

Ralph Waldo Emerson

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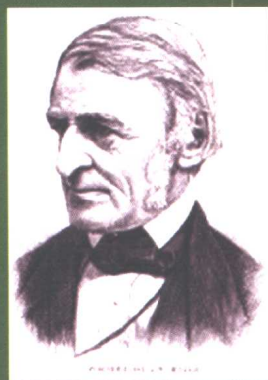
SELECTED WRITINGS

爱默生 作品选

★★★★★ 中英对照

顾毅 译注
天津人民出版社

*But things respect
the devout mind,
and a mental
ecstasy was never
interrupted.*



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邮购部电话:27307107

网址:<http://www.tjrm.com.cn>

电子信箱:tjrmchbs@public.tpt.tj.cn

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简 介

爱默生(Ralph Waldo Emerson, 1803 - 1882)是 19 世纪超验主义的代表人物,美国散文作家、诗人、思想家。他 1803 年生于波士顿,父亲和祖父都是牧师;他的姑母是一位虔诚的教徒,善于雄辩,对爱默生的影响很大。爱默生毕业于波士顿拉丁学校与哈佛大学,1829 年在波士顿第二教堂任牧师。爱默生于 1831、1847、1872 年三次赴欧洲旅行,与卡莱尔结下了终生的友情,他还受到柯尔律治、华兹华斯以及一些东方哲学家的影响,对荷马、柏拉图、但丁、蒙田和莎士比亚也曾作过深入研究。爱默生住在马萨诸塞州的康科德,但经常去波士顿并外出讲演,尽量不参与政务,但却是个关心公益的公民,19 世纪 50 年代热衷于废奴运动。其代表作有《论自然》、在哈佛大学发表的《美国学者》、《神学院致辞》、《散文选》、《诗集》等。

爱默生的大部分文章都是由演讲整理而成,他的思想可以概括为:第一,崇尚精神;第二,强调个人的价值;第三,主张自然、世界的象征意义。爱默生将个人独立、自助的思想渗透在他的《友谊》中。《圆》充分体现了爱默生坚信个人具有无限发展潜力的乐观思想。《补偿》一文表明了他的万事万物皆合道德的思想。爱默生将其心目中纯粹的、理想的诗人形象不折不扣地呈现在他的《诗人》一篇中。《梭罗》一文可以说为上述篇章做了一个很好的注脚,梭罗在一定程度上是爱默生思想的化身。

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Friendship

[1] We have *a great deal* more kindness than is ever spoken. *Maugre* all the selfishness that chills like¹ *east winds* the world, the whole human family is bathed with an element of love like a fine ether. How many persons we meet in houses, whom we scarcely speak to, whom yet we honor, and who honor us! How many we see in the street, or sit with in church, whom, though silently, we warmly rejoice to be with! Read the language of these wandering eye-beams. The heart knoweth.

The effect of the indulgence of this human affection is a certain cordial exhilaration. In poetry and in common speech the emotions of benevolence and complacency which are felt towards others *are likened to* the material effects of fire; *so swift, or much more swift, more active, more cheering, are these fine inward* irradiations. From the highest degree of passionate love to the lowest degree of good-will, they make the sweetness of life.

[2] Our intellectual and active powers increase with our affection. The scholar sits down to write, and all his years of meditation do not *furnish him with* one good thought or happy expression; but it is necessary to write a letter to a friend – and forthwith *troops of gentle thoughts*² invest themselves, on every hand, with chosen words. See, in any house where virtue and self-respect abide, the palpitation which the approach of a stranger causes. *A commended stranger* is expected and announced, and *an uneasiness betwixt pleasure and pain* invades all the hearts of a household. His arrival almost brings fear to the good hearts that would welcome him. The house is dusted, all things fly into their places, the old coat *is ex-*

changed for the new, and they must *get up*³ a dinner if they can. *Of a commended stranger, only the good report is told by others, only the good and new is heard by us*⁴. He stands to us for humanity. He is what we wish. Having imagined and invested him, we ask how we should stand related in conversation and action with such a man, and are uneasy with fear. The same idea exalts conversation with him. We talk better than *we are wont*. We have the nimblest fancy, a richer memory, and our dumb devil has *taken leave* for the time. For long hours we can continue a series of sincere, graceful, rich communications, drawn from the oldest, secretest experience, so that they who sit by, of our own kinsfolk and acquaintance, shall feel a lively surprise at our unusual powers. But as soon as the stranger begins to intrude his partialities, his definitions, his defects into the conversation, *it is all over*. He has heard the first, the last and best he will ever hear from us. He is no stranger now. Vulgarity, ignorance, misapprehension are old acquaintances. Now, when he comes, he may get the order, the dress and the dinner – but the throbbing of the heart and communications of the soul, no more.

[³]What is so pleasant as these jets of affection which make a young world for me again? *What so delicious as a just and firm*⁵ *encounter of two, in a thought, in a feeling?* How beautiful, on their approach to this beating heart, the steps and forms of the gifted and the true! The moment we indulge our affections, the earth is metamorphosed; there is no winter and no night; all tragedies, all ennui vanish – all duties even; *nothing* fills the proceeding eternity *but* the forms all radiant of beloved persons. Let the soul be assured that somewhere in the universe it should rejoin its friend, and it would be content and cheerful alone for a thousand years.

I awoke this morning with devout thanksgiving for my friends, the old and the new. Shall I not call God the Beautiful, who daily

showeth himself so to me in his gifts? *I chide society, I embrace solitude, and yet I am not so ungrateful as not to see the wise, the lovely and the noble-minded, as from time to time they pass my gate. Who hears me, who understands me, becomes mine – a possession for all time. Nor is Nature so poor but she gives me this joy several times*, and thus we weave social threads of our own, a new web of relations; and, as many thoughts in succession substantiate themselves, we shall by and by stand in a new world of our own creation, and no longer strangers and pilgrims in a traditionary globe⁷. My friends have come to me unsought. The great God gave them to me. By oldest right, by the divine affinity of virtue with itself, I find them, or rather not I, but the Deity in me and in them derides and cancels the thick walls of individual character, relation, age, sex, circumstance, *at which he usually connives*, and now *makes many one*. High thanks I owe you, excellent lovers, who carry out the world for me to new and noble depths, and enlarge the meaning of all my thoughts. These are new poetry of the first Bard – poetry without stop – hymn, ode and epic, poetry still flowing, Apollo and the Muses chanting still. Will these too separate themselves from me again, or some of them? I know not, but I fear it not; for my relation to them is so pure that we hold by simple affinity, and *the Genius of my life* being thus social, the same affinity will exert its energy on whomsoever is as noble as these men and women, wherever may be.

[4] I confess to an extreme tenderness of nature on this point. It is almost dangerous to me to “crush the sweet poison of misused wine” of the affections. A new person is to me a great event and hinders me from sleep. I have often had fine fancies about persons which have given me delicious hours; but the joy ends in the day; it yields no fruit. Thought is not born of it; my action is very little modified. I must feel pride in my friend’s accomplishments as if

they were mine, and a property in his virtues. I feel as warmly when he is praised, as the lover when he hears applause of his engaged maiden. We over-estimate the conscience of our friend. His goodness seems better than our goodness, his nature finer, his temptations less. Every thing that is his – his name, his form, his dress, books and instruments – fancy enhances. Our own thought sounds new and larger from his mouth.

Yet the systole and diastole of the heart are not without their analogy in the ebb and flow of love. Friendship, like the immortality of the soul, is too good to be believed. The lover, beholding his maiden, *half knows*⁸ that she is not verily that which he worships; and *in the golden hour of frendship*⁹ we are surprised with shades of suspicion and unbelief. We doubt that we *bestow on* our hero the virtues in which he shines, and afterwards worship *the form to which we have ascribed this divine inhabitation*. In strictness, the soul does not respect men as it respects itself. *In strict science all persons underlie the same condition of an infinite rempteness*. Shall we fear to cool our love by mining for the metaphysical foundation of this Elysian temple? Shall I not be as real as the things I see? If I am, I shall not fear to know them for what they are. Their essence is not less beautiful than their appearance, though it needs finer organs for its apprehension. The root of the plant is not unsightly to science, though for chaplets and festoons we cut the stem short. And I must hazard the production of the bald fact amidst these pleasing reveries, though it should prove an Egyptian skull at our banquet. A man who stands united with his thought conceives magnificently of himself. He is conscious of a universal success, even though bought by uniform particular failures. No advantages, no powers, no gold or force, *can be any match for him*. I cannot choose but rely on my own poverty more than on your wealth. I cannot make your consciousness *tantamount to*¹⁰ mine. Only the

star dazzles; the planet has a faint, moonlike ray. I hear what you say of the admirable parts and tried temper of the party you praise, but I see well that, *for all*¹¹ his purple cloaks, I shall not like him, unless he is at least a poor *Greek* like me. I cannot deny it, O friend, that the vast shadow of the Phenomenal includes thee also in its pied and painted immensity – thee also, compared with whom all else is shadow. Thou art not Being, as Truth is, as Justice is – thou art not my soul, but a picture and effigy of that. Thou hast come to me lately, and already thou art *seizing thy hat and cloak*.¹² Is it not that the soul puts forth friends as the tree puts forth leaves, and presently, by the germination of new buds, extrudes the old leaf? The law of nature is alternation for evermore Each electrical state superinduces the opposite. *The soul environs itself with friends that it may enter into a grander selfacquaintance of solitude; and it goes alone for a season that it may exalt its conversation or society.* This method *betrays itself* along the whole history of our personal relations. The instinct of affection revives the hope of union with our mates, and the returning sense of insulation recalls us from the chase. Thus every man passes his life in the search after friendship, *and if he should record his true sentiment, he might write a letter like this to each new candidate for his love: –*

DEAR FRIEND,

If I was sure of thee, sure of thy capacity, sure to match my mood with thine, I should never think again of trifles in relation to thy comings and goings. I am not very wise; my moods are quite attainable, and I respect thy genius; it is to me as yet unfathomed; *yet dare I not presume in thee a perfect intelligence of me*,¹³ and so thou art to me a delicious torment. Thine ever, or never.

[⁵] Yet these uneasy pleasures and fine pains are for curiosity and not for life. They are not to be indulged. This is to weave cob-web, and not cloth. Our friendships hurry to short and poor conclu-

sions, because we have made them a texture of wine and dreams, instead of the tough fibre of the human heart. The laws of friendship are austere and eternal, of one web with the laws of nature and of morals. But we have aimed at a swift and petty benefit, to suck a sudden sweetness. We snatch at the slowest fruit in the whole garden of God, which many summers and many winters must ripen. We seek our friend not sacredly, but with an *adulterate passion*¹⁴ which would appropriate him to ourselves. In vain. *We are armed all over with subtle antagonisms*, which, as soon as we meet, begin to play, and *translate all poetry into stale prose*. Almost all people descend to meet. All association must be a compromise, and, what is worst, the every flower and aroma of the flower of each of the beautiful natures disappears as they approach each other. What a perpetual disappointment is actual society, even of the virtuous and gifted! After interviews have been compassed with long foresight we must be tormented presently by baffled blows, by sudden, unseasonable apathies, by baffled blows, by sudden, unseasonable apathies, by epilepsies of wit and of animal spirits, *in the heyday of firendship*¹⁵ and thought. Our faculties do not play us true, and both parties are relieved by solitude.

I ought to be equal to every relation. It makes no difference how many friends I have and what content I can find in conversing with each, if there be one to whom I am not equal. *If I have shrunk unequal from one contest*, the joy I find in all the test becomes mean and cowardly. I should hate myself, if they test becomes mean and cowardly. I should have myself, if they I made my other friends my asylum: —

“The valiant warrior famoused for fight,
After a hundred victories, once foiled,
Is from the book of honor razed quite
And all the rest forgot for which he toiled.”

[6] Our impatience is thus sharply rebuked. Bashfulness and apathy are a tough husk in which a delicate organization is protected from premature ripening. It would be lost if it knew itself before any of the best souls were yet ripe enough to know and own it. Respect the *naturlangsamkeit* which hardens the ruby in a million years, and works in duration in which Alps and Andes come and go as rainbows. *The good spirit of our life has no heaven*¹⁷ *which is the price of rashness*. Love, which is the essence of God, is not for levity, but for the total worth of man. Let us not have this childish luxury in our regards, but the austere worth; let us approach our friend with an audacious trust in the truth of his heart, in the breadth, impossible to be overturned, of his foundations.

The attractions of this subject are not to be resisted, and I leave, for the time, all account of subordinate social benefit, to speak of that select and sacred relation which is a kind of absolute, and which even *leaves the language of love suspicious and common*, so much is this purer, and nothing is so much divine.

[7] I do not wish to treat friendships daintily, but with roughest courage. When they are real, they are not glass threads or frost-work, but the solidest thing we know. For now, after so many ages of experience what do we know of nature or of ourselves? Not one step has man taken toward the solution of the problem of his destiny. *In one condemnation of folly stand the whole universe of men*. But the sweet sincerity of joy and peace which I draw from this alliance with my brother's soul is the nut itself whereof all nature and all thought is but the husk and shell.¹⁸ Happy is the house that shelters a friend! It might well be built, like a festal bower or arch, to entertain him a single day. Happier, if he know the solemnity of that relation and honor its law! He who offers himself a candidate for that covenant comes up, like an Olympian, to the great

games where the first-born of the world are the competitors. He proposes himself for contests where Time, Want, Danger, are in the lists, and he alone is victor who has truth enough in his constitution to preserve the delicacy of his beauty from the wear and tear of all these. The gifts of fortune may be present or absent, but all the speed in that contest depends on intrinsic nobleness and the contempt of trifles. *There are two elements that go to¹⁹ the composition of friendship*, each so sovereign that I can detect no superiority in either, no reason why either should be first named. One is truth. A friend is a person with whom I may be sincere. Before him I may²⁰ *think aloud*. I am arrived at last in the presence of a man so real and equal that I may drop even those undermost garments of dissimulation, courtesy, and²¹ *second thought*, which men never put off, and may deal with him with the simplicity and wholeness with which one chemical atom meets another, Sincerity is the luxury allowed, like diadems and authority, only to the highest rank; *that* being permitted to speak truth, as having none above it to court or *conform unto*.²² Every man alone is sincere. At the entrance of a second person, hypocrisy begins. We parry and fend the approach of our fellow-man by compliments, by gossip, by amusements, by affairs. We cover up our thought from him under a hundred folds. I knew a man who under a certain religious frenzy cast off this drapery, and omitting all compliment and commonplace, *spoke to the conscience of every person he encountered, and that with great insight and beauty*. At first he was resisted, and all men agreed he was mad. But persisting – as indeed he could not help doing – for some time in this course, he *attained to* the advantage of bringing every man of his acquaintance into true relations with him. No man would think of speaking falsely with him, or of *putting him off*²³ with any *chat of markets or reading-rooms*²⁴. But *every man was constrained by so much sincerity to the*²⁵ *like plain dealing*, and

what love of nature, what poetry, what symbol of truth the had, he did certainly show him. But to most of us society shows not its face and eye, but its side and its back. To stand in true relations with men in a false age is worth a fit of insanity, is it not? We can seldom go erect. Almost every man we meet requires some civility – *requires to be humored*, he has some fame, some talent, some whim of religion or philanthropy in his head that is not to be questioned, and which spoils all conversatrion with him. *But a friend is a sane man who exercises not my²⁶ ingenuity, but me*. My friend gives me entertainment without requiring any stipulation on my part. A friend therefore is a sort of paradox in nature. I who alone am. I who see nothing in nature whose existence I can affirm with equal evidence to my own, behold now the semblance of my being, in all its height, variety and curiosity, reiterated in a foreign form; so that a friend may well be reckoned the masterpiece of nature.

[8] The other element of friendship is tenderness. We are holden to men by every sort of tie, by blood, by pride, by fear, by hope, by lucre, by lust, by hate, by admiration, by every circumstance and badge and trifle – but we can scarce believe that so much character can *subsist in* another as to draw us by love. Can another be so blessed and we so pure that we can offer him tenderness? When a man becomes dear to me I have touched the goal of fortune. I find very little *written directly to the heart of this matter²⁷* in books. And yet I have one text which I *cannot choose but remember*. My author says – “I offer myself faintly and bluntly to those whose I effectually am, and tender myself least to him to whom I am the most devoted.” I wish that friendship should have feet, as well as eyes and eloquence. It must plant itself on the ground, before it vaults over the moon. I wish it to be a little of a citizen, before it is quite a cherub. We chide the citizen because he makes love a commodity. It is an exchange of gifts, of useful loans; it is good

neighborhood; it watches with the sick; it holds the pall at the funeral; and quite loses sight of the delicacies and nobility of the relation. But though we cannot find the god under this disguise of a suttler, yet on the other hand we cannot forgive the poet if he spins his thread too fine and does not substantiate his romance by the municipal virtues of justice, punctuality, fidelity and pity. I hate the prostitution of the name of friendship to signify modish and worldly alliances. I much *prefer the company of ploughboys and tin-peddlers to the silken and perfumed amity* which celebrates its days of encounter by a frivolous display, by rides in a curricule and dinners at the best taverns. The end of friendship is a commerce the most strict and homely that can be joined; more strict than any of which we have experience. It is for aid and comfort through all the relations and passages of life and death. It is fit for serene days and graceful gifts and country rambles, but also for rough roads and hard fare, shipwreck, poverty and persecution. It *keeps company with* the sallies of the wit and the trances of religion. We are to dignify to each other the daily needs and offices of man's life, and embellish it by courage, wisdom and unity. It should never fall into something usual and settled, but should be alert and inventive and add rhyme and reason to what was drudgery.

[9] Friendship may be said to require natures so rare and costly, each so well tempered and so happily adapted, and withal so circumstance (for even in that particular, a poet says love demands that the parties be altogether paired), that its satisfaction can very seldom be assured. It cannot subsist in its perfection, say some of those who are learned in *this warm lore of the heart*, betwixt more than two. I am not quite so strict in my terms, perhaps because I have never known so high a fellowship as others. I please my imagination more with a circle of god-like men and women variously related to each other and between whom subsists a lofty intelligence. *But I find*

this law of one to³⁰ one peremptory for conversation, which is the practice and consummation of friendship. *Do not mix waters too much. The best mix as ill as good and bad.* You shall have very useful and cheering discourse at several times with two several men, but let all three of you come together and you shall not have one new and hearty word. Two may talk and one may hear, but three cannot take part in a conversation of the most sincere and searching sort. In good company there is never such discourse between two, across the table, as takes place when you leave them alone. In good company the individuals merge their egotism into a social soul exactly co-extensive with the several consciousnesses there present. No partialities of friend to friend, no fondnesses of brother to sister, of wife to husband, are there pertinent, but quite otherwise. Only he may then speak who can *sail on* the common thought of the party, and not poorly limited to his own. Now this convention, which good sense demands, destroys the high freedom of great conversation, which requires an absolute running of two souls into one.

[10] *No two men but being left alone with each other enter into simpler relations.* Yet it is affinity that determines *which two shall converse*. Unrelated men give little joy and each other, will never suspect the latent powers of each. We talk sometimes of a great talent for conversation, as if it were a permanent property in some individuals. Conversation is an evanescent relations — no more. A man is reputed to have thought and eloquence; he cannot, for all that, say a word to his cousin or his uncle. *They accuse his silence with as much reason as they would blame the insignificance of a dial in the shade.* In the sun it will mark the hour. Among those who enjoy his thought he will *regain his tongue*.

Friendship requires that rare *mean* betwixt likeness and unlikeness that piques each with the presence of power and of consent in the other party. Let me be alone to the end of the world, rather

than that my friend should overstep, by a word or a look, his real sympathy. I am equally balked by antagonism and by compliance. Let him not cease an instant to be himself. The only joy I have in his being mine, is that the *not mine is mine*. I hate, where I looked for a manly furtherance or at least a manly resistance, to find *a mush of concession*. Better be a nettle in the side of your friend than his echo. The condition which high friendship demands is ability to do without it. That high office requires great and sublime parts. There must be very two, before there can be very one. Let it be an alliance of two large, formidable natures, mutually beheld, mutually feared, before yet they recognize the deep identity which, beneath these disparities, unites them.

[11] *He only is fit for this society who is magnanimous*³³; who is sure that greatness and goodness are always economy; who is not swift to intermeddle with his fortunes. Let him not intermeddle with this. Leave to the diamond its ages to grow, nor expect to accelerate the births of the eternal. Friendship demands a religious treatment. We talk of choosing our friends, but friends are self-elected. Reverence is a great part of it. Treat your friend as a spectacle. Of course he has merits that are not yours, and that you cannot honor if you must needs hold him close to your person. Stand aside; give those merits room; let them mount and expand. Are you the friend of your friend's buttons, or of his thought? To a great heart he will be a stranger in a thousand particulars, that he may come near in the holiest ground. Leave it to girls and boys to regard a friend as property, and to suck a short and all-confounding pleasure, instead of the noblest benefit.

Let us buy our entrance to this guild by a long probation. Why should we desecrate noble and beautiful souls by intruding on them? Why insist on rash personal relations with your friend? Why go to his house, or know his mother and brother and sisters? Why be visited