



# Emerson

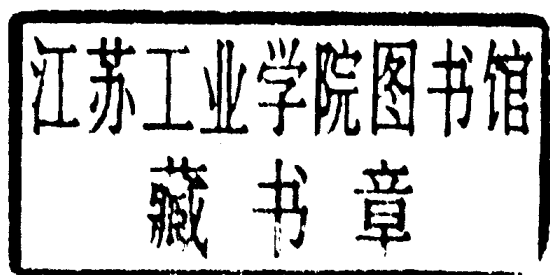
Collected Poems & Translations

RALPH WALDO EMERSON

---

COLLECTED POEMS  
AND TRANSLATIONS

---



THE LIBRARY OF AMERICA

Volume compilation, notes, and chronology copyright © 1994 by  
Literary Classics of the United States, Inc., New York, N.Y.

All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced commercially  
by offset-lithographic or equivalent copying devices without  
the permission of the publisher.

Some of the material in this volume is reprinted by  
permission of the holders of copyright and publication rights.  
Acknowledgments will be found in the Note on the Texts.

The paper used in this publication meets the  
minimum requirements of the American National Standard for  
Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed  
Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48—1984.

Distributed to the trade in the United States  
by Penguin Putnam Inc.  
and in Canada by Penguin Books Canada Ltd.

Library of Congress Catalog Number: 93-40245  
For cataloging information, see end of Index.

ISBN 0-940450-28-3

---

Third Printing  
The Library of America—70

# Contents

*Each section has its own table of contents.*

Poems (1847) . . . . .	I
May-Day and Other Pieces (1867) . . . . .	127
<i>from</i> Selected Poems (1876) . . . . .	219
Other Published Poems and Translations . . . . .	237
Manuscript Poems and Translations . . . . .	271
<i>Chronology</i> . . . . .	553
<i>Note on the Texts</i> . . . . .	570
<i>Notes</i> . . . . .	590
<i>Index of Titles and First Lines</i> . . . . .	625

# POEMS

(1847)



# *Contents*

The Sphinx . . . . .	5
Each and All . . . . .	9
The Problem . . . . .	10
To Rhea . . . . .	12
The Visit. . . . .	14
Uriel . . . . .	15
The World-Soul . . . . .	17
Alphonso of Castile. . . . .	20
Mithridates . . . . .	22
To J. W. . . . .	23
Fate. . . . .	24
Guy. . . . .	25
Tact. . . . .	27
Hamatreya . . . . .	28
EARTH-SONG . . . . .	28
Good-Bye . . . . .	30
The Rhodora . . . . .	31
The Humble-Bee. . . . .	31
Berrying . . . . .	33
The Snow-Storm. . . . .	34
Woodnotes, I . . . . .	35
————— II . . . . .	39
Monadnoc . . . . .	49
Fable . . . . .	61
Ode. . . . .	61
Astræa. . . . .	64
Etienne de la Boëce. . . . .	65
Suum Cuique . . . . .	66
Compensation. . . . .	66

Forbearance. . . . .	67
The Park . . . . .	67
Forerunners. . . . .	68
Sursum Corda. . . . .	69
Ode to Beauty. . . . .	69
Give All to Love. . . . .	72
To Ellen . . . . .	73
To Eva. . . . .	75
The Amulet. . . . .	75
Thine Eyes Still Shined . . . . .	76
Eros . . . . .	76
Hermione . . . . .	76
Initial, Dæmonic, and Celestial Love . . . . .	79
The Apology . . . . .	90
Merlin, I . . . . .	91
——— II. . . . .	93
Bacchus . . . . .	95
Loss and Gain. . . . .	97
Merops . . . . .	97
The House . . . . .	98
Saadi . . . . .	98
Holidays . . . . .	103
Painting and Sculpture . . . . .	104
From the Persian of Hafiz . . . . .	104
Ghaselle . . . . .	108
Xenophanes. . . . .	109
The Day's Ration . . . . .	110
Blight . . . . .	111
Musketaquid . . . . .	113
Dirge . . . . .	115
Threnody . . . . .	117
Hymn, Sung at the Completion of the Concord Monument . . . . .	125



### *The Sphinx*

The Sphinx is drowsy,  
Her wings are furled;  
Her ear is heavy,  
She broods on the world.  
“Who’ll tell me my secret,  
The ages have kept? —  
I awaited the seer,  
While they slumbered and slept; —

“The fate of the man-child;  
The meaning of man;  
Known fruit of the unknown;  
Dædalian plan;  
Out of sleeping a waking,  
Out of waking a sleep;  
Life death overtaking;  
Deep underneath deep?

“Erect as a sunbeam,  
Upspringeth the palm;  
The elephant browses,  
Undaunted and calm;  
In beautiful motion  
The thrush plies his wings;  
Kind leaves of his covert,  
Your silence he sings.

“The waves, unashamed,  
In difference sweet,  
Play glad with the breezes,  
Old playfellows meet;

The journeying atoms,  
Primordial wholes,  
Firmly draw, firmly drive,  
By their animate poles.

“Sea, earth, air, sound, silence,  
Plant, quadruped, bird,  
By one music enchanted,  
One deity stirred,—  
Each the other adorning,  
Accompany still;  
Night veileth the morning,  
The vapor the hill.

“The babe by its mother  
Lies bathed in joy;  
Glide its hours uncounted,—  
The sun is its toy;  
Shines the peace of all being,  
Without cloud, in its eyes;  
And the sum of the world  
In soft miniature lies.

“But man crouches and blushes,  
Absconds and conceals;  
He creepeth and peepeth,  
He palter and steals;  
Infirm, melancholy,  
Jealous glancing around,  
An oaf, an accomplice,  
He poisons the ground.

“Outspoke the great mother,  
Beholding his fear;—  
At the sound of her accents  
Cold shuddered the sphere:—  
‘Who has drugged my boy’s cup?  
Who has mixed my boy’s bread?  
Who, with sadness and madness,  
Has turned the man-child’s head?’ ”

I heard a poet answer,  
Aloud and cheerfully,  
“Say on, sweet Sphinx! thy dirges  
Are pleasant songs to me.  
Deep love lieth under  
These pictures of time;  
They fade in the light of  
Their meaning sublime.

“The fiend that man harries  
Is love of the Best;  
Yawns the pit of the Dragon,  
Lit by rays from the Blest.  
The Lethe of nature  
Can’t trance him again,  
Whose soul sees the perfect,  
Which his eyes seek in vain.

“Profounder, profounder,  
Man’s spirit must dive;  
To his aye-rolling orbit  
No goal will arrive;  
The heavens that now draw him  
With sweetness untold,  
Once found,—for new heavens  
He spurneth the old.

“Pride ruined the angels,  
Their shame them restores;  
And the joy that is sweetest  
Lurks in stings of remorse.  
Have I a lover  
Who is noble and free?—  
I would he were nobler  
Than to love me.

“Eterne alternation  
Now follows, now flies;  
And under pain, pleasure,—  
Under pleasure, pain lies.

Love works at the centre,  
Heart-heaving away;  
Forth speed the strong pulses  
To the borders of day.

“Dull Sphinx, Jove keep thy five wits!  
Thy sight is growing blear;  
Rue, myrrh, and cummin for the Sphinx—  
Her muddy eyes to clear!”—  
The old Sphinx bit her thick lip,—  
Said, “Who taught thee me to name?  
I am thy spirit, yoke-fellow,  
Of thine eye I am eyebeam.

“Thou art the unanswered question;  
Couldst see thy proper eye,  
Alway it asketh, asketh;  
And each answer is a lie.  
So take thy quest through nature,  
It through thousand natures ply;  
Ask on, thou clothed eternity;  
Time is the false reply.”

Uprose the merry Sphinx,  
And crouched no more in stone;  
She melted into purple cloud,  
She silvered in the moon;  
She spired into a yellow flame;  
She flowered in blossoms red;  
She flowed into a foaming wave;  
She stood Monadnoc’s head.

Thorough a thousand voices  
Spoke the universal dame:  
“Who telleth one of my meanings,  
Is master of all I am.”

*Each and All*

Little thinks, in the field, yon red-cloaked clown,  
Of thee from the hill-top looking down;  
The heifer that lows in the upland farm,  
Far-heard, lows not thine ear to charm;  
The sexton, tolling his bell at noon,  
Deems not that great Napoleon  
Stops his horse, and lists with delight,  
Whilst his files sweep round yon Alpine height;  
Nor knowest thou what argument  
Thy life to thy neighbor's creed has lent.  
All are needed by each one;  
Nothing is fair or good alone.  
I thought the sparrow's note from heaven,  
Singing at dawn on the alder bough;  
I brought him home, in his nest, at even;  
He sings the song, but it pleases not now,  
For I did not bring home the river and sky;—  
He sang to my ear,—they sang to my eye.  
The delicate shells lay on the shore;  
The bubbles of the latest wave  
Fresh pearls to their enamel gave;  
And the bellowing of the savage sea  
Greeted their safe escape to me.  
I wiped away the weeds and foam,  
I fetched my sea-born treasures home;  
But the poor, unsightly, noisome things  
Had left their beauty on the shore,  
With the sun, and the sand, and the wild uproar.  
The lover watched his graceful maid,  
As 'mid the virgin train she strayed,  
Nor knew her beauty's best attire  
Was woven still by the snow-white choir.  
At last she came to his hermitage,  
Like the bird from the woodlands to the cage;—  
The gay enchantment was undone,  
A gentle wife, but fairy none.  
Then I said, 'I covet truth;

Beauty is unripe childhood's cheat;  
I leave it behind with the games of youth.'—  
As I spoke, beneath my feet  
The ground-pine curled its pretty wreath,  
Running over the club-moss burrs;  
I inhaled the violet's breath;  
Around me stood the oaks and firs;  
Pine-cones and acorns lay on the ground,  
Over me soared the eternal sky,  
Full of light and of deity;  
Again I saw, again I heard,  
The rolling river, the morning bird;—  
Beauty through my senses stole;  
I yielded myself to the perfect whole.

### *The Problem*

I like a church; I like a cowl;  
I love a prophet of the soul;  
And on my heart monastic aisles  
Fall like sweet strains, or pensive smiles;  
Yet not for all his faith can see  
Would I that cowed churchman be.

Why should the vest on him allure,  
Which I could not on me endure?

Not from a vain or shallow thought  
His awful Jove young Phidias brought;  
Never from lips of cunning fell  
The thrilling Delphic oracle;  
Out from the heart of nature rolled  
The burdens of the Bible old;  
The litanies of nations came,  
Like the volcano's tongue of flame,  
Up from the burning core below,—  
The canticles of love and woe;  
The hand that rounded Peter's dome,

And groined the aisles of Christian Rome,  
Wrought in a sad sincerity;  
Himself from God he could not free;  
He builded better than he knew;—  
The conscious stone to beauty grew.

Know'st thou what wove yon woodbird's nest  
Of leaves, and feathers from her breast?  
Or how the fish outbuilt her shell,  
Painting with morn each annual cell?  
Or how the sacred pine-tree adds  
To her old leaves new myriads?  
Such and so grew these holy piles,  
Whilst love and terror laid the tiles.  
Earth proudly wears the Parthenon,  
As the best gem upon her zone;  
And Morning opes with haste her lids,  
To gaze upon the Pyramids;  
O'er England's abbeyes bends the sky,  
As on its friends, with kindred eye;  
For, out of Thought's interior sphere,  
These wonders rose to upper air;  
And Nature gladly gave them place,  
Adopted them into her race,  
And granted them an equal date  
With Andes and with Ararat.

These temples grew as grows the grass;  
Art might obey, but not surpass.  
The passive Master lent his hand  
To the vast soul that o'er him planned;  
And the same power that reared the shrine,  
Bestrode the tribes that knelt within.  
Ever the fiery Pentecost  
Girds with one flame the countless host,  
Trances the heart through chanting choirs,  
And through the priest the mind inspires.  
The word unto the prophet spoken  
Was writ on tables yet unbroken;

The word by seers or sibyls told,  
In groves of oak, or fanes of gold,  
Still floats upon the morning wind,  
Still whispers to the willing mind.  
One accent of the Holy Ghost  
The heedless world hath never lost.  
I know what say the fathers wise,—  
The Book itself before me lies,  
Old *Chrysostom*, best Augustine,  
And he who blent both in his line,  
The younger *Golden Lips* or mines,  
Taylor, the Shakspeare of divines.  
His words are music in my ear,  
I see his cowed portrait dear;  
And yet, for all his faith could see,  
I would not the good bishop be.

### *To Rhea*

Thee, dear friend, a brother soothes,  
Not with flatteries, but truths,  
Which tarnish not, but purify  
To light which dims the morning's eye.  
I have come from the spring-woods,  
From the fragrant solitudes;—  
Listen what the poplar-tree  
And murmuring waters counselled me.

If with love thy heart has burned;  
If thy love is unreturned;  
Hide thy grief within thy breast,  
Though it tear thee unexpressed;  
For when love has once departed  
From the eyes of the false-hearted,  
And one by one has torn off quite  
The bandages of purple light;  
Though thou wert the loveliest  
Form the soul had ever dressed,



Thou shalt seem, in each reply,  
A vixen to his altered eye;  
Thy softest pleadings seem too bold,  
Thy praying lute will seem to scold;  
Though thou kept the straightest road,  
Yet thou errest far and broad.

But thou shalt do as do the gods  
In their cloudless periods;  
For of this lore be thou sure, —  
Though thou forget, the gods, secure,  
Forget never their command,  
But make the statute of this land.  
As they lead, so follow all,  
Ever have done, ever shall.  
Warning to the blind and deaf,  
'Tis written on the iron leaf,  
*Who drinks of Cupid's nectar cup  
Loveth downward, and not up;*  
Therefore, who loves, of gods or men,  
Shall not by the same be loved again;  
His sweetheart's idolatry  
Falls, in turn, a new degree.  
When a god is once beguiled  
By beauty of a mortal child,  
And by her radiant youth delighted,  
He is not fooled, but warily knoweth  
His love shall never be requited.  
And thus the wise Immortal doeth. —  
'Tis his study and delight  
To bless that creature day and night;  
From all evils to defend her;  
In her lap to pour all splendor;  
To ransack earth for riches rare,  
And fetch her stars to deck her hair:  
He mixes music with her thoughts,  
And saddens her with heavenly doubts:  
All grace, all good his great heart knows,  
Profuse in love, the king bestows:  
Saying, 'Hearken! Earth, Sea, Air!