



Ralph Waldo Emerson
(1803-1882)

Initial Love

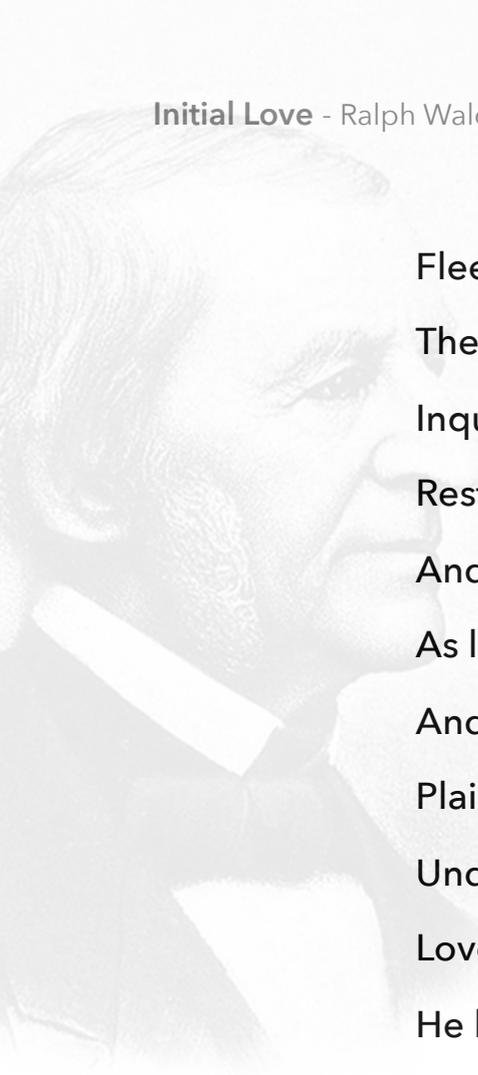
from: Emerson, Ralph Waldo. Early Poems of Ralph Waldo Emerson. New York, Boston,
Thomas Y. Crowell & Company: 1899. Introduction by Nathan Haskell Dole.

(Part of Ode I: Initial Love and Ode II: Dæmonic Love and Celestial Love)

Venus, when her son was lost,
Cried him up and down the coast,
In hamlets, palaces, and parks,
And told the truant by his marks,
Golden curls, and quiver, and bow;—
This befell long ago.
Time and tide are strangely changed,
Men and manners much deranged;
None will now find Cupid latent
By this foolish antique patent.
He came late along the waste,
Shod like a traveller for haste,

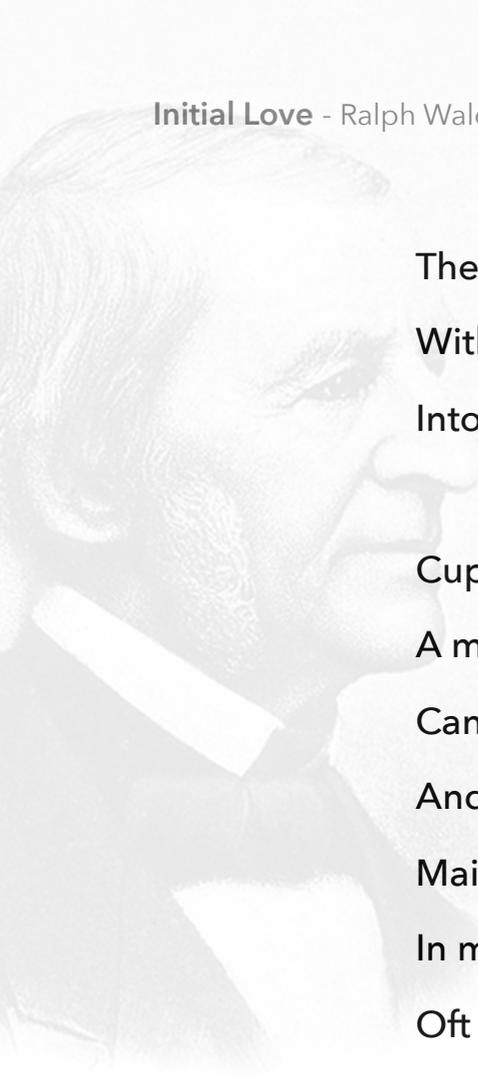
With malice dared me to proclaim him,
That the maids and boys might name him.

Boy no more, he wears all coats,
Frocks, and blouses, capes, capôtes,
He bears no bow, or quiver, or wand,
Nor chaplet on his head or hand:
Leave his weeds and heed his eyes,
All the rest he can disguise.
In the pit of his eyes a spark
Would bring back day if it were dark,
And,—if I tell you all my thought,
Though I comprehend it not,—
In those unfathomable orbs
Every function he absorbs;
He doth eat, and drink, and fish, and shoot,
And write, and reason, and compute,
And ride, and run, and have, and hold,
And whine, and flatter, and regret,
And kiss, and couple, and beget,
By those roving eye-balls bold;
Undaunted are their courages,
Right Cossacks in their forages;



Fleeter they than any creature,
They are his steeds and not his feature,
Inquisitive, and fierce, and fasting,
Restless, predatory, hasting,—
And they pounce on other eyes,
As lions on their prey;
And round their circles is writ,
Plainer than the day,
Underneath, within, above,
Love, love, love, love.
He lives in his eyes,
There doth digest, and work, and spin,
And buy, and sell, and lose, and win;
He rolls them with delighted motion,
Joy-tides swell their mimic ocean.
Yet holds he them with tortest rein,
That they may seize and entertain
The glance that to their glance opposes,
Like fiery honey sucked from roses.

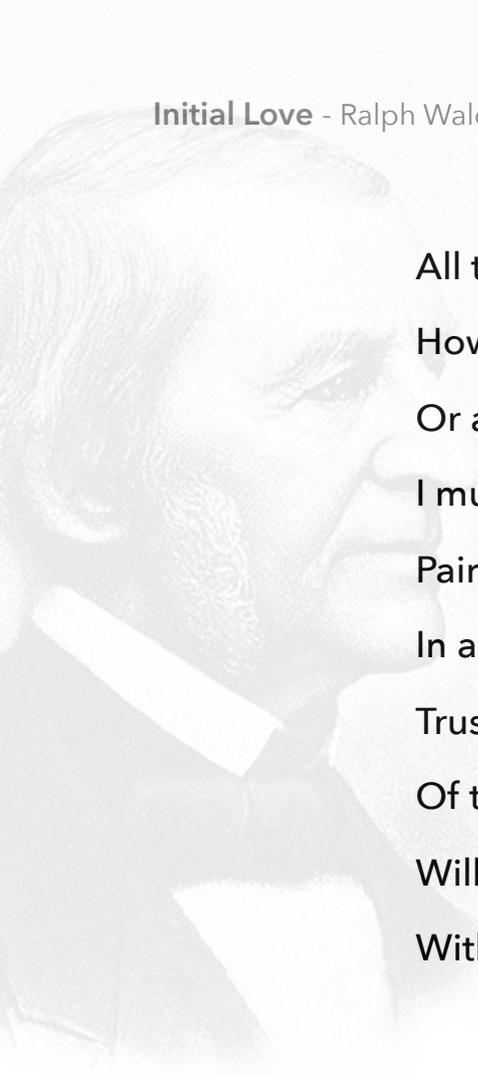
He palmistry can understand,
Imbibing virtue by his hand
As if it were a living root;



The pulse of hands will make him mute;
With all his force he gathers balms
Into those wise thrilling palms.

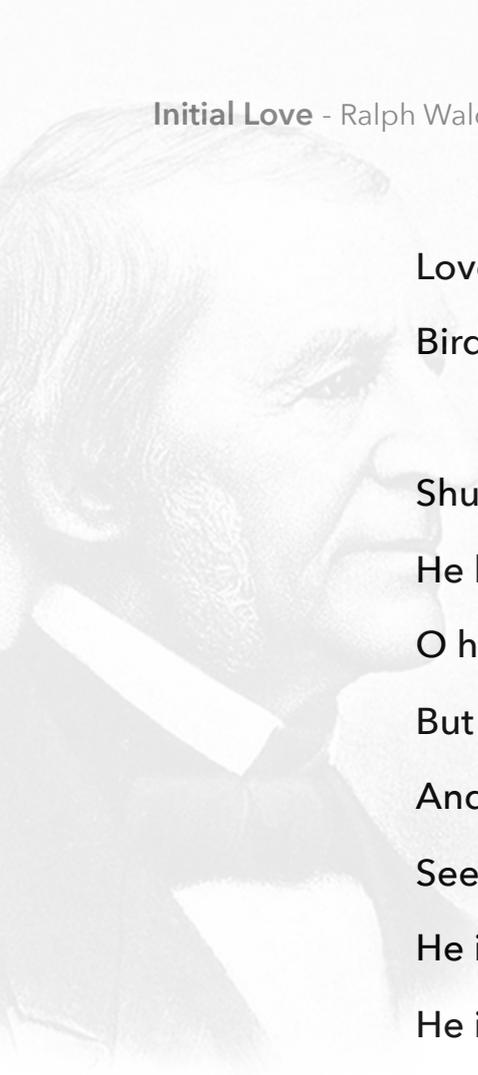
Cupid is a casuist,
A mystic, and a cabalist,
Can your lurking Thought surprise,
And interpret your device;
Mainly versed in occult science,
In magic, and in clairvoyance.
Oft he keeps his fine ear strained,
And reason on her tiptoe pained,
For aery intelligence,
And for strange coincidence.
But it touches his quick heart
When Fate by omens takes his part,
And chance-dropt hints from Nature's sphere
Deeply soothe his anxious ear.

Heralds high before him run,
He has ushers many a one,
Spreads his welcome where he goes,
And touches all things with his rose.



All things wait for and divine him,—
How shall I dare to malign him,
Or accuse the god of sport?—
I must end my true report,
Painting him from head to foot,
In as far as I took note,
Trusting well the matchless power
Of this young-eyed emperor
Will clear his fame from every cloud,
With the bards, and with the crowd.

He is wilful, mutable,
Shy, untamed, inscrutable,
Swifter-fashioned than the fairies,
Substance mixed of pure contraries,
His vice some elder virtue's token,
And his good is evil spoken.
Failing sometimes of his own,
He is headstrong and alone;
He affects the wood and wild,
Like a flower-hunting child,
Buries himself in summer waves,
In trees, with beasts, in mines, and caves,



Loves nature like a horned cow,
Bird, or deer, or cariboo.

Shun him, nymphs, on the fleet horses!

He has a total world of wit,

O how wise are his discourses!

But he is the arch-hypocrite,

And through all science and all art,

Seeks alone his counterpart.

He is a Pundit of the east,

He is an augur and a priest,

And his soul will melt in prayer,

But word and wisdom are a snare;

Corrupted by the present toy,

He follows joy, and only joy.

There is no mask but he will wear,

He invented oaths to swear,

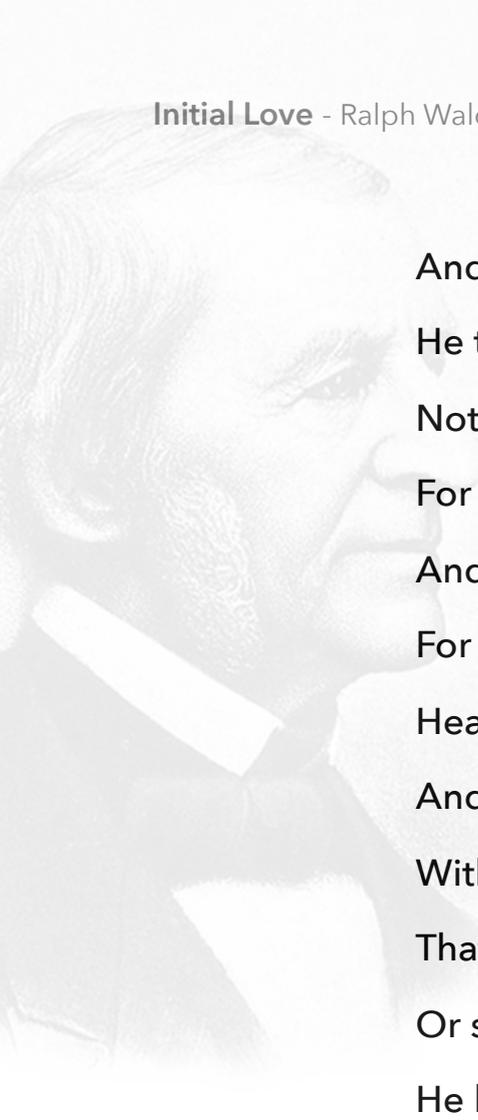
He paints, he carves, he chants, he prays,

And holds all stars in his embrace,

Godlike, –but 'tis for his fine pelf,

The social quintessence of self.

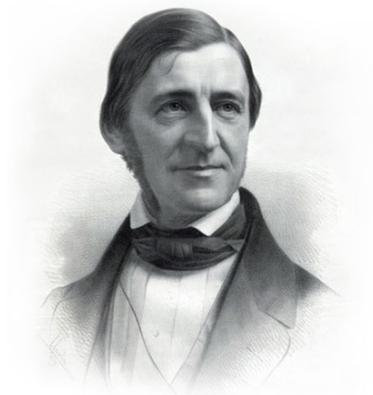
Well, said I, he is hypocrite,



And folly the end of his subtle wit,
He takes a sovran privilege
Not allowed to any liege,
For he does go behind all law,
And right into himself does draw,
For he is sovranly allied.
Heaven's oldest blood flows in his side,
And interchangeably at one
With every king on every throne,
That no God dare say him nay,
Or see the fault, or seen betray;
He has the Muses by the heart,
And the Parcæ all are of his part.

His many signs cannot be told,
He has not one mode, but manifold,
Many fashions and addresses,
Piques, reproaches, hurts, caresses,
Action, service, badinage,
He will preach like a friar,
And jump like Harlequin,
He will read like a crier,
And fight like a Paladin.

Boundless is his memory,
Plans immense his term prolong,
He is not of counted age,
Meaning always to be young.
And his wish is intimacy,
Intimater intimacy,
And a stricter privacy,
The impossible shall yet be done,
And being two shall still be one.
As the wave breaks to foam on shelves,
Then runs into a wave again,
So lovers melt their sundered selves,
Yet melted would be twain.



Ralph Waldo Emerson
(1803-1882)