



THE TRANSCENDENTALISTS

CAST

HAWTHORNE	<i>American Writer</i>
EMERSON	<i>American Writer</i>
THOREAU	<i>American Writer</i>
POE	<i>American Writer</i>
RAVEN	<i>American Bird</i>
DICKINSON	<i>American Poet</i>
MUIR	<i>American Activist</i>

(Nathaniel Hawthorne, a man with salt and pepper hair and a large, bushy moustache, enters an empty stage.)

HAWTHORNE: Good evening. I am famed American author, Nathaniel Hawthorne. You may remember me for writing several novels and short stories that you were tortured with in high school—*The Scarlet Letter* and “The Minister’s Black Veil.” I am also known for this impressive moustache.

(scattered applause from the audience)

HAWTHORNE: My co-hosts for this evening are two other Romantic authors, Edgar Allan Poe and Herman Melville. *(loudly)* Romantics, assemble!

(Edgar Allan Poe, a dreary, mustached man with a raven on his shoulder, walks onstage.)

HAWTHORNE: Poe! Where is Melville?

POE: At sea.

HAWTHORNE: Good grief! He is just *obsessed* with that whale!

POE: But never fear, I am here!

RAVEN: Kaw! Never fear!

POE: *(to the audience)* Good evening, I am the one and only Edgar Allan Poe—probably America’s most famous writer. Yet even with all my immense talent, I died penniless...and all alone...in a gutter.... *(grumbling)* Not that I’m bitter about it or anything.

RAVEN: Kaw! Born rich. Died Poe.

HAWTHORNE: *(to the audience)* Tonight, we have come here to issue a very serious warning. It is the mid-1800’s, and right here in our very own New England, radicals are at work—attending secret meetings, sipping punch, talking about their feelings, and thinking up ways of ruining our society! That’s right! I’m talking about...the Transcendentalists. *(dramatic music)*

(Ralph Waldo Emerson, a large-nosed, well-dressed gentleman, enters the stage.)

EMERSON: Stop this slander, you paperback hack!

HAWTHORNE: I beg your pardon! Who are you?

EMERSON: I am Transcendentalism's most influential leader, Ralph Waldo Emerson.

HAWTHORNE: (*snickering*) I don't know what's funnier—your name or that huge thing growing in the middle of your face.

EMERSON: I assume you are referring to my nose.

HAWTHORNE: I assume that, too! What a honker! You should really have a doctor check that thing out.

EMERSON: It's not the size of a man's nose that matters. It's the size of his ideas!

RAVEN: Kaw! Big nose! Big nose!

EMERSON: (*to Poe*) Silence that bird! Isn't he only supposed to say, "Nevermore?"

POE: He's broken.

HAWTHORNE: Like most Romantic writers of our day, Poe and I were extremely critical of the philosophy of the Transcendentalists.

POE: They were like a bunch of little toads sitting around a pond—croaking their ridiculous mystical philosophy. I hated them. (*pause*) Of course, I hate everything.

EMERSON: Our ideas were revolutionary! They were momentous! They were... transcendent!

HAWTHORNE: They were bat-crap crazy, that's what they were.

EMERSON: An end to slavery! Equality for women! If these ideas are crazy, call me crazy!

POE: (*strangely*) Some men have called me mad. But we all go a little mad sometimes. Especially on Tuesdays. (*loud laughter*) Sorry.

HAWTHORNE: Listen, Waldo.

EMERSON: (*annoyed*) My name is Ralph Waldo Emerson.

HAWTHORNE: Whatever, Waldo. It wasn't your goals that were crazy. We Romantic writers agreed with them. It was how you planned to achieve those goals!

POE: Plus, you picked that horrible name—Transcendental...who can pronounce it?

EMERSON: We chose the name Transcendentalism because it means seeing past the natural world to something deeper!

HAWTHORNE: Yes, *something* is getting deeper in here. But I know what I'm talking about. At one point I joined one of your little "communities" called Brook Farm because I was intrigued by your ideas.

EMERSON: Funny. I thought you joined up to meet women.