined by my individuality. I *am* ugly, but I can buy for myself the *most beautiful* of women. Therefore I am not *ugly*, for the effect of ugliness – its deterrent power – is nullified by money. I, according to my individual characteristics, am *lame*, but money furnishes me with twenty-four feet. Therefore I am not lame. I am bad, dishonest, unscrupulous, stupid; but money is honoured, and hence its possessor. Money is the supreme good, therefore its possessor is good. Money, besides, saves me the trouble of being dishonest: I am therefore presumed honest. I am *brainless*, but money is the *real brain* of all things and how then should its possessor be brainless? Besides, he can buy clever people for himself, and is he who has power over the clever not more clever than the clever?<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John Clare, *Selected Poems*, Everyman's Library, London, 1965, pp. 155-6.

<sup>2</sup> Karl Marx, 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844', *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, volume 3, Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1975, p. 324.