Draft Script - possibly for a short play

Manchester: The Sentinel, The River, The Return

Inspiring by walks, sounds, books, research and prompts.
Research for ‘Would Like to Meet’ by Quarantine, 2025
A collaboration between Alan J Ward and Linus Grösel

Manchester and Chemnitz

Character Biographies & Transnational Context

Friedrich Engels (1820–1895)

German philosopher, social scientist, and journalist. Observed Manchester's industrial working class in 1842-44.

Author of *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845).

Connection to the statue site: Now immortalised in the sculpture on the former Vauxhall Gardens / Elysian Fields site, overlooking the Irk Valley.

Connection to Chemnitz and Ukraine: Engaged with Saxon industrial towns; via family trade links and correspondence, aware of Eastern European labour networks.

Karl Marx (1818–1883)

German philosopher, economist, and revolutionary theorist.

Co-author of *The Communist Manifesto* (1848).

Analysed Saxon industrial towns; his theory shaped East German urban memory.

In correspondence and economic studies, interacted with conditions in the Russian Empire (including Ukraine), linking agrarian/industrial transitions.

Jem Ashton (fictional character from *The Manchester Man*, 1876)

Manchester working-class narrator of social and personal experience in the industrial city.

Witness to floods along the Irk, factory labour, and moral dilemmas of 19th-century urban life.

Isabella Banks (author of *The Manchester Man*)

Moral and domestic observer of Manchester society; emphasises sentiment, social cohesion, and ethical responsibility.

William Mitchell (sculptor, 1925–2020)

British public-artist known for large-scale concrete, relief and mural works from the 1960s/70s.

His style: textured surfaces, industrial motifs, abstract totems.

Location: Mitchell's sculpture stands on the historic site of the Vauxhall Gardens / Elysian Fields above the Irk Valley — a vantage point linking past pre- and industrial Manchester, public art, and memory and regeneration.

Transnational Context

Manchester: Irk Valley, industrial hub; the sculpture stands atop former pleasure-garden site overlooking mills and rivers. Engles sculpture reclaimed from Ukraine as part of MIF2017.

Chemnitz: Saxon industrial city; knbown as 'Saxony Manchester' the Karl-Marx-Monument uses granite from Ukraine, casting forged in Leningrad.

Ukraine: Source of raw materials and labour flows; inter-linked with both Manchester's industrial past and memorialisation of labour in Europe.

Scene 1

The Vantage Point & the Flooding Irk

Setting: Late afternoon. On the elevated terrace of the former Vauxhall Gardens / Elysian Fields site, the Mitchell concrete sculpture stands as a sentinel. Below, the Irk Valley spreads out: factories with tall chimneys, mill buildings, the swollen river racing after recent rain, confronting the banks of Danzic Street and the arteries of trade.

Engels stands by the plinth of the sculpture, pointing downward at the river.

Marx scribbles notes.

Jem Ashton leans on the pedestal, boots muddy from earlier strolls beside the river.

Isabella Banks stands slightly apart, gaze steady, taking in the scene with moral weight.

Dialogue snippet:

ENGELS: "From here you see the Irk in full voice — black, laden with dye-works refuse, bone-mills' waste, the city's invisible labour become visible."

JEM ASHTON: "Yes sir. But I see more too — the river rages after the rain, yes, but children laugh by its sides when it's calm. Families keep living."

MARX: "That is the duality: life and labour, wealth and suffering. The Irk is not simply nature — it is the archive of industrial production."

ISABELLA BANKS: "And as we look down, we must ask: how shall memory treat these lives? The flood, the mill, the family saved — these deserve witness."

Scene 2

Danzic Street & Transnational Trade

Setting: A downward glance from the terrace reveals Danzic Street cutting across the industrial heart of the valley. Named after the German-language form of Gdańsk, it stands as a reminder that Manchester's textile wealth was bound up with Baltic and Eastern European trade networks.

Engels walks slowly along the edge of the terrace as Marx follows.

Jem Ashton moves toward the street, pointing out the flows of wagons and loading docks below. Isabella Banks remains near the sculpture, reflecting.

Dialogue snippet:

MARX: "Danzic Street — a name from the Baltic, a trace of international commerce. The raw materials, the textiles, the machinery all travelled across borders, linking Manchester to Gdańsk, to Chemnitz, to the quarries of Ukraine."

ENGELS: "Indeed. Capital flows across these streets, unseen. The river, the street, the valley — all part of the same network."

JEM ASHTON: "We think of Manchester as ours, but the trade reaches far. My uncle used to say: the cloth here contains threads spun on distant looms in Saxony, fed by miners and rivers there."

ISABELLA BANKS: "So our memory must be wide — not just the local mill, but the distant quarry, the foreign factory. Kindness and labour know no borders."

Scene 3

The Sculpture & Temporal Palimpsest

Setting: The concrete sculpture by Mitchell looms above. Its surface is textured: arc-shapes, gears, shell-like patterns, deep reliefs that catch the fading light. You can almost feel the weight of the 1960s, the era of redevelopment, the echo of worker motifs and public art ambitions.

The four characters cluster around the base of the sculpture. Engels touches the relief. Jem Ashton runs a hand over the concrete. Isabella Banks steps back and contemplates the form. Marx records in his notebook.

Dialogue snippet:

ENGELS: "This sculpture stands not just on a vantage point, but between times. The 19th-century river valley, the 20th-century public art, the future yet to come."

JEM ASHTON: "It feels like labour made stone. The totem, the gear-motif, the concrete riddled with history."

MARX: "Yes. Mitchell uses industrial form as memory. This material stands for machines, workers, architecture. It links Manchester's past to Manchester's built memory."

ISABELLA BANKS: "And so memory becomes shape. A sculpture becomes witness. We live, we flood, we rebuild — and someone carves it into concrete so future eyes may see."

Scene 4

Interiors of the Mill & Worker Housing

Setting: Flashback in the mind: the factory interior, the looms clacking, coal dust, men and women at machines. Outside, rows of terraces, windows small, chimneys tall, the Irk lapping close behind.

Jem Ashton imagines walking through the row-houses; Engels watches him, Marx writes; Isabella Banks closes her eyes and pictures the children.

Dialogue snippet:

JEM ASHTON: "I remember a flood in my youth — the Irk rose and the water crept into our home. The mill clock still beat, looms kept going, despite the tide inching up the stairs."

ENGELS: "And that flood was not nature alone — it was the result of living next to the river, the factory, the waste from the mills. Production and hazard folded together."

MARX: "Housing, employment, flood-risk — interlinked. The labourer is property of the machine just as the machine is property of capital."

ISABELLA BANKS: "And in that house, the mother held her child and prayed. That act of resilience matters. Statistical categories cannot hold the small miracles of human care."

Scene 5

Transnational Reflection & The Future – Victoria North and the New Irk

Setting:

The light is now fading over the Irk. The four figures stand together in silhouette before the glowing pulsing Mitchell sculpture. Around them the sounds of construction rise — drilling, scaffolding, the rhythmic humming of machinery from the new Victoria North development. Cranes mark out the skyline; hoardings promise "New Homes, New Communities, New Manchester."

Dust drifts through the light; the Irk glints beneath the scaffolding of the future. The dialogue now bends toward questions of return, continuity, and the persistence of capital.

Dialogue snippet:

ENGELS: "They called it improvement once — clearing the courts, draining the flood-lands, bringing order to squalor. And again it returns, the same vision wrapped in new words."

MARX: "Yes — capital renews itself by reinvesting in its own ruins. What was once industrial becomes speculative; the landscape is gentrified capital's mirror."

JEM ASHTON: "I hear them say it's for 'new life by the river' — cafés, apartments, gardens. But whose life? Not the spinners' children nor the families of the old terraces."

ISABELLA BANKS: "And yet — the cranes do rise, the Irk is cleaned, the air a little clearer. Is there not hope in that?"

ENGELS: "Hope perhaps, but mediated by property deeds. The cycle continues — accumulation, displacement, reconstruction."

MARX: "The contradiction persists: the same land that once housed the factory worker now yields profit through the promise of 'urban nature.' Even the river's restoration is commodified."

JEM ASHTON: "So the Irk still labours — only now the labour is aesthetic. It works as symbol, as backdrop, as the selling point of a cleaner dream."

ISABELLA BANKS: "Then let the memory not be washed away. Let those who walk the riverside gardens know what lies beneath: floods, factories, families, courage."

ENGELS: "History flows in spirals, not circles. But here, on this terrace, the spiral tightens. The Elysian Fields become construction fields — the eternal return of Manchester's making."

MARX: "And each return carries the possibility of change, if the watchers read the signs rightly."

JEM ASHTON: "Then let the sculpture stand not as decoration, but as witness."

ISABELLA BANKS: "Yes. May the city remember the labour that built its beauty."

The sound of construction merges with the river's rush. The scene fades — the Mitchell concrete figure holding its silent vigil above the Irk, the watchers' words dissolving into the dusk.

Poetic coda (optional addition after final curtain - solo voice in the dark):

The Irk flows on, now clean, now bordered by steel and glass.

Its currents carry silt and memory — a century’s debris turned heritage.

Beneath the cranes, the workers of the past still turn their invisible gears.

Manchester remakes itself, but the rhythm remains the same.

Concrete remembers what glass forgets.