



Nature and Selected Essays (Penguin Classics)

By Ralph Waldo Emerson

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An indispensable look at Emerson's influential life philosophy

Through his writing and his own personal philosophy, Ralph Waldo Emerson unburdened his young country of Europe's traditional sense of history and showed Americans how to be creators of their own circumstances. His mandate, which called for harmony with, rather than domestication of, nature, and for a reliance on individual integrity, rather than on materialistic institutions, is echoed in many of the great American philosophical and literary works of his time and ours, and has given an impetus to modern political and social activism.

Larzer Ziff's introduction to this collection of fifteen of Emerson's most significant writings provides the important backdrop to the society in which Emerson lived during his formative years.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Ralph Waldo Emerson, the son of a Unitarian minister and a chaplain during the American Revolution, was born in 1803 in Boston. He attended the Boston Latin School, and in 1817 entered Harvard, graduating in 1820. Emerson supported himself as a schoolteacher from 1821-26. In 1826 he was "approbated to preach," and in 1829 became pastor of the Second Church (Unitarian) in Boston. That same year he married Ellen Louise Tucker, who was to die of tuberculosis only seventeen months later. In 1832 Emerson resigned his pastorate and traveled to Europe, where he met Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Carlyle. He settled in Concord, Massachusetts, in 1834, where he began a new career as a public lecturer, and married Lydia Jackson a year later. A group that gathered around Emerson in Concord came to be known as "the Concord school," and included Bronson Alcott, Henry David Thoreau, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Margaret Fuller. Every year Emerson made a lecture tour; and these lectures were the source of most of his essays. *Nature* (1836), his first published work, contained the essence of his transcendental philosophy, which views the world of phenomena as a sort of symbol of the inner life and emphasizes individual freedom and self-reliance. Emerson's address to the Phi Beta Kappa society of Harvard (1837) and another address to the graduating class of the Harvard Divinity School (1838) applied his doctrine to the scholar and the clergyman, provoking sharp controversy. An ardent abolitionist, Emerson lectured and wrote widely against slavery from the 1840's through the Civil War. His principal publications include two volumes of *Essays* (1841, 1844), *Poems* (1847), *Representative Men* (1850), *The Conduct of Life* (1860), and *Society and Solitude* (1870). He died of pneumonia in 1882 and was buried in Concord.

Larzer Ziff is a research professor of English at Johns Hopkins University who has written extensively on American literary culture.

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