

John Donne (1572–1631)
The Flea

Mark but this flea, and mark in this,
 How little that which thou deny'st me is;
 Me it suck'd first, and now sucks thee,
 And in this flea, our two bloods mingled be;
 5 Thou know'st that this cannot be said
 A sin, or shame, or loss of maidenhead,
 Yet this enjoys before it woo,
 And pamper'd swells with one blood made of two,
 And this, alas, is more than we would do.

 10 Oh stay, three lives in one flea spare,
 Where we almost, nay more than married are.
 This flea is you and I, and this
 Our marriage bed, and marriage temple is;
 Though parents grudge, and you, we're met,
 15 And cloistered in these living walls of jet.
 Though use make you apt to kill me,
 Let not to that self murder added be,
 And sacrilege, three sins in killing three.

 20 Cruel and sudden, hast thou since
 Purpled thy nail, in blood of innocence?
 In what could this flea guilty be,
 Except in that drop which it sucked from thee?
 Yet thou triumph'st, and say'st that thou
 Find'st not thyself nor me the weaker now;
 25 'Tis true, then learn how false fears be;
 Just so much honour, when thou yield'st to me,
 Will waste, as this flea's death took life from thee.

The Major Works, ed. John Carey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 89. [Digital Donne](#) has facsimiles of the [first printed edition](#) (1633) and [manuscripts](#). The “flea poem” was a widespread late-medieval and early modern genre; cf. Helen Gardner, ed., *The Elegies and the Songs and Sonnets* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965), 174.

John Donne
The Sun

Busy old fool, unruly Sun,
 Why dost thou thus,
Through windows, and through curtains, call on us?
Must to thy motions lovers' seasons run?
5 Saucy pedantic wretch, go chide
 Late schoolboys, and sour prentices,
 Go tell court-huntsmen, that the king will ride,
 Call country ants to harvest offices;
Love, all alike, no season knows, nor clime,
10 Nor hours, days, months, which are the rags of time.

Thy beams, so reverend and strong
 Why shouldst thou think?
 I could eclipse and cloud them with a wink,
But that I would not lose her sight so long:
15 If her eyes have not blinded thine,
 Look, and tomorrow late, tell me
 Whether both th' Indias of spice and mine
 Be where thou left'st them, or lie here with me.
 Ask for those kings whom thou saw'st yesterday,
20 And thou shalt hear, All here in one bed lay.

She's all states, and all princes, I,
 Nothing else is.
 Princes do but play us; compared to this,
All honour's mimic; all wealth alchemy.
25 Thou, sun, art half as happy as we,
 In that the world's contracted thus;
 Thine age asks ease, and since thy duties be
 To warm the world, that's done in warming us.
 Shine here to us, and thou art everywhere;
30 This bed thy centre is, these walls, thy sphere.

The Major Works, ed. John Carey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 92–93. [Digital Donne](#) has facsimiles of the [first printed edition](#) (1633) and [manuscripts](#). Some annotations at [Representative Poetry Online](#).

Phillis Wheatley (ca. 1753–1784)
On Being Brought from Africa to America

'Twas mercy brought me from my *Pagan* land,
Taught my benighted soul to understand
That there's a God, that there's a *Saviour* too:
Once I redemption neither sought nor knew.
5 Some view our sable race with scornful eye,
"Their colour is a diabolic die."
Remember, *Christians*, *Negros*, black as *Cain*,
May be refin'd, and join th' angelic train.

Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral (London: by A. Bell, for Cox and Berry, Boston, 1773), 18, [Early American Imprints](#).

Robert Browning (1812–1889)
My Last Duchess

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive. I call
That piece a wonder, now: Frà Pandolf's hands
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
5 Will't please you sit and look at her? I said
"Frà Pandolf" by design, for never read
Strangers like you that pictured countenance,
The depth and passion of its earnest glance,
But to myself they turned (since none puts by
10 The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)
And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,
How such a glance came there; so, not the first
Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 'twas not
Her husband's presence only, called that spot
15 Of joy into the Duchess' cheek: perhaps
Frà Pandolf chanced to say "Her mantle laps
"Over my lady's wrist too much," or "Paint
"Must never hope to reproduce the faint
"Half-flush that dies along her throat;" such stuff
20 Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough
For calling up that spot of joy. She had
A heart—how shall I say?—too soon made glad,
Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er
She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.
25 Sir, 'twas all one! My favour at her breast,
The dropping of the daylight in the West,
The bough of cherries some officious fool
Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule
She rode with round the terrace—all and each
30 Would draw from her alike the approving speech,
Or blush, at least. She thanked men,—good; but thanked
Somehow—I know not how—as if she ranked
My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name
With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame
35 This sort of trifling? Even had you skill

In speech—(which I have not)—to make your will
 Quite clear to such an one, and say, “Just this
 “Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,
 “Or there exceed the mark”—and if she let
 40 Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set
 Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse,
 —E’en then would be some stooping; and I choose
 Never to stoop. Oh sir, she smiled, no doubt,
 Whene’er I passed her; but who passed without
 45 Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;
 Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands
 As if alive. Will’t please you rise? We’ll meet
 The company below, then. I repeat,
 The Count your master’s known munificence
 50 Is ample warrant that no just pretence
 Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;
 Though his fair daughter’s self, as I avowed
 At starting, is my object. Nay, we’ll go
 Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,
 55 Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,
 Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!

The Poetical Works of Robert Browning (London: Smith, Elder: 1898), 1.348. The poem was first published in 1842, under the title “Italy and Spain, 1.—Italy.” Please consult the annotated text edited by F.E.L. Priestley at [Representative Poetry Online](#). The annotations are very useful for finding your way in the poem. (The long commentary on the same page is not required reading.)

Emily Dickinson (1830–1886)
“I’m Nobody! Who are you?”

I’m Nobody! Who are you?
Are you - Nobody - too?
Then there’s a pair of us!
Dont tell! they’d banish us - you know!

5 How dreary - to be - Somebody!
How public - like a Frog -
To tell one’s name - the livelong June -
To an admiring Bog!

The Poems of Emily Dickinson: Reading Edition, ed. R.W. Franklin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 116–17. Franklin dates the poem to 1861. Compare the Emily Dickinson Archive fascimile of the manuscript, [Houghton Fascicle 11](#).

Emily Dickinson
“Publication - is the Auction”

Publication - is the Auction
Of the Mind of Man -
Poverty - be justifying
For so foul a thing

5 Possibly - but We - would rather
 From Our Garret go
 White - unto the White Creator -
 Than invest - Our Snow -

10 Thought belong to Him who gave it -
 Then - to Him Who bear
 It's Corporeal illustration - sell
 The Royal Air -

15 In the Parcel - Be the Merchant
 Of the Heavenly Grace -
 But reduce no Human Spirit
 To Disgrace of Price -

Ibid., 351–52. Franklin dates the poem to 1863. Compare the Emily Dickinson Archive facsimile of the manuscript, [Houghton Fascicle 37](#).

Herman Melville (1819–1891)
Shiloh
A Requiem
(April, 1862)

Skimming lightly, wheeling still,
The swallows fly low
Over the field in clouded days,
The forest-field of Shiloh—
5 Over the field where April rain
Solaced the parched ones stretched in pain
Through the pause of night
That followed the Sunday fight
Around the church of Shiloh—
10 The church so lone, the log-built one,
That echoed to many a parting groan
And natural prayer
Of dying foemen mingled there—
Foemen at morn, but friends at eve—
15 Fame or country least their care:
(What like a bullet can undeceive!)
But now they lie low,
While over them the swallows skim
And all is hushed at Shiloh.

Battle-Pieces and Aspects of War (New York: Harper, 1866), 63, [HathiTrust](#). *Shiloh*, with almost twenty-four thousand casualties, was an unprecedentedly bloody battle (though even bloodier battles followed).

T. S. Eliot (1888–1965)
The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock

Following pages: Eliot, *Prufrock and Other Observations* (London: Egoist Press, 1917), 9–16, [HathiTrust](#). Some annotations in [Representative Poetry Online](#), ed. Ian Lancashire. More extensive annotations in *Poems of T.S. Eliot*, ed. Christopher Ricks and Jim Cue (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015). The poem's first print appearance was in *Poetry* 6, no. 3 (June 1915): 130–35.

The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock

*S'io credesse che mia risposta fosse
A persona che mai tornasse al mondo,
Questa fiamma staria senza piu scosse.
Ma perciocche giammai di questo fondo
Non torno vivo alcun, s'i'odo il vero,
Senza tema d'infamia ti rispondo.*

LET us go then, you and I,
When the evening is spread out against the sky
Like a patient etherized upon a table ;
Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets,
The muttering retreats
Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels
And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells :
Streets that follow like a tedious argument
Of insidious intent
To lead you to an overwhelming question. . . .

10 The Love Song of Prufrock

Oh, do not ask, "What is it?"
Let us go and make our visit.

In the room the women come and go
Talking of Michelangelo.

The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-
panes,
The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the
window-panes,
Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening,
Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains,
Let fall upon its back the soot that falls from
chimneys,
Slipped by the terrace, made a sudden leap,
And seeing that it was a soft October night,
Curled once about the house, and fell asleep.

And indeed there will be time
For the yellow smoke that slides along the street,
Rubbing its back upon the window-panes ;
There will be time, there will be time
To prepare a face to meet the faces that you
meet ;
There will be time to murder and create,
And time for all the works and days of hands
That lift and drop a question on your plate ;
Time for you and time for me,

The Love Song of Prufrock 11

And time yet for a hundred indecisions,
And for a hundred visions and revisions,
Before the taking of a toast and tea.

In the room the women come and go
Talking of Michelangelo.

And indeed there will be time
To wonder, "Do I dare?" and, "Do I dare?"
Time to turn back and descend the stair,
With a bald spot in the middle of my hair—
(They will say: "How his hair is growing
thin!")

My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to
the chin,

My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a
simple pin—

(They will say: "But how his arms and legs
are thin!")

Do I dare

Disturb the universe?

In a minute there is time

For decisions and revisions which a minute will
reverse.

For I have known them all already, known them
all:

Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons,

12 The Love Song of Prufrock

I have measured out my life with coffee spoons ;
I know the voices dying with a dying fall
Beneath the music from a farther room.

So how should I presume ?

And I have known the eyes already, known them
all—

The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase,
And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin,
When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall,
Then how should I begin
To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways ?
And how should I presume ?

And I have known the arms already, known them
all—

Arms that are braceleted and white and bare
(But in the lamplight, downed with light brown
hair !)

Is it perfume from a dress
That makes me so digress ?
Arms that lie along a table, or wrap about a shawl.
And should I then presume ?
And how should I begin ?

* * * *

Shall I say, I have gone at dusk through narrow
streets

The Love Song of Prufrock 13

And watched the smoke that rises from the pipes
Of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of
windows ? . . .

I should have been a pair of ragged claws
Scuttling across the floors of silent seas.

* * * *

And the afternoon, the evening, sleeps so peacefully !

Smoothed by long fingers,
Asleep . . . tired . . . or it malingers,
Stretched on the floor, here beside you and me.
Should I, after tea and cakes and ices,
Have the strength to force the moment to its
crisis ?

But though I have wept and fasted, wept and
prayed,

Though I have seen my head (grown slightly
bald) brought in upon a platter,

I am no prophet—and here's no great matter ;
I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker,
And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my
coat, and snicker,
And in short, I was afraid.

And would it have been worth it, after all,
After the cups, the marmalade, the tea,

14 The Love Song of Prufrock

Among the porcelain, among some talk of you
and me,
Would it have been worth while,
To have bitten off the matter with a smile,
To have squeezed the universe into a ball
To roll it toward some overwhelming question,
To say : " I am Lazarus, come from the dead,
Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all "—
If one, settling a pillow by her head,
Should say : " That is not what I meant at all ;
That is not it, at all."

And would it have been worth it, after all,
Would it have been worth while,
After the sunsets and the dooryards and the
sprinkled streets,
After the novels, after the teacups, after the
skirts that trail along the floor—
And this, and so much more ?—
It is impossible to say just what I mean !
But as if a magic lantern threw the nerves in
patterns on a screen :
Would it have been worth while
If one, settling a pillow or throwing off a shawl,
And turning toward the window, should say :
" That is not it at all,
That is not what I meant, at all."

* * * *

The Love Song of Prufrock 15

No ! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to
be ;

Am an attendant lord, one that will do
To swell a progress, start a scene or two,
Advise the prince ; no doubt, an easy tool,
Deferential, glad to be of use,
Politic, cautious, and meticulous ;
Full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse ;
At times, indeed, almost ridiculous—
Almost, at times, the Fool.

I grow old . . . I grow old . . .
I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled.

Shall I part my hair behind ? Do I dare to eat
a peach ?
I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon
the beach.
I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.

I do not think that they will sing to me.

I have seen them riding seaward on the waves
Combing the white hair of the waves blown
back
When the wind blows the water white and
black.

16 The Love Song of Prufrock

We have lingered in the chambers of the sea
By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and
brown
Till human voices wake us, and we drown.

tempt to produce this new concoction by cutting up Marxism into sections and taking some which seem palatable and rejecting others. Because it proceeds in this way, this tendency is essentially wrong and destined to produce nothing but confusion and to hinder real understanding of Marxism and of revolutionary politics. It is especially significant that the line of division, where the "cutting" is made, usually lies along the Marxian theory of politics and the Marxian theory of the State, which are regarded as out-of-date, particularly the theory of revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat. An attempt is made to use history. But that is an impermissible way of treating Marxism, because then there is nothing left. Marxism as an attitude to contemporary history and to action is gone. As an interpretation of past history alone, it becomes degraded to a mere "economic interpretation," forced on to the horns of the dilemma of either accepting a rigid historical fatalism or else as a guide to contemporary history—to contemporary *activity*—explaining precisely nothing at all. Mr. Rowse, for instance, would reject the theory of the State as an old-fashioned half-truth, inapplicable at any rate to English peculiarities; and with it necessarily goes the theory of revolutionary politics and the dictatorship of the proletariat. Mr. Murry is less explicit. Whether or not he accepts in words the Marxian theory of the State he completely fails to face up to the logical implications of the Marxian theory of politics. In his view of England, at any rate, it is precisely the implications of the State as a class instrument that he ignores; so that while he may accept physical birth as a glorious fact, he has no place for the forceps of the midwife. At any rate he casts his "Marxism" in such a "moral," such a Spinozist, shape as to destroy all meaning in the contrast between "scientific" and "Utopian" Socialism.

But the Marxist conception of class is meaningless except with the idea of exploitation—the latter is included with the former in the same definition. Similarly, without the concept of the State as a class instrument, it is inconceivable that a class system, rooted in the exploitation of the masses by a small minority, could last out a span of more than a few years. And if the State in capitalist society is essentially a *capitalist* State—an organ of class domination, to perpetuate an exploiting system—then proletarian politics can be nothing less than revolutionary politics—a struggle to overthrow the exploiting system which of necessity implies a struggle *against* the State. Socialism then acquires its only consistent meaning, not as an issue of planning *versus laissez-faire*, but as the ending of class-exploitation in the only way it can be ended, namely, by expropriation of the exploiting class. And, since history does not proceed mechanically, but is framed by conscious purpose, inspired by a scientific theory, it follows that such a revolution and the eventual building of Socialism on new foundations cannot arise "spontaneously," but must be led and guided by a revolutionary Party. Such a Party must be of the proletariat, while leading it, it must be part of the proletarian movement, in order to guide it, but it must not merely follow events "by the tail." Hence, the primary importance in Marx's theory of the role of a Communist Party.

It is a common fallacy that Communists are people who want to do things in a hurry, impatient people, to be contrasted with the more sober experimental sort. But the distinction is not a time distinction. Actually the Communist places a much greater stress on historical relativity than anyone else. He realizes that events have a certain order—that there is a certain order of "first things first," and that there are other things which it is utopian to hope to attempt. For instance, he regards it as utopian to conceive the possibility of a planned economy apart from proletarian revolution as a first condition; and similarly utopian to conceive of a proletarian revolution without a whole period of preceding partial struggles, and without a revolutionary Party leading those struggles, and schooled in years of the class struggle. Communists differ in holding a particular view of history and of politics (which is the making of current history). This view is Marxism. If one is to discuss Marxism and seek to understand it, one must approach it first as a unity, and seek to understand it in its unity. Only then will its separate departments—its theory of the State, of Political Economy, of Proletarian Politics—acquire their full meaning. To approach it piecemeal is to court misapprehension at the outset; because by approaching it in this way, one excludes Marxism, *ab initio*, as an *attitude to practical activity*, in which theory and practice acquire a new unity, and

Langston Hughes

Good Morning Revolution

Good-morning, Revolution:

*You're the very best friend
I ever had.*

We gonna pal around together from now on.

Say, listen, Revolution:

*You know, the boss where I used to work,
The guy that gimme the air to cut down expenses,
He wrote a long letter to the papers about you:
Said you was a trouble maker, a alien-enemy,
In other words a son-of-a-bitch.
He called up the police
And told 'em to watch out for a guy
Named Revolution.*

You see,

*The boss knows you're my friend.
He sees us hangin' out together.
He knows we're hungry, and ragged,
And ain't got a damn thing in this world—
And are gonna do something about it.*

The boss's got all he needs, certainly,

*Eats swell,
Owns a lotta houses,
Goes vacationin',
Breaks strikes,
Runs politics, bribes police,
Pays off congress,
And struts all over the earth—*

*But me, I ain't never had enough to eat.
Me, I ain't never been warm in winter.
Me, I ain't never known security—
All my life, been livin' hand to mouth,
Hand to mouth.*

Listen, Revolution,

We're buddies, see—

Together,

We can take everything:

*Factories, arsenals, houses, ships,
Railroads, forests, fields, orchards,
Bus lines, telegraphs, radios,
(Jesus! Raise hell with radios!)*

Steel mills, coal mines, oil wells, gas,

*All the tools of production,
(Great day in the morning!)*

Everything—

And turn 'em over to the people who work.

Rule and run 'em for us people who work.

Boy! Them radios—

Broadcasting that very first morning to USSR:

Another member the International Soviet's done come

Greetings to the Socialist Soviet Republics

Hey you rising workers everywhere greetings

And we'll sign it: Germany

Sign it: China

Sign it: Africa

Sign it: Poland

Sign it: Italy

Sign it: America

Sign it with my one name: Worker

On that day when no one will be hungry, cold, oppressed,

Anywhere in the world again.

That's our job!

I been starvin' too long,

Ain't you?

Let's go, Revolution!

abstract propositions have meaning only when interpreted concretely. Only in its concrete application to current politics; only as expressed in the activities of the Communist Party, can Marxism be fully understood and learned.

Previous page: Langston Hughes (1901-1967), “Good Morning Revolution,” *New Masses* 8, no. 3 (September 1932), 5, [Marxists Internet Archive](#). (The left column is part of longer article by another writer; *New Masses* was a Communist Party USA–affiliated magazine.) Also in the online *Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*, ed. Arnold Rampersad (New York: Knopf, 1995), 162–63. Hughes, who was under surveillance by J. Edgar Hoover’s FBI for more than a decade for his leftist sympathies, did not include this poem in his own later collections of his work.

Derek Walcott (1930–2017)
[The Sea Is History](#)

Please read this poem in the online *Collected Poems 1948–1984* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1986), 364–367. The poem appeared in *The Star-Apple Kingdom* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979).