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There is perhaps no better evidence that myths and monsters had not been eradicated by the Enlightenment than a poem by Edward P. Mead, published in 1843 in the Birmingham newspaper *The Northern Star*:

There is a King, a ruthless King,
 Not a King of the poet's dream;
 But a Tyrant fell, white slaves know well,
 And that ruthless King is Steam.

 The sighs and groans of Labour's sons
 Are music in their ear,
 And the skeleton shades, of lads and maids,
 In the Steam King's hells appears. (1-4, 21-24)

This is not what we would, even metaphorically, consider unbiased historical fact. Yet a part of us clings to this image—when we think of the Industrial Revolution, we think of great innovation, and great suffering; for every triumph of human inventiveness in the form of steam engines, looms, and telegraph lines, there is an *Oliver Twist* that sticks in our collective memories. This polemical image has been contested and reinforced on several fronts, many of them tied directly to the creation of the title, 'Industrial Revolution'; for example, during the latter

half of the nineteenth century the term 'Industrial Revolution' entered common parlance through the lectures of Arnold Toynbee, whose work centred on, 'the *unnecessary* suffering that has been inflicted upon the people' (35, my emphasis). Enforcing this have been the commentaries by the Hammonds, who wrote extensively on the Chartist movement and the wider movement towards industrialisation, and most notably, in this context, Friedrich Engels in *The Conditions of the Working Class in England*. His reporting on the working population of Manchester helped form the foundations for analysis by the Marxist historians of the twentieth century, among them E.P. Thompson, who credited the Industrial Revolution for the shaping and defining of the English working class through exploitation and mechanisation of their tasks.

Conversely, Sidney Pollard has remarked upon the difficulty of tracking the vast complexity of industrialization and its underlying components, pointing to a far more complicated and nuanced reconstruction of events that reach beyond the realms of industry. Rondo Cameron goes as far as to say that the upheaval implied in the term 'revolution' belies the actual gradual innovations, and that the term Industrial Revolution and all that it entails is 'grossly misleading' (377). The Industrial Revolution is decidedly not just the aggregate of its title's component parts, and furthermore, as a concept it was birthed specifically out of the anxieties arising from its advent. Yet even with all of this in mind, why do we favour not just a vaguely negative, but a specifically sinister image of the machine and the ways in which we have incorporated it into society? Why is it that, even as we embrace technology more and more in our daily lives, we continue to embrace a monstrous image of industrialization?

I raise these questions not with the intent to censure, but rather to recognize the importance of these perpetuated images. Our perception of the past has always been an amalgam of historical fact and constructed myth, which has been termed by William McNeill as

‘mythistory’.¹ Mythistory is what I intend to focus on here: the monstrous characterization of technology as demonstrated by Mead's poem is artful social criticism meant to outrage, but it has become inextricable from remembered history, transcending the more nuanced readings that Pollard and Cameron offer. Rather, bound up in the very real statistics on factory fatalities and the conditions of England's working class, there is the implied narrative of Man, like Doctor Frankenstein, having created a creature destined to destroy its creator; or like Doctor Faustus, sold his soul for the sake of knowledge.

Both of these myth-arcs were explored and used in the interpretation of the Industrial Revolution by Karl Marx and Thomas Carlyle. In the same year as the *Northern Star* published Mead's poem, Carlyle wrote in his extended work, *Past and Present*, about the idyll of medieval England: “Side by side sleep the coal-strata and the iron-strata for so many ages; no Steam-Demon has yet risen smoking into being” (66). When Engels published *The Condition of the Working Class in England* a year later, he cited ‘The Steam King’ as a fair example of the feelings of the working class towards their employment in industrial cities (213). I posit that the imagery of monstrosity in the context of industrialization is in part founded on anxieties that were articulated and given narrative structure by historical mythmakers like Marx and Carlyle, which have since had a profound impact on how we use and consider machines in history and in our culture. By dissecting their use of monstrosity in their approaches to history, and moreover characterizing machines as monsters in their work, as ‘The Steam King’ did, I hope to illustrate one aspect of the historiographical foundation on which we build our perception of industrialization in the nineteenth century, and let that perception colour our views of technology today.

I. Carlyle and the Machine Age

Before the term 'Industrial Revolution' became widely used in England through Toynbee's lectures in the 1880s, Carlyle had coined the term 'the Machine Age' in his article, 'Signs of the Times', which was published in the *Edinburgh Review* in 1829. The article was Carlyle's first major foray into tackling industrialism and one of his first efforts towards social criticism; his previous works were mainly translations and literary critiques, particularly of German Romantic authors. In his early years he had found guidance and inspiration in the works of Goethe, who had famously offered his own interpretation of the Faust myth, a project which spanned the whole of his life and hinted also at the tale's relevance to the anxieties of his day. Carlyle, for his part, continuously returned to the Goethe's conception of *Bildung*, the notion of harmonious development of the self in both spirit and body, and through that the possibility of guiding society towards a unified knowledge through a form of higher faith that involved a consideration of the material and immaterial that meant that his criticism of modern society would stem not from technological process itself, but rather its dominion over the spiritual life of the society that built it. We see this evidenced in 'Signs of the Times', in which he turned what could have been merely a discussion of the wide dissemination of technology into a warning of the spiritual peril machine culture presented. The Machine Age, as he described it, offered a comprehensive understanding of the period by using machines as a metaphor through which every aspect of the time could be read, from the larger philosophical concerns of the materialism versus spiritualism, to the individual plights of the working class. Furthermore, by characterising the present age in this way, he specifically sets himself against it, as a harbinger of destruction should society continue on its current path.

Herbert Sussman states that in 'Signs of the Times', 'Carlyle sought to absorb the machine into his transcendental philosophy' (15), in the hopes that he could direct the use of machines away from total domination of material and spiritual life. His diagnosis of the age stemmed from his criticism of the overall 'mechanization' of society at the hands of capitalism, laissez-faire economics, and Utilitarianism. For this reason, the 'Machine Age' was not just a title he used to denote the advent of great and widespread technological development, but also served as a contrast to the classical ideas of the Golden or Iron Ages, and to any 'Heroical, Devotional, Philosophical, or Moral Age'. He wrote:

It is the Age of Machinery, in every outward and inward sense of that word...Nothing is now done directly, or by hand; all is by rule and calculated contrivance...Our old modes of exertion are all discredited, and thrown aside. On every hand, the living artisan is driven from his workshop, to make room for a speedier, inanimate one. The shuttle drops from the fingers of the weaver, and falls into iron fingers that ply it faster. The sailor furls his sail, and lays down his oar; and bids a strong, unwearied servant, on vaporous wings, bear him through the waters. (100-1)

Carlyle built his interpretation of contemporary history off the assertion that mechanism had become its most fundamental characteristic. He argued that the machine has infiltrated every part of modern existence, as he demonstrated here through the occupations it had usurped. While 'the metaphor of the machine suggests not so much the power of the new technology as the rationalized organization it necessitates' (Sussman 19), the larger rise of industrialism suggested more to him than an increase in the use of technology in society; it marked a spiritual movement

towards a mechanical existence—an overall loss of individuality, and a rejection of spiritual truth.

From this standpoint, Carlyle expressed a mix of skepticism and awe: machines on their own were one of man's most impressive accomplishments, and may be celebrated for the wealth and the enhanced quality of life they brought to England ('Signs' 101). Their spiritual cost, however, was of Faustian proportions. Just as Mephistopheles accompanies Faust for the rest of his life, so does machinery follow man into every aspect of his life. In describing this change, Carlyle used the din of machinery to evoke its invasion of the sciences, art and literature. The world as it now existed was filled with a new noise, and the fundamental ways that people lived their lives and treated each other had changed:

Men are grown mechanical in head and in heart, as well as in hand. They have lost faith in individual endeavour, and in natural force, of any kind... Their whole efforts, attachments, opinions, turn on mechanism, and are of a mechanical character. (103)

The basis for Carlyle's mythology and his critical prophecy was this pervasiveness of mechanism as both a driving material characteristic of the age and as a metaphor for modern spiritual existence (or lack thereof). In his estimation, the industrial world had unbalanced man's whole existence, creating an apocalyptic time of crisis in which the nation had abandoned its spiritual pole: 'The King has virtually abdicated; the Church is a widow, without jointure; public principle is gone; private honesty is going; society, in short, is fast falling in pieces; and a time of *unmixed* evil is come on us' (100, my emphasis). By constructing a worldview that is founded in the balance of polarities—most obviously the material versus the spiritual, but Albert LaValley also suggests those of mechanism and dynamics, unconsciousness and Consciousness (59)—the

overwhelming takeover of industry can only spell disaster if trusted to run society. Even without having ever used the title 'Industrial Revolution', Carlyle manages in 'Signs of the Times' to build up the foundations for the title through his transcendentalist historical perspective. Moreover, the machine transcends its own use as metaphor and becomes both a physical and spiritual monster :

We term it...the Machine of Society...Considered merely as a metaphor, all this is well enough; but here...the shadow we have wantonly evoked stands terrible before us and will not depart at our bidding. (105-6)

In this moment, Carlyle places the machine at the centre of a myth arc through which the entirety the modern age could be understood. Moreover, in this myth that same machine grows to embody soullessness and inhumanity, with the potential to become a monstrous haunting that we cannot control.

II. Marx's Industrial Haunting

Against this backdrop, Marx presented his own interpretation of monstrous machines while also reconfiguring the myth arc seen in Carlyle's work to present an opportunity for society to regain control. *The Communist Manifesto*, written in 1847 and translated to English in 1850, was not widely disseminated to English audiences until later decades, but it consolidated and lent coherence to the struggle of the working classes that had come under scrutiny since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. It therefore serves as both a contemporaneous influential document and an historical interpretation of the time.

Marx began *The Manifesto* with a haunting: 'A spectre is haunting Europe—the spectre of Communism' (473). He introduced Communism not as what it is, but rather how it is

perceived, and in doing so established the methodology with which he approached industrialization. He presented, through the medium of propaganda, a reading of history in which the supernatural participants that may have been perceived by other Europeans were usurped for the purpose of his own mythmaking. Though Marx, too, had admiration for Goethe and other Romantic writers of the previous generation, his use of the supernatural within the *Manifesto* is specifically for the construction of material history. Chris Baldick observes that Marx began with the spectre, a medieval relic, as a symbol of Communism because despite Enlightenment claims that modern science and rationality had conquered myths and monsters, 'Far from killing off myths, modern inventions multiply them, even embody them' (123). By embodying spectres and demons in machines and their overseers, Marx carved out a myth of industrialism that enforced not only its overall tenacity and the way it had shaped social and spiritual life during the early nineteenth century, but also his belief in the creation and rise of the proletariat.

Baldick's analysis offers a comprehensive view of Marx's overall body of work with the unexpectedly ghoulish description of industrial life in the foreground. Marx was at points dismissive of the place of mythology post-Enlightenment, and at others apparently willing to not only embrace myth but attempt to subvert others' use of it in order to promote his own world view.ⁱⁱ While many of Marx's contemporaries were writing about the Titanic machines being built using comparisons to Greek mythological figures, such as Andrew Ure's gushing descriptions of factory systems as 'Herculean prodig[ies]' having 'sprung out of the hands of our modern Prometheus at the bidding of Minerva' (192), Marx was devoting his mythical references to monstrous, ambiguous figures such as vampires and sorcerers. His goal overall, Baldick argues, was the manipulation of a pro-bourgeois myth of the self-made man into that of Frankenstein, so that even when pro-industrialists who he criticized, such as Ure, pronounced the

wonder and majesty of the factory system and its machinery, he could temper that awe into fear through invoking the myth-arc of that force turning on its creator. Furthermore, in this way he echoes the way Shelley's novel destabilised the central tenets of Goethe or Carlyle's work regarding the transcendent potential of man, by Frankenstein instead reflecting upon his creation as, 'the being whom I had cast among mankind...my own spirit let loose from the grave, and forced to destroy all that was dear to me' (72), thereby placing the seed of destruction not in a larger cosmic balance but rather in personal, human flaw; likewise in Marx, the spiritual balance Carlyle idealises is eschewed in favour of a single process of self-propagation and exacerbation through a social divide between men.

I contend that this is the true haunting that underlies *The Manifesto*. Marx toyed with the idea of machine as literary device in many of his works, repeatedly tying it back to the Frankenstein myth while replacing the obsessive scientific exploration in Shelley's work with industrialization. The rise of the machine was as much a central component of Marx's historical narrative as capitalism—when he stated, 'Not only has the bourgeoisie forged the weapons that bring death to itself; it has also called into existence the men who are to wield those weapons' (478), he was speaking of the human monsters created by capitalism, and also the monstrosity of the new modes of production facilitated by technology. For this reason, the analysis of machinery and its part in the creation of the proletariat extends not only into causal relationships in the *Manifesto*, but metaphorical ones as well. Marx stated, 'Machinery is put to a wrong use, with the object of transforming the workman, from his very childhood, into a part of a detail-machine' (*Manifesto* 408). Here the Frankenstein parallel is in stark relief—the proletariat, a chaotic conglomerate of labourers, was forged together by capital and devoured by the machinery of the factory, thereby proclaiming in their revolution, 'You are my creator, but I am

your master;—obey!’ (Shelley 165). We see also the same mechanistic inevitability of Marx's historical reading in Shelley's tale, such that when Frankenstein gives chase, he relates, ‘I pursued my path towards the destruction of the daemon, more as a task enjoined by heaven, as the mechanical impulse of some power of which I was unconscious, than as the ardent desire of my soul’ (202). One mechanical process begets another, such that the two are locked together in destruction of one another. Moreover, as was the case with Dr. Frankenstein wherein his creation of the monster was marked by his ‘[having] lost all soul or sensation but for this one pursuit’ (49-50), Marx saw the capitalist/creator also transform into a monster through this process: ‘Capital is dead labour, that, vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labour’ (*Capital* 233). The myth perpetuates not only because of the sense it makes of a chaotic paradigm shift in modern society, but also because it gives this order and power to those that needed and lacked it most.

Thus, the history of the world according to Marx is not only a series of class struggles but also a cycle of constant revolutions. The staying power of the Faust-Frankenstein myth had already been established, but in Marx's hands it lingers even more strongly for its significance to later Victorian society and the present. When combined with bourgeois guilt in the latter half of the nineteenth century, for example, the idea took hold as a reference point for general attitudes towards technology, as demonstrated by the narrator of H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine*. Having encountered the weak, technology-reliant Eloi and dreary, monstrous Morlocks, his first thought is to assume that, ‘Proceeding from the problems of our own age, it seemed clear as daylight to me that the gradual widening of the present merely temporary and social difference between the Capitalist and the Labourer, was the key to the whole position’ (38).

3. The Imaginative Legacy

With all of this in mind, what has been the impact of Marx and Carlyle's work on our historiography of the Industrial Revolution?

Marx's mythmaking has most overtly had a profound effect on our perception of the Industrial Revolution and technology in general, but this is not solely due to his politics. Marx's historical construction of industrialization has since become one of the major contributors to what Donald MacKenzie calls 'technological determinism'—the belief that technology shapes society (473). Despite the concept's rejection by prominent twentieth century Marxists and its debatable accuracy as a legitimate interpretation of Marx's work, it best encapsulates the amalgam of class struggle and exploitation through technology that Marx captured in the *Communist Manifesto*, such that it has since stuck in the public consciousness. How many times, for example, have we heard from advertisers that a new gadget on the market 'will change the way we live our lives'?

Carlyle has had his share of influence as well, and it has not been one restricted to an academic readership. While his ideas were singular, radical, and certainly not universally accepted, the legacy of Carlyle's Machine Age lives strongly in the work of Dickens, who was a great admirer of Carlyle's work, and dedicated his novel *Hard Times* to him with the assertion that he hoped to 'shake some people in a terrible mistake of these days' (367). Previous to his exposure to Carlyle, Dickens had loosely ascribed to Benthamite principles of reforming society through its particular institutions, but by the publication of *Hard Times*, wherein almost every character is mechanized, mind and body, by Utilitarian principles, he appeared to have all but rejected Utilitarian ideas as he understood them (it is notable, additionally, that the criticisms he levelled at Utilitarianism throughout the novel also bore the mark of Carlyle's histrionic

simplification of Bentham's ideas). Thus much of Dickens' later body of work, responsible for some of our most persistent notions of what Victorian England, and particularly Victorian London, was like, are bound up inextricably with Carlyle's vision. Taken together, despite the authors' individual politics lying on opposite ends of the spectrum, the works of Marx and Carlyle both colour our consideration of industrialism by binding a machine lifestyle with a lack of human feeling, and in doing so they gave the human flaw of inhumanity a monstrous, physical embodiment.

An important aspect of both of the central pieces addressed here is that they were intended for popular audiences, designed specifically not to offer dry objective study, but to enlighten through narrative—a characteristic that we as modern audiences tend to place under the purview of myth rather than history. Peter Heehs observes that, 'The general trend of post-Enlightenment historiography has been the eradication of myth from the record of "what really happened". Hence the most prevalent use of the word "myth" among historians: an interpretation that is considered blatantly false' (2). This has not always been how history was studied, however, and what makes the Industrial Revolution particularly interesting from the perspective of *mythistory* rather than simply *history* is the prevalence and scale of the mythology that now surrounds it, and what in particular we now 'remember' about it. While academically our understanding of the Industrial Revolution has grown far more nuanced, there remains an emotional attachment to the drama of the era that statistics alone do not account for. For some reason, rather than the positive economic gains England felt as a result of industrialization, the negative impacts of it—the soot, the child labor, the factory fires—is what lingers with us in our cultural-historical memory.

Is this preference for drama just the result of our own contemporary frame of reference? We can look at our own troubling economic prospects, and perhaps argue that yes, the time is right for us to question whether industrialization was a movement of progress or is destined to ultimately destroy us. But consider the fiction of the twentieth century: for every vampire and werewolf fantasy, there is a robot apocalypse and soulless mechanized police state from dystopian science fiction. The unknown and the unnatural have always been the central sources of human fear, but at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century, industrialization caused us to place our own creations in those categories—the fear of the unknown has transformed into the fear of the ubiquitous. Machines have become part of the vocabulary of horror, due in part to how the Industrial Revolution was read by Marx and Carlyle, as well as many others; as a result, the Steam King continues to hold sway over our collective memories and imaginations.

Notes:

ⁱ The idea of mythistory has also been explored by Joseph Mali in his more recent book, *Mythistory: The Making of a Modern Historiography* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2003).

ⁱⁱ A good summation of his ambivalence towards myth can be found in the *Grundrisse*, in which he remarked, ‘All mythology masters and dominates and shapes the forces of nature in and through the imagination...the difficulty...lies rather in understanding why they still...prevail as the standard and model beyond attainment’ (St. Albans: Granada Publishing Limited, 1973, 56).

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