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Become What You Are: The Student Handbook to Fighting Nihilism

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Become
What
You
Are:

The Student Handbook to
Fighting Nihilism

Jules
Shinkle

DePauw University Honor Scholar Program

Class of 2020

Primary Thesis Sponsor: Beth Benedix

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Preface

Hi, my name is Jules, thanks for coming out tonight. The following is what DePauw University would call my Honor Scholar Thesis. And while this project has always fallen under that label (for legal reasons), the exact nature of this undertaking has wandered pretty far from its originally charted course. So if you're interested in the story of "why" this Thesis is what it is, I've made this preface.

I think my very first idea was to create a board game (I was going through a phase) that revolved around the players composing music. I wanted to demystify the creation of music for people who like board games but are intimidated by music theory. I love games and understanding what makes them fun, but the idea was scratched – I couldn't make a game, that's not a capital 't' Thesis.

So I honed my prospects down to two primary academic interests. Not all that difficult, seeing as I'm a music student with an amateur's grasp of philosophy. In the Fall semester of my junior year, I was in a class that surveyed several Existentialist philosophers and their writings (including Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morality*). I was in a class that discussed the literature of Franz Kafka and Friedrich Nietzsche the following semester. During this class, I had stumbled upon a fascinating fact: Nietzsche and Richard Wagner had a very close relationship.

And there it was: the perfect, strictly academic, interdisciplinary marriage between philosophy and music. Throughout the course of these two classes, I became somewhat preoccupied with the notion of authenticity.

It's the summer of 2019, and I'm reading this great biography of Nietzsche titled *I Am Dynamite* by Sue Prideaux. I believe it was in this book that I became familiar with a titular turn of phrase: "Become what you are, having learned what that is." Nietzsche liked it. I liked it too.

At the beginning of my senior year, it was more or less time to decide what my Honor Scholar Thesis would look like. And what I knew at the time was that I was in love with this weird, twisted, intensely complicated relationship between Nietzsche and Wagner. I knew that surely, a Thesis was hiding in that love somewhere, right? So I recruited a committee of professors with this subject in mind. At this point, I'm thinking aloud, "80 pages doesn't seem *that bad*" while secretly thinking "The only way this will work is if I get real funky and creative."

What I settle on is a podcast. But let's not call it that, a podcast can't be a Thesis. Let's call it...an audio drama! There we go. I knew at this point that I wanted to write and have voice acted a cast of characters that would...talk about Nietzsche and Wagner? You know, chat?

The semester goes on, and I'm researching a lot about these two people. Their ideas, their music, and how each affected the other. My brain becomes like this very dubious soup where you begin with just a few simple ingredients, and you think everything will just fine. But you want to experiment a little, so you throw in things like diced zucchini and black beans. You

notice you have some leftover squash, so may as well toss that in too. And before you know it, you've shucked three ears of corn and rubbed them down with curry powder; this isn't a soup anymore, this is *art soup*. The thing about art soup is that you can't *take out* the tablespoon of cumin you've gleefully seasoned the cauldron with. You can only keep adding and adding, hoping this glorious mess of a food balances out somewhere on the spectrum of edible.

That's how *Become What You Are: The Student Handbook to Fighting Nihilism* was born.

Now, I was set to produce the audio drama by mid-March. The script was prepared, my friends were game, I even had a mic. Up to this point, nobody had slowed me down, given me any restrictions, or asked me to take a certain path to create this Thesis. But quite honestly, I was struggling to get it done. I had lived in this headspace of Nietzsche and Wagner for over a year at this point, and I was upset that I hadn't gotten any closer to the real meat of the project: discovering what it meant to be authentic. *Become What You Are* became this horrible cloud hanging over me, like a constant reminder that I was failing the point of writing a Thesis. Things changed after the COVID19 pandemic.

It was theoretically feasible to create *Become What You Are*. I could have enlisted the help of my family to play the characters, or I could have recorded dialogue with the original cast over Zoom. Frankly, though, I didn't want to. Forcing myself to make a sub-par version of the thing I wasn't altogether happy with felt wrong. So I loosened up a little.

I did some light editing. I went back and took out all the things I only did to make this more like a Thesis. Big surprise, I think it was holding me back. I added more of myself into the art. Knowing that I'd be turning in a script of sorts, I explored what I take advantage of with the written medium.

Strangely, it took a horrifying existential threat to my life to totally grasp what I wanted from *Become What You Are*. It seems counterintuitive, but I think how COVID has taken away my free reign made this endeavor much more gratifying. I'm not telling the reader that this version is the best, wholly realized version of this work. I won't even try to convince the reader that it's good. That's entirely up for my defense committee to decide (joking).

So what is *Become What You Are* now? A screenplay? A free-style piece of creative fiction? The skeleton of a podcast never-to-be? The transcript of a radio show from ages ago? I encourage the reader to embrace its ambiguous nature. If you're interested in my exact interpretation of this story, I've also written a few Artistic Statements which follows the fifth and final episode. The first one was written before I had completed the project. The second one was after I finalized everything.

I hope this silly preamble has shed some light on my process. Thanks for reading!

Become What You Are – Episode 1 “Overture”

Imagine yourself in your loneliest loneliness. Aren't you tired by now? Tired of bad faith? Tired of the same lies, repeated over and over? I'm not talking about lies like "I'm so sorry I couldn't make it to class, I was feeling sick," or "Why yes, I *am* proficient in Microsoft Excel." I'm talking about lies that kill truth. Lies that have existed forever and have been spoken for so long that they've become the new reality. Maybe you're aware of these lies; but actually realizing their exposure would be so devastating that you'd rather be complicit and miserable. It'd nice if we could take up arms, wouldn't it?

~

W: Hello, and thanks for tuning into 88.8 APRI, broadcasting from Alpis University! My name is Walter Picardy, Professor of Philosophy, Director of High Morale, and yooouurr newest campus DJ! Welcome to *Become What You Are*, a show where I have authentic conversations with riveting personalities on how to defeat nihilism, forever. If I've done my job, then by show's end, we'll have confronted at least one truth head-on.

W: Now, for our "pilot" episode, we'll just be getting a feel for the main themes of what I hope to explore in more depth in the oncoming weeks. But first, let's hear the news:

News

JJ: This is AP Radio News, I'm Jessie Jingle. The world is still abuzz after the recent death of Pindar the Poet, the first Great Thinker to have died. The Thebes Police Department has had no further statements following their initial announcement last week. Many are demanding answers to the most pressing question: what was the cause of death? Those personally familiar with Pindar report having seen him only days earlier to his body being found, one saying he looked "perfectly healthy despite being over two and half millennia years old." This is AP News.

Opener

W: Hello, and we're back! To get things started, I've written up a brief speech to inaugurate myself and explain my mission: [unfolds paper]

[clears throat] Welcome, people from all walks of life, to *Become What You Are*. Consider my position, and by extension this radio show, as another initiative on the part of Alpis' benevolent Administration to encourage the well-being of the student body. As the Director of High Morale, it's my job to stamp out the negativity that creeps into our university and distracts us from the highest calling: learning. It is my sincere hope that through this position, I will be able to further kindle our love of knowledge that binds us together through our darkest hours. Thank you. [folds paper]

Now, I know some of you must be struck with several questions. That is why I've proactively assembled a *thorough* question and answer pamphlet. [unfolding paper] Let's begin with what surely must be in the foreground of your mind:

It's 8:00 PM on APRI radio: what happened to "Friday Funk-Out with Francesca and Mauve"?

Rest assured, Francesca and Mauve are *completely* safe. Alpis Administration saw that my project was deserving of a time slot that historically attracts a substantial listenership. Knowing how beloved Friday Funk-Out was...is... among you, the students, we have pulled each and every string to make sure both of our programs can coexist. After having their mental well-being assessed at the Center for Assured Happiness, I can say with confidence that Francesca and Mauve are taking this programming change "fine". This concludes the question and answer pamphlet. [folds back paper]

For those who have not taken a class with me, prepare yourselves! There are no prerequisite courses needed for this radio show, but I must warn all those unfamiliar with my teaching style. I will take your minds on a journey through the world's most raw and sensational talking points of all time. You will experience a sort of academia so utterly visceral that you will rethink your place among humanity. Without further ado, my dear academic pupils, *Become What You Are!*

Dialogue, Movement I

F: That was cute, Walter! How many of those scripts have you prepared?

W: [nervous laughter] What, these old things? Just a few lecture notes...

F: Sorry, don't let me interrupt! Just edit me out when you need to.

W: Edit you out from live radio? Can we do that? [slightly away from mic] Engineer, can we do that? ...No?

F: Aw, shame. Well, best get on with what you had in mind.

W: Where was I though? Ach, my rhythm is all off. Why, I haven't introduced you yet!

F: Oh, they all know me, dear.

W: Surely, surely. But it's what these things do! Ladies, gentlemen and all, please welcome our university's esteemed leader, Dean Flygloss! [claps]

F: Thank you, thank you! You're so kind to have me on as the first guest, Walter. Or, should I say, Director Picardy?

W: Who would be better to kick off the school's newest initiative than the person who hired me?

F: Who am I kidding? No one! [laughs]

W: Now, however lofty the title of Director may be...Professor Picardy is an alliteration I have no intentions of giving up.

F: Say no more, Professor. How, then should we celebrate your promotion?

W: The honor of being the first to hold my position is fulfilling enough. I have such great plans, Ms. Flygloss, you wouldn't believe it!

F: I know, Picardy. The Cabinet knew right from the start that nobody else could live up to the name of "Director of High Morale". Do you know why?

W: Flatter me, Ms. Flygloss.

F: It's your *spirit!* You have an aura of great excitement about you, Picardy. It's like every movement you make is done with a tinge of manic urgency!

W: [beat] Pardon?

F: Oh, it's not an insult, Picardy! Let me choose my words better: You care, deeply. You care like there's nothing left in your life but caring.

W: Yes, I... think I see where you're coming from. The way I see it, passion fuels itself. I do feel quite strongly about the power of optimism, for example.

F: Exactly! That's exactly what we've hired you to care most about, Picardy. Spread your aura through the magic of radio. Give Alpiss University a share of your explosive energy!

W: I can guarantee you my best. To be honest, I had no clue the Board saw what you're describing in me.

F: Of course they did, insight is their bread and butter.

W: And here I was just thinking that I do best when I temper my explosive mania!

F: Students love your catastrophic energy! Alpiss will be rid of the plague in no time!

W: Right, yes, the plague...It's probably best that we address the reason behind this initiative. Sweet lord, I can't believe how off-track we've gotten.

F: Everything comes as it should, Walter. Yes, explain away.

W: Students, as much as I live for the stuffy air and bad lighting of the classroom, I needed a much bigger platform to accomplish my newer responsibilities. As the Director of High-

Morale, I have been tasked with the somewhat daunting duty of...ah, how should I put it tactfully-

F: Curing you!

W: Nonono, that would imply there's something wrong with them! It's just, well, there's a trend going about these days. We want to gently nudge you all in a direction that promotes aspiration...growth...

F: Gently, my pen!

W: [inhales sharply] Ms. Flygloss!

F: Oh, let's not beat around the bush, Walter! They meander about campus like sedated livestock; they refuse to do their academics, they overindulge each and every weekend just to make it through the next slog of a week! The students are *sick*. Sick with, with...[snaps fingers] what did you call it the other day?

W: [sighs] Nihilism.

F: Yes, nihilists! The whole lot of you!

W: Please, Ms. Flygloss, we ought not to get ahead of ourselves. I agree with you more than anyone about not "beating around the bush", but, we ought to save the berating for when they really need it.

F: Humor me, professor.

W: First off, this is not a disparagement on all of you. Like I said, a *trend*, no more. But one that is best nipped at the bud! Alpis University is like a garden, and it's the faculty's job to tend to the students like delicate, intellectually curious flowers.

F: Ah, if only they were as perky and fanciful as tulips!

W: Do you practice horticulture?

F: Oh, avidly! A very wise man told me that a well-tended garden will cure all vices.

W: Which one?

F: [curt laugh] No, he wasn't a Great Thinker, at least that I knew of. There's just too many to keep track of these days.

W: Well, one less as of last week...

F: Oh my, Pindar the Poet! I remember hearing about that! Isn't that *something*!

W: A tragedy, to be sure. At any rate, where was I? Yes, addressing nihilism.

F: Suppose we install personal soil beds in the dorms? Wouldn't that boost morale!

W: We can discuss that idea on break, Ms. Flygloss, but right now I would like to talk how this outbreak came about.

F: Oh, that's simple enough, isn't it? Children have been getting more dismal with each year, and it's only now coming to a head!

W: Whether or not that's true, I think I can pinpoint the cause of our misfortune to one, *large* misstep.

F: Oh, yes, that's right, the Living Music Festival you've gone on about before. No need to remind me.

W: ...Ah, well, that was meant to be a setup. [whispers] So you would ask me to elaborate?

F: You have another speech for this part? Delightful! Take it away, Walter!

W: Close enough! [unfolds paper]

Monologue, Movement I

Let's go back in time, listeners. Back to a mythological era when the — Sorry?...What's that about ads?

F: I think the Engineer needs us to take an ad break, Walter.

W: Can it not wait? I went through all this trouble to rehearse — Now? Well at least let me — [static crackling]

Promotional Material

R: Hey Alpis! Russ here, your student government prez. If you haven't heard the latest from our School of Music, where have you been? As you know, each year we host the Living Music Festival, where all our ensembles perform a series of concerts dedicated to the works of a modern composer. It's been the pride of Alpis for many years to celebrate those who are underperformed and fight for their lives each day against the inevitable tide of fading into obscurity. To celebrate the Tenth Anniversary of this event, we have an extremely special resident composer...Richard Wagner! Whether you're a casual fan of classical music or a cinema buff, there's no doubt Wagner has been a part of your life's soundtrack. Buy your tickets in advance! Don't miss out on what will definitely be the event of a lifetime!

Monologue, Movement II

W: Hello, you're listening to 88.8 APRI. I'm Professor Walter Picardy, and this is *Become Who You Are*...I'll begin right where we left off! [clears throat]

Let's go back in time, listeners. Back to a mythological era when the world was vibrant with legend and the philosophy flowed in abundance. Back to when the Gods among us, the Great Thinkers, were revered by all and their immortality worshiped. As tomes were written, thunder crashed, when discourse was wrought, lightning crackled! When the Philosophers fought, the cataclysm that ensued would quake the earth and all its helpless mortals. Listeners, this was when Philosophy was King. We may not have the same awe for these people as our ancestors did, but the light of nature bestowed upon them has not allowed us to forget their worth.

Of course, you students understand this better than anyone else! We're all here, congregated in devout study to the Thinkers, trying our best to glean some insight into how to improve the world at large. Why, I wouldn't put it past some of you if you were aspiring to achieve their immortal likeness. [chuckles]

Cast off the cloak of modernity, listeners, and come with me to Leipzig, Germany 1868, where a fateful meeting occurred between an undergraduate and an international super-star. Friedrich Nietzsche, 24 at the time, was just finishing up his studies as a philologist at Leipzig University when he received a tip that a celebrity was passing through town. Richard Wagner, 55, was keeping a low profile in order to not attract the press's prying eye, and it was extremely lucky that Nietzsche caught whiff of the little party he was putting together.

If you're fortunate enough to not recognize the name Wagner, then let me give you a brief overview. Wagner is a composer classically recognized for his operas in the mid-19th century, including the four-opera epic drama known as *The Ring Cycle*. Having also been... [sighs] a writer, so some degree, he somehow managed to achieve the status of Great Thinker. In the past half-century or so, he has rekindled his popularity by composing and directing films. Even by 1868, which saw the premiere of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, Wagner was a household name across Germany. He was lauded, mostly by himself, as an era-defining composer who had masterfully united the arts of philosophy and music. So needless to say, when you're invited to eat with arguably the most culturally important person of your time, you say yes.

Nietzsche was star-struck. Music played a very important role in this budding philosopher's life, and he found Wagner's work to be particularly enchanting. That evening, the two hit it off after discovering a shared love for a philosopher by the name of Arthur Schopenhauer. Wagner and Nietzsche stayed in contact for many years following this episode, with Nietzsche paying frequent visit to Wagner's Swiss home while teaching at a nearby university. Four years later, Nietzsche wrote his first book and dedicated it to Wagner. The composer, his wife Cosima, and their children grew very close to Nietzsche, even awarding him the privilege of celebrating Christmas together.

However, if this story ended with Nietzsche and Wagner holding hands and singing carols over a fireplace, I wouldn't be telling it. Wagner, who as you may remember is over twice

Nietzsche's age, assumed the role of father figure to the young philosopher, as Nietzsche's biological father died very early in childhood. Wagner, ever the opportunist, took great advantage of Nietzsche's admiration for his music. Nietzsche was used by Wagner as a tool to pedal his operas and write treatises on their cultural significance. Nietzsche's turning point as a philosopher was reached when he finally broke free from Wagner's parasitic grip. Having matured to become philosophically independent of Schopenhauer, he found himself at ends with everything Wagner and his music stood for.

F: Walter, dear. What's the point of all this?

W: Ah, allow me a bit more, will you? We have the time!

F: Okay...a *bit* more.

W: Listeners, consider where our campus climate is today. Faculty across all departments report poor class attendance and participation. Quality of work has seen substantial drops. Every week the student newspaper can't help but express some shortcoming of Alpis. Students are fixated with a macabre sense of humor and seek out the ideologies that are most likely to hurt us. Clearly, there is a general malaise afflicting the minds of many of you. I see these symptoms and can't help but think that the apathetic void of the abyss has descended upon us. Call this phenomenon what you want, but for my purposes, nihilism fits best. Nietzsche knew this feeling well after living under Wagner's spell for eight years.

Nietzsche's story is crucial to understanding why we need to disavow Wagner. The arc of Nietzsche's life is defined by his heroic overcoming of Wagner, an incredible feat considering how close the two were. Nietzsche worked his whole life to discern the meaning of a phrase penned by the late Pindar the Poet: "Become what you are, having learned what that is." Nietzsche took this quip to mean that we ought to affirm the state of living, *truly* living as an individual who is not satisfied with being stagnant. No, we are agents of change, people with the power to constantly create who we ought to be. I chose the namesake for this program very purposefully, for I wanted a mantra that summarizes my goal; a knight, leading a crusade fighting against the forces of nihilism. [folds paper]

Dialogue, Movement II

F: Phew, that *was* a journey.

W: [laughs] You're too kind.

F: I mean, I generally knew how you felt about this from your pitch to the Cabinet, but...it's something else to here you in long-form.

W: Isn't that the beauty of radio? I can say whatever I want, as long as I need to!

F: I feel like you've just sucked all the energy right out of me.

W: Really? I feel like I could conquer mountains! Ms. Flygloss, I was hoping you could field me some questions about anything you think the listeners might be confused about so far. Oh! And I almost forgot, we have a text-in line! Send us a message to read on-air at (555) 963 – 8376.

F: Is it okay if I'm confused as well?

W: What was the hard part?

F: Alright... So the Living Musical Festival is the source of the campus's problems?

W: Well, I'm more concerned with the subject of *this* year's Festival: Wagner.

F: And Nietzsche comes into this...

W: Because he has the best, most clear things to say on defeating Wagner. Nietzsche holds the key!

F: You know, Walter, I have to say that I somewhat disagree. How late are we? Can we change the script some?

W: Well, I haven't really gotten to argue my case all that much. I wanted to get to that, but I'm afraid we're quickly running out of time.

F: But the premise of the whole thing! I mean, Wagner's hardly what you'd call underplayed. Wouldn't most people be a nihilist given how widespread his music is?

W: [laughs] You're beating me to the punch with that one! I think it's important to make a distinction between people who *are* nihilists, like Wagner, and people who *suffer* from nihilism. The people who are swayed by Wagner's siren song, e.g. Alpis University, are suffering from acute nihilism.

F: Even so...this is about the students! Why are the students so mistrustful of the Administration, who are more or less responsible for Wagner's selection? If they've been hypnotized by opera, shouldn't they love the Administration? It makes no sense!

W: I'll admit, I've pondered this one for a bit. Why bite the hand that feeds you? After all, there's plenty of thematic coding that encourages submissiveness to authority.

F: [laughs] Thank goodness!

W: So the students' disdain for Alpis must be detached from their appreciation for Wagner, and the illness that his music carries isn't strong enough to override that disdain.

F: Walter, I love the energy you've clearly put into this hypothesis, but...allow me to pitch in my two cents, since I'm here. Frankly, the nihilism comes from within the students. I know times can seem bleak, especially if you're plugged into the news circuit, but we each have got

to find a way to pull ourselves up. Find joy in the little things, get out and bask in the overcast! You want some actionable advice? Grow your garden, volunteer at the campus farm. The world we live in, this world? It's the best we got, people! Nothing's gonna change but you! [curt laugh]

W: That's an interesting point of view, Ms. Flygloss.

F: I've had my whole life to sort it out. Students tend to forget that us old-timers have been around the block a few times. [laughs] Well, how old are you again? It's always you spring chickens who think of the most complicated solutions.

W: I'm in my 30s! And I'm a philosophy professor, I'll be like this to my grave.

F: Is it too late to take this radio show to spin in a more...down-to-earth direction?

W: Great question! I've already named the show *Become Who You Are*, which is taken from Nietzsche's favorite quote. So...

F: Ah, well...

W: But I'm also very confident in my argument! By the end of this initiative, our students ought to be smiling cheek to cheek in existential self-becoming! I'll find a way to apply your wisdom along the way, I promise.

F: I can't help but know you're right! You're the best one for this job, Walter!

W: It means the most coming from you [pause] Oh? Look what we have here!

F: A text! Click on it!

W: Finally, some student input [mouse] ... this person says, "*Where's Friday Funk-Out?*" [laughs] I did address that at the beginning, but I suppose it bears repeating –

F: Walter! Another one!

W: Um... "*I can usually count on APRI to help me escape...thought I was having a stress-induced hallucination when I heard Picardy on-air*" Alright well I –

F: "*Flygloss? On APRI? Why can't student media be STUDENT MEDIA*"

W: "*Lol can't believe Picardy's trying to shut down the one thing Alpis got right*"

F: "*I need Wagner to fall asleep at night...i'll take nihilism over insomnia thanks though Picardy*"

W: "*Free Francesca and Mauve!*"

Both: [pause. Laughter simultaneously, half-heartedly]

F: That's our students!

W: Did you notice how none of them signed their names?

F: Easier to be snarky behind anonymity.

W: Write a letter next time, folks. Thank you, Ms. Flygloss, for joining me tonight.

F: It's been a pleasure, Walter. I'm excited to see where this goes!

W: And that's been *Become Who You Are!* The first broadcast of what will be many more to come. Please tune in next time, where I'll be talking with Maestro Tronckh! This is 88.8 APRI, and remember: *create yourself!*

Postlude

W: And...we're off the air!

F: Mm.

W: Wasn't that fun? I have to hand it to myself, even when things got off track, I did a fine job of reeling it back in!

F: [silence]

W: Well, I did my best, anyway! [nervous laughter] Don't you think it went well?

F: Improvement is called for, I'd say.

W: ...Of course! I mean, there's so much to work on! The pacing felt odd, my scripts were a bit overboard maybe, possibly, but I wanted to impart so badly how important Nietzsche can be for us...I'll dial it back! Don't worry, this is all a work in progress, for everyone!

F: Picardy, I didn't hire you for this job so you could teach another class. Right?

W: I...well, sure.

F: You've been trusted with this responsibility to produce results, not babble on about some poor Thinker who may as well have died a century ago.

W: I –

F: When you first pitched this idea to the Cabinet, Picardy, I was the one to defend you for such a laughably silly idea. A radio show? I don't care if you think Wagner and the Living Music Festival are to blame, really. But I can't believe you thought it would be appropriate to

publicly condemn Alpis's greatest asset! I was here tonight for one reason: to see if this – you – were worth defending.

[silence]

F: The Administration has a lot riding on this High Morale Department. If this fails, then...
[sighs] I don't know what we'll do. Alumni will stop putting Alpis in their estates when there's nothing left here to fund. Enrollment keeps plummeting and we can't even convince the students to appreciate what they have... This needs to work. It simply needs to. Do you understand?

W: ...Yes.

F: Then take your goddamn job seriously!

[rises from spot, footsteps, shutting of studio door]

W: [pauses. exhales. Swivels in chair, rises, shutting of studio door]

End

Become What You Are – Episode 2 “Eros”

Imagine yourself in your loneliest loneliness. The despair, the disease, puts up quite a good argument. However, you have a trusty blade capable of cutting down the mightiest of demons. You wield it once more and notice a blemish of tarnish. You look closer: has it always been this dull? Brandished against the despair, it does what it’s always done – but you can’t help but think it look longer, this time. Often times love is likened to a shield, or a plate of armor used to fend off the despair. A more accurate metaphor might be that love is a sword. It can harm us just as efficiently as it can the darkness. In either case, the potency of love doesn’t last forever. When love fails, what will we have left?

Is love a bastion of hope, or is it a handicap to our authentic quest?

News

JJ: This is AP Radio News, I’m Jessie Jingle. Today, two of the world’s largest media conglomerates, Disney and Gesamtkunstwerk Inc., announced that they had partnered for a joint-production. What was only rumor years ago has now been confirmed as fact at a press-release this morning at Wagner-Con in Bayreuth, Germany. Helmwig Wagner, fourteenth child and Director of Media Relations at Gesamtkunstwerk Inc., had the following to say: *translated in English* “My father has been working very closely with Disney on a joint-collaboration titled *The Little Rhinemaiden*. He assures me it is his greatest work to date!” Richard Wagner was not available for comment, as he had just departed for a conducting tour across North America. Helmwig adds, “He will finish the score after his tour, which begins at the New York Philharmonic and ends at Alpis University.” This is AP News.

Dialogue, Movement I

W: Annnd we’re back! Welcome, esteemed listeners of radio! This is *Become What You Are*, a broadcast coming out of 88.8 APRI and hosted by yours truly, Walter Picardy, Professor of Philosophy and Director of High Morale. I’m joined today to have a riveting, authentic conversation with a beloved Alpis faculty member. You know him, you love him...it’s Mr. Tronckh!

...

W: [whispers] You can speak now! ...What’s this? [unfolding of paper]

[clears throat] “As a passionate advocate for the arts, Maestro Humpshire Van Tronckh is reinventing the classical music soundscape. His experience conducting includes residencies with highly-esteemed orchestras and opera companies across Asia, Europe, and North America. Maestro Tronckh has been awarded the Clancy Schrumitz Music Education Excellence Fellowship four times while at Alpis.” Now, without further ado, please-

T: The whole thing!

W: Sorry, excuse me – “The *New York Times* says about Tronckh, “A force of nature...expressive skill unmatched by any other” in a concert review his conducting of Wagner’s *Parsifal*. *The Guardian* praises him further, “Truly a spectacle worth hearing as well as seeing...a virtuoso of playing my heart.” Wait, what’s that even mean?

T: I means you haven’t finished my biography, go on!

W: Mr. – Maestro Tronckh, this is pages long!

T: And? I thought speeches were in the spirit of the show?

W: I mean, usually I’m the one writing speeches – and they’re not bios (typically) - but – no matter! So you listened to my inaugural broadcast?

T: No.

W: Word, just spreads that quick on a small campus, eh? [chuckle]

T: I received an express warning from Miss Flygloss.

W: Oh, brilliant! We love her, don’t we!

T: [guffaws] This is great! You’re a darling, Walter.

W: I, uh, yes, thank you. Maestro Trockh, everyone, conductor of the Alpis Student Orchestra. So, this is actually our first time meeting! Can you believe it, for someone as accomplished as yourself, I can’t believe I haven’t introduced myself before now!

T: Yes yes, well, I’m not here to be flattered.

W: I’m so pleased you could make it on tonight.

T: Right, of course. So, could you explain the gist of your show for me? Just a reminder, your email is a little hazy in my memory.

W: It would be my pleasure, Maestro. My project – if I may speak broadly – is to promote happiness and well-being throughout the student body.

T: You don’t say! I like to think of myself as a community man myself. I’m something of a creative placemaker.

W: We’ll get along beautifully then! My approach right now is to use the campus radio as a platform to teach about what it means to live an authentic, meaningful life.

T: How...hm...

W: And I know it's a big task! I'm trying very hard to break down achievable authenticity into digestible themes with actionable advice.

T: Compelling!

W: That's such a relief to hear you say. [nervous laugh]

T: And you bring on people like me because we know a thing or two about life?

W: More or less. You, specifically, have an expertise very relevant to my message.

T: Because the students need good role models. Life advice from the ones who've been through it?

W: You might say that. As you may have heard—

T: You need me to help you reach out to the students, because you have no clue how to connect with an audience?

W: Yes, yes! No, hold on.

T: [guffaws] Just rich. I'm ruffling your feathers, sport. Let's get straight to it, you want to destroy nihilism, right?

W: Yes! Wait, you know?

T: I've been to faculty meetings.

W: Wow! I, I didn't think the school would take this seriously so quick!

T: I didn't say *that*.

W: [beat] So how did it come up then?

T: Martin, our Professor of Musicology brought it up. This was a while ago. We were talking about the problem of student morale...you know, the supposed downtrodden attitude of this generation and all that. The attendance, the work ethic, this and that...I'd be lying if I said even the Conservatory wasn't feeling it.

W: And they always say the music students are the happiest bunch on campus!

T: Exactly, so, allow me to tell a story from not too long ago. Imagine my reaction when the second bassoonist (I won't say who) comes to rehearsal late!

W: ...Wrath?

T: Impassioned disappointment, more like. Anyway, I've scolded hundreds- thousands-of tardy musicians in my day. You give them a berating, a helping of embarrassment, a pinch of resentment, and bam! That musician is never. late. again. This isn't a new phenomenon, Walter.

W: Then –

T: What was new was this bassoonist, Clancy. Next rehearsal, Clancy is late.

W: Oh?

T: And the next one. And the next one! I'll grimace, I'll scowl, I'll even send emails, but to no avail!

W: Then what happened?

T: I'll tell you: I was resigned to simply having a perpetually late bassoon. Nothing to be done but let the grades reflect it. And I wasn't the only affected by this! We're talking about a whole orchestra that depends on each other to do their part. We *love* each other.

W: Tragic.

T: So that's why I sympathize with your cause, Mr. Director of High Morale. I come bearing the antidote! I cured Clancy, and my orchestra is vibrant as ever.

W: The antidote, to, what, late students? That's huge!

T: Nonono, to *nihilism*!

[pause]

W: Excuse my skepticism, but...I have my doubts? You've no doubt been preparing for the Living Music Festival? An all Wagner concert?

F: Ah, don't beat me to the punch!

W: You don't mean –

F: That's the secret! I've done it, lad! Wrap it up!

W: Please, explain.

Monologue

F: [unfolding paper] Walter, I've been saturated in music since I was a toddler learning to walk. I loved it all – Baroque, Romantic, Modernist – and each work of art opened up something new inside me. Mozart taught me how to have fun, Brahms taught me self-control,

Bruckner taught me piety, but Wagner... Wagner made me vulnerable to the most potent feeling of them all: love.

I was thirteen the first time I saw a fully-staged Wagner opera: *Tristan und Isolde*. It was the single most moving experience of my life up until that point. In the moment, I knew that from that moment on I had to dedicate myself to understanding, interpreting, and conducting Wagner. If you had bothered to *finish my bio*, you'd understand that this part of my backstory was fundamental to me getting a job at Gesamtkunstwerk.

W: Wait, was that part written down? How did you know I'd skip that?

T: You're doing excellent, Walter, don't start ad-libbing now. There, I was able to crawl my way up the ranks and grow more fervent as I was able to just be in the peripheries of Wagner's genius! I was an usher for years, soaking in his entire repertoire and studying it inside out. Then, one day, my day came. My years of waiting on the conductor's sub-list came to fruition, and I took the baton and led the orchestra to what would be, in my opinion, their fourth best performance of *Tristan*.

W: That's a pretty bold claim. Doesn't Wagner conduct his own company?

T: For a while, yes. Directed, too! But for the past fifty or so years, he's just made books for future productions to follow. Frees up a lot more time for him to engage with new projects. Between you and me, I'm more of a pre-1882 kind of Wagnerian though. [guffaws]

It was my big break, and I've had a great career making the best music around the world. And now I'm here! [laughs] I never could have done it without Wagner and the impression he made on me from such an early age. When you listen to his music...you just get engrossed in his universe. You see the world as it truly is: will and representation, Walter.

W: Yes, yes, I've read Schopenhauer too. And I have a few choice words for –

T: The world is terrible, Walter! The world, the phenomenal, is a wretched place that causes despair in every man. Why were we placed here, only to desire for what cannot be? Behind the curtain of reality lurks a world that's more than just shadows dancing along a stone wall. Free yourself from your shackles to take a peek beyond representation – and what do you see? The noumenal, sport: truth.

W: And do you care to share how Wagner intends we get there?

T: Love! Tristan and Isolde see the noumenal through their impassioned commitment to each other! Life isn't politics, betrayal, insidious love potions – it's the ability to form a bond which transcends longing itself.

W: No, death! Tristan and Isolde *die* at the end, Tronckh!

T: The death of the hero is integral to understanding the struggle of balancing order with chaos! Wagner's the only one who got this right since the Ancient Greeks. You know, you

ought to read *The Birth of Tragedy*. Have you heard of Nietzsche? A true Wagnerian if there ever was one.

W: I – of course I’ve – you’re co-opting my radio show!

T: Wagner teaches us not just how to love, but how transcendental love can be! It’s more than carnal lust, with love we ascend the ladder to a sublime realm where the dirtiness of the world means nothing!

W: Cut the mics! Stop this madman!

Promotional Material

Heyyyy, Alpis! Your student prez, Russ, here. I’ve been hard at work with the student government to fight for our voices to be heard by Alpis Administration. The message is clear: y’all are fed up! And I’m happy to say that we have been listened to. Thanks to the thoughtful and nuanced guidance of Dean Flygloss, we’re proud to announce that all Alpis students will be given a free hydroponic garden! Watch out for more information to come on how we’ll fundraise this initiative. Another victory for student representation!

Dialogue, Movement II

T: Ah, Russ! A great student, a talented concertmaster.

W: Welcome back to *Become What You Are*, this is Walter Picardy. I am your host, Walter Picardy.

T: You know, this has been great. How did you get yourself a timeslot? There’s nothing like a good soapbox.

W: I did a lot of work to get this box!

T: That, I’m sure of.

W: Maestro, may I please explain why I’ve invited you on?

T: There’s no need, Walter, we’re allies for the same cause. You want to know why my students are happier than the rest; the answer is Wagner’s coming appearance at the Living Music Festival! We’re having a splendid time playing the most important music in the world.

W: That’s just it, though, you’re mistaken! You’re poisoning the school’s waters by lauding your Wagnerian sensibilities.

T: [guffaws]

W: And to answer your question from earlier: yes, I am familiar with Nietzsche. I've taught many a class about him, enough to confidently say that he despises Wagner more than any other person. Have you read *Nietzsche contra Wagner*? It's too-the-point.

T: Mm, I haven't. Tell me, was it written before or after he lost his marbles? [laughs]

W: Before – and, some would say, when had reached philosophical maturity.

T: Give me the shortened version.

W: Wagner is an intoxicant. You get drawn into his world, his romantic web, and you become his captive while he whispers to you subliminally: “life is suffering,” “death is redemption”. *Tristan und Isolde* is beautiful, but it's poison. It's decadence.

T: You're really hung up on the whole suicide thing, huh?

W: How are you not?

T: Because I can personally attest to how Wagner has shaped me to be the man I want to be! I *feel more* because of him, my capacity to love is grows more with each rehearsal. Is that such a bad thing?

W: I'm not saying love is bad. Love can do us good just as much as it can harm us, Maestro. We might be wary of love chaining us down, maybe. Haven't you ever felt...stuck, before?

T: In what way?

W: Stuck like you have to be a certain person for someone you love? Because in real life, there aren't love potions that make people instantly infatuated with each other forever. [laughs]

T: [laughs] True.

W: It's a process, because we like to explore the other person's personality in every way we can, so we can know a person inside and out. But when someone comes to love that person...can't it be hard to change? Aren't you ever afraid to change, for fear that you'll stop being the person other people know?

T: [slower laugh] A true romantic, everybody.

W: [nervous laugh] I'm just pointing out that love isn't perfect. If we're interested in becoming who we want to be, sometimes love can pose as an obstacle.

T: You're young, aren't you?

W: Old enough to have my job, you could say.

T: No, but not old enough to have been through the gambit. I'm in my 60s, Walter. I'm not so interested in changing that much.

W: But are your students?

[pause]

T: You know, I met my wife in college. Lots of people do.

W: I'm happy for you! College is a great time to explore a plethora of personalities and fall in love with a few. People often say that a partner changed them for the better, too. Students: just make sure you don't get chained down to anyone, will you? Find out who you want to be day by day, and use love as a sword to cut down whatever stops your way.

T: Well, Walter, it's about time I took my leave.

W: We're very close to wrapping up! I just have to...oh, I forgot!

T: What?

W: We have a text line! It's our best indicator that anybody is listening...there's a few!

T: *"love that two fascist corporations are finally coming together to own everything. why is nobody worried about this?"* What's this about?

W: Oh, probably Disney and Gesampkunstwerk. Didn't you hear the news?

T: *"go off, Maestro Tronckh!! So happy to be learning wagner under you - Russ"* [guffaws]

W: *"weirdest feeling right now having just broken up with my bf and tuning into APRI to hear Picardy giving relationship advice. Is this real?"*

T: I have a couple question for you, Walter.

W: Shoot.

T: Are you proposing we cancel the Living Music Festival?

W: I am. With all due respect, Maestro, I know that Wagner is teaching the students an unsustainable morality. It's a masochistic morality. Don't you agree that there's more to life than the pain of longing?

T: [laughs] I'm going to ignore that. What do you suppose they, or we, should listen to instead?

W: Huh! You know, I didn't give much thought to that [flips through papers] I've really been into *Carmen* recently.

T: [guffaws] Rich! This has been a treat.

W: Thanks for listening to *Become What You Are!* This has been 88.8 APRI, and remember: create yourself!

Postlude

W: Thanks for coming on, Maestro. I knew we'd have our disagreements going into this, but I think we both got something out of this. Don't you?

T: [sighs] I tried my best.

W: Oh, what do you mean? You were great! I love a thrilling debate.

T: It's so hard to get people to understand these days, the beauty of art.

W: I, oh no, I'm a huge fan of music! There's so much value in what you do!

T: Each year, the world seems to be closing in on classical music, demanding that it justifies its existence in the modern age.

W: I wasn't trying to dis –

T: But it doesn't matter what you were trying to do, Walter! All I'm trying to do is teach young people to love a craft that I'm afraid isn't valued like it was. And whatever you think of Wagner, he's the only great composer to be a Thinker! He's living on, today, to carry the torch of a tradition that the world wants to put out.

W: I am so sorry, I was *not* tryin –

T: You should've listened to me when I first said it: I found the cure. And if you want the evidence, come see our concert.

[silence]

T: I need to head out. Thanks for having me here. I'll be sure to read my emails more carefully from now on.

[rises from spot, footsteps, shutting of studio door]

W: [whispering] Was I that...?

W: [pauses. exhales. Swivels in chair, rises, shutting of studio door]

End

Become What You Are – Episode 3 “Ressentiment”

Imagine yourself in your loneliest loneliness. It’s the same dark assailant, but you have a different attitude, now. Years have passed, and lashing out in anger doesn’t seem to do it anymore. You start to feel like it’s your fault, this whole mess. If you can’t beat em, join em, right? When you think of the happiest people you know, isn’t it what they’ve done? Maybe though, if we can fight just a little bit longer...

Is rebellion just a way to cope, or is it lifestyle needed to create ourselves?

News

JJ: This is AP Radio News, I’m Jessie Jingle. More Great Thinkers have met their demise! Over the course of 24 hours, over a dozen philosophers have joined Pindar as being the first Thinkers to die. While Pindar’s death still remains a mystery, cases are all but certainly related. Some are claiming that their immortality is being “revoked”, while more pious individuals say this is a warning for an incoming rapture. Many Great Thinkers have been interviewed on their own theories on if this trend will continue. A common answer we’ve received: “I guess they were just wrong.” This is AP News.

Dialogue, Movement I

W: Good evening, Alpis University! This is *Become What You Are*, a radio show dedicated to, well, becoming who we are! We’re broadcasting out of Alpis’ own campus radio station at 88.8 APRI.

Before we get to this week’s guest and what will certainly be a thrilling conversation, I would like to issue an apology. Last week, I had on Maestro Tronckh and we discussed the pros and cons of Wagner’s ideology and whether his music causes harm or not. I want to be on record saying that while oppose everything that Wagner’s music espouses, I am not an opponent to the Maestro and his livelihood. I fear that maybe I came off a certain way that made me seem unsympathetic. I’m not here to hold anyone or their crafts to hot water.

M: What about their beliefs?

W: Those are open season! As an offering of my good-nature, I actually went to one of Conservatory’s concerts this week. Congratulations to the orchestra, I’ve never seen the auditorium to full capacity before...a record student turn-out, I heard.

M: [laughs] That must have been a lot for you. Hi everyone, I’m Professor Martin.

W: Wow, introducing yourself!

M: Well, I thought I’d save you a hassle. I hate hearing other people talk about me. And I’m dying to be put under hot water!

W: [laughs] Yes, I'm sorry, I'm just accustomed to having to steer the conversation so that we eventually get to the whole philosophy thing. There's usually some small-talk, dawdling, vamping and then suddenly I'm out of time!

M: Sounds like most classes I teach. [laughs]

W: Tell our listeners what those classes are, why don't you?

M: Mmm...I'm one of the faculty musicologists over at the Alpis Conservatory. So what I teach is mostly related to the history of music and how music is studied academically.

W: Fascinating! What's your specialty, though?

M: Oh, that's what you meant: boring young-adults to death. [laughs]

W: [short laugh] You're a card. But really, we're dying to know your primary academic interest.

M: Wagner and the Aesthetics of Music. I mean, mostly the Wagner part though. You kind of have to get to know aesthetics in order to totally grasp Wagner, though.

W: A splendid intersection of fields! So you see why I just had to have you onto my show!

M: Right right, so we can kill the Living Music Festival and make everyone happy again, right?

W: Only if that's the outcome our discourse leads to?

M: Oh?

W: Well, I think I've been dominating these past attempts at the show. I'm still working out the kinks of everything, and I think a formal debate ought to be the way we move forward.

M: You don't say? I was kind of looking forward to manic energy. Honest, conversations, right?

W: I know, I know, but – things didn't turn out totally how I wanted. I think a little balance between chaos and structure can be just as authentic.

M: Just say Apollonian and Dionysian, Walter, don't hold your tongue. [laughs]

W: Well I don't want to over-complicate things with jargon...

M: But that's what you mean, right? Isn't this all about saying what we mean?

W: [beat] The debate hasn't started quite yet, friend. [nervous laughs]

M: I'm just messing with you. What did you want to talk about tonight?

W: So glad you asked! What do you know about rebellion, Professor Martin?

M: Um, not much, these days.

W: Then without further ado, let the debate begin!

Monologue, Movement I

W: What other philosopher has a more sordid reputation than Nietzsche? His living legacy is besmirched with all sorts of accusations: Nazism, syphilis, but worst of all...nihilism! The most common questions I'll have in the beginning (or end) of a lecture on Nietzsche are: "Isn't he staring into the abyss?" and "Isn't life meaningless to him?" I have to explain to them that the answer to both those queries is "No – yet, yes at the same time? It's complicated, and his views expressed across his writings aren't wholly consistent with one another so it's difficult to ascribe to him a belief as broad as that." All the same, the record needs to be set straight: Nietzsche is not a nihilist, he's the world's greatest rebel.

Nietzsche was constantly frustrated with things. He was frustrated with his fellow Germans, his academic colleagues, and the general unwillingness of people to be critical of the world around them. It was the culture of obedience and mob-mentality that he disdained, and he was desperate for people to see that there was more than one path to life. So it was only natural that he found himself so attracted to Wagner, whose life and music was everything but conventional.

It was the young Nietzsche who was awestruck by characters like Siegfried who could slay gods as easily as dragons. It was the mature Nietzsche that balked at what Wagner's heroes truly championed: a masochistic, decadent, Christian morality. It dawned on Nietzsche that his purpose in life was to be the anti-moralist, an insurgent voice to expose the arbitrary oppression of some desires over others.

But that doesn't mean that the world is meaningless, no, far from it! The world is merely people interpreting facts. Just because we have killed God doesn't mean it's impossible to replace Him! Nietzsche's rebellion dismantled the illusion, and the worse thing we could do in this critical moment in history is to let the masters spin their lie all over again. When we listen to Wagner, we are admitting to ourselves: "It's okay that truth is dead, we may as well accept our self-resentment. Long live the masters of this manipulated void." Say *no* to nihilism; say *no* to the old gods. Embrace revelry; embrace Nietzsche!

[silence]

Dialogue, Movement II

W: Right, so I had my positive statement, now you argue the opposition!

M: Sorry, what are we arguing exactly? Who was the better rebel?

W: Well, more like the general importance of Nietzsche's rebellious philosophy and its potential impact on the fight against nihilism.

M: I...well, should I have prepared something or another? I don't have notes, like you.

W: This? This is a script. Don't sweat it, Professor, I've seen you in action. Remember that panel back in 1998, with the pompous epistemologist? You're a beautiful improviser!

M: Mmm...If you say so.

Monologue, Movement II

M: I concede.

Dialogue, Movement III

W: Wait, no! Come on!

M: No no, it's true. I think you made some pretty interesting points, albeit kind of florid and only loosely based around a subject.

W: You see, those are good criticisms! Draw upon your years of research and teaching to disprove me!

M: I don't think I can, Walter. You seem pretty certain of yourself.

W: I'm the most open-minded person I know!

M: Isn't that what everyone says?

W: [sighs] I can admit I was a bit too optimistic that this would work.

M: Acceptance! Good! And you might take comfort in the fact that I honestly agree, mostly. Wagner was totally insufferable back in the day, and he's only gotten worse since becoming a Great Thinker. It's pretty hard to maintain the "rebel" image when you've had the patronage of a king most your life (and now Disney, apparently).

W: Exactly! Who's he kidding, he's a walking manifestation of the Western canon of music.

M: It's a shame that Nietzsche got that Great Thinker status too, ain't it?

W: What do you mean?

M: Well...isn't he in the Philosophical canon, de facto? Millions of people know this poor man's name. Does that change how rebellious his ideas really are?

W: Now that's the Martin I know! What a retort!

M: Oh, stop.

W: He may be a famous name, but all that really caught on were the misconceptions. The real meat of his philosophy – that the rebelliousness we need right now.

M: Maybe so, Walter.

W: We need to take a quick break, can we run the ad?

Promotional Material

Attention, Alpis University. Consider this is a message of warning. We are the Radical Anti-Garden Nihilists Associated with deicide and the Ruination Of all Knowledge. RAGNAROK for short. We stand as a front united against the tyranny of all authority. Rise up, students, and weaponize your anger for a cause that doesn't pretend to stand for anything. The "representation" that is our student government is a patronizing façade. Skip your classes. Trash your dorms. Vandalize. We are more than collective bargaining. We are the end of all things as you know it. Meetings are held on Sundays at midnight at the Student Union. Free pizza.

Dialogue, Movement IV

W: Hey, what was that? Why wasn't Russ giving the usual spiel?

M: Oh, they've been playing that one a lot for the past couple days.

W: [shouting to the engineer] Can we have a word about this? After the show?

M: What's the problem?

W: What's the – you can't see the problem here? Student groups openly calling themselves nihilists? "The end of all things as you know it"? I'm trying to *reach* these people.

M: Mm. I wonder what deicides they're associated with?

W: I just need *more time!* More time to find out what works, what's interesting, what's authentic!

M: At least they're taking a break advertising the Living Music Festival and Wagner, yeah?

W: I honestly don't know which I'd prefer at the moment.

[longer pause]

M: You know, there is one point I'd like to bring up, about the whole rebellion thing.

W: Yes?

M: Something that's not talked about much these days is that Wagner was, in his youth, a leftist revolutionary.

W: I...didn't know that, actually. You don't say?

M: Mhm. He was part of proto-socialist and anarchist circles, an acquaintance with Bakunin, even. Played a wee bit too large a role in one of Dresden's uprisings and got himself exiled straight into Switzerland.

W: You'd think that'd stop a man from becoming a German nationalist, huh?

M: [sighs] People change, Walter. Young people see the cruelty of the world and hate it, as they should. They think they can put a face to evil, and powerful people seem to fit the bill pretty well. But most of us have to move on...we get jobs, and over time we gain more and more responsibility. We become more and more entrenched in the status quo and can't help but retreat from the idea of systemic change. Growing up, for me at least, meant focusing more on my personal growth and happiness.

W: I thought you agreed with me that nihilism was the problem.

M: I do.

W: Then how come you're not concerned about it? Not to lambast you or anything, but, it doesn't seem you care.

M: You might say I've Become Who I Am [laughs]

W: [laughs] You devil! And all thanks to this show!

M: Mm, not quite.

W: I disagree with this sentiment, Professor Martin.

M: Color me surprised!

W: Nietzsche gives us the charge that we must always be evolving. It's in stagnation that we've truly failed –

M: Sorry, I don't mean to interrupt, but – you've got some notifications on the display, here.

W: Oh!! I keep managing to forget about our text-in line! Let's read off a few: "*can't wait to have prof Martin's cool attitude about everything. Picardy's sermon just isnt doing it for me*"

M: [laughs] I see why you might “forget”. Here’s an one: “*You’ve made the mistake of attributing Siegfried to Schopenhauerian thought as well as being a character Nietzsche would admire. You’ve neglected to mention the influence of Ludwig Feuerbach on Wagner’s early life and how this would affect The Ring Cycle’s libretto, which was written quite a while before Wagner’s introduction to Schopen –*” Well, you get the idea. Have them on, Walter!

W: [laughs nervous] How are there so many damn Wagnerians at this school?

M: Careful, Walter, let’s not invoke their ire any more than you have already.

W: At this point, that’s the only way I can describe my job as the Director of High Morale! Thank you for listening, Alpis, this has been *Become What You Are* broadcasting out of 88.8 APRI. Remember: create yourself!

Postlude

W: Whew! I think that may have been our best show yet. I don’t want to jinx it, but I think I’m getting to the bottom of this!

M: You think so?

W: Well, you might hate to admit it, but I think there was a hint of debate in there! There’s always a certain aroma in the air after contributing to the dialectic. You know what I mean?

M: [laughs softly] You sound like someone who’s tired of hearing “truth is in the eye of the beholder!”

W: Oh, well, I’m not sick of them yet [laughs]. Times have changed, haven’t they? When I was an undergrad, I was so hungry for philosophy! I wanted more than just to understand Nietzsche...I wanted to see what he saw! Now it feels like I have to pull teeth just to get someone to feign that they did the reading.

M: Do you think this is working, so far?

W: Ah, I’m at least heading in the right direction. I think I’ve been letting my past guests down a little, and...well, I don’t want to be the laughing stock of my peers.

M: [laughs] So it does come down to aesthetics, doesn’t it?

W: If I can’t make Nietzsche seem reasonable to my colleagues, then I doubt I can to my audience.

M: I have to say, I’m kind of disappointed myself.

W: Ah, not you.

M: We all have our pet passions, Walter. I felt pretty similarly about Wagner like you do Nietzsche, you know. It'd be a shame if you turned out like me.

W: Martin, don't say that! You're one of the smartest guys I know! What's more, you have such a detached temperament, I admire that!

M: I'm not beating myself up about it. But I really did – do – love Wagner. I mean the man's despicable in every way, yet – genius is magnetic. I can't help but think that I gave up chasing the sun just because...it was hard. I couldn't get people to see his music the way I do, so I gave up.

W: What about Tronckh? The man's practically foaming at the mouth for Wagner.

M: Yes, we were friends for a while. It gets old after a while though... [laughs] have you ever seen two Wagnerians go at it? It's utterly masturbatory.

W: Decadent, one might say?

M: Don't test me, Walter [laughs]. There was a part of me that thought this broadcast would be a chance to revive that flame though, if I'm being honest.

W: I had no idea...you can come on another time, then we'll really get into it!

M: No, let someone else take a shot. You know, I have a student you might like to talk to.

W: Oh? What's their name?

M: Mauve. A real apathetic character, but a lot of people seem to follow her lead.

W: When I started *Become What You Are*, I didn't think I'd be platforming the enemy [laughs]

M: Enemy?

W: Well, you know what I mean, Martin.

M: Do I?

[pause]

M: Well, I gotta go Walter. Best of luck with this whole thing, I really mean it.

W: Thank you, Martin. See you around!

[rises from spot, footsteps, shutting of studio door]

W: Hm. Baby steps!

W: [pauses. exhales. Swivels in chair, rises, shutting of studio door]

End

Become What You Are – Episode 4 “Child”

Imagine you're in your loneliest loneliness. And you've finally come face-to-face with the demon which weaves through the annals of your nightmare. The creature before you is impossible to see clearly. An impenetrable brightness forces you to avert your gaze again and again, forcing you to retreat back into the darkness, blinded by this unnatural denizen.

Do you curse or worship the thing that robs you of your most prized sense?

News

JJ: This is AP Radio News, I'm Jessie Jingle. What was originally a strange exception has now turned into a grim, unseen assailant on seemingly all Great Thinkers. Whatever brought about the death of Pindar some months ago is now indiscriminately targeting philosophers both ancient and modern. Even the biggest names like Emanuel Kant and René Descartes have withdrawn from their teaching positions. Schools are contemplating closing their doors after a surgeon general made a passing comment about knowledge being “infectious”. Philosopher-laureates locked in a race to find the logic behind this metaphysical-murderer, with their respective governments providing all the financial support needed for their contemplation. Gesamtkunstwerk Inc. is being credited with halting what would otherwise be a global panic after Richard Wagner himself released a statement saying “this will all blow over!” The media conglomerate has also assuaged the public with the release of its online streaming service, Drama Live (available at \$8.89/month). This is Jessie Jingle, AP Radio News.

Dialogue, Movement I

W: Hello and welcome, listeners, to *Become What You Are*, a broadcast hosted by yours truly, Walter Picardy, Professor of Philosophy and Director of High Morale. We're broadcasting out of Alpis University from 88.8 APRI. Today I'm joined by the leader of, uh...Radical Anti-Garden Nihilists Associated with deicide and the Ruination of All Knowledge. And, listen, I know what you're thinking. “Anti-Garden Nihilists? Professor Picardy, what are, some kind of traitor?”

Rest assured, listener. There's room for every kind of voice here on *Become What You Are*. I'm here to not just to defeat nihilism, but to promote a professional unity between students and faculty.

V: [scoffs]

W: So without further ado, please welcome...Mauve! Welcome, Mauve, it's a pleasure to meet you.

V: I'm not the leader.

W: Erm, what's that?

V: You said I was the leader of RAGNAROK. That's not right. We're a non-hierarchical society.

W: Oh! Excuse me, it's just I heard you were the voice on the ad we played on our last show.

V: Uh huh.

W: And I don't think you got back to me on if you wanted me to read a short bio on you...

V: I didn't.

W: Is there any way you'd like yourself introduced?

V: [sighs] Hi Alpis, I'm Mauve. You know who I am.

W: Ominous! Can you explain to the listeners what you're known for?

V: I think you mean, "Can you explain for me?"

W: [laughs nervously] Fair enough. I only know as much as your professors have told me.

V: Didn't you do your homework? I happen to know a lot more about you than what students say about you. By the way, do you want to know what students say about you?

W: No, that's not for the best, I think. Do you mean to say you've read some of my published work?

V: [laughs] Does your radio show count?

W: You...tune in?

V: Avidly. It's required listening for all RAGNAROK.

W: You don't say! That's a touching gesture, really,

V: Part of our mission has been to expose our Administration's blatant and useless attempts at quelling student protest. A repeated tactic has been to address outrage in pandering ways that masquerade as being sweeping systemic change.

W: I'm glad you've brought that up, actually. I've played a personal role in changing how the Administration reacts to the campus climate! Dean Flygloss and the Cabinet have created my Directorship in a way I think respectfully –

V: The group I'm part of has been keeping close tabs on the bread and circuses of Alpis. As of late, they've grown more egregious than ever.

W: I completely understand! And I know it's not worth much, but I did my best to advise against the whole garden initiative.

V: ...

W: And I'll get more into this with my speech, but I wanted this episode to revolve around alternatives to nihilism that still operate within a firmly anti-garden framework.

V: I don't plan on sticking around for that.

W: Nonsense, it'll be fun. [laughs] In the meantime, why don't you tell me about RAGNAROK and how you all adopted nihilism?

V: Um...we're not nihilists.

W: As in...you don't adhere to nihilism as it is classically understood?

V: As in we needed an eye-catching word that would fit the acronym.

W: [laughs] I have to appreciate your generation's sarcasm. Only it's harder and harder to tell when students are kidding these days.

V: It's just for the acronym, Picardy. Nothing else. We were close to changing it to "Nuisances" until someone mentioned that the word nihilism really peevd you.

[pauses]

W:[clears throat] What, um, do you all stand for, morally?

V: All of us? I don't know, there's like, over 100 members. We probably believe a lot of things.

W: [exhales sharply] Right, then what is your unifying principal?

V: Discontentment.

W: With what?

V: Life?

W: Aha! The very thing we ought to be affirming!

V: You know we're all going to die of climate change, right?

W: [beat] I honestly can't keep up with all the curveballs you're throwing at me.

V: That's because this isn't a game of catch.

W: Why not? This can be an exchange of valuable ideas, one where we learn from each other's perspectives.

V: I've listened to your show. Your perspective is just whatever you want your pet philosopher to say.

W: Nietzsche and I just so happen to agree on many things!

V: How about Nazism? How aligned are you two love birds on that one?

W: That's actually a common misconception! It was Nietzsche's sister, Eliz –

V: Please, stop. We know.

W: Wagner though: never was there a more fascist celebrity who we applaud each and every year. We look past his antisemitism so easily, all in the name of art.

V: Don't group me in with that crowd. I haven't canonized anything.

W: I guess I mean "we" as in our society. There's worse things about him, though; namely, the values he smothers with his operas. Would you say RAGNAROK are fans?

V: I don't know, we haven't, like, taken a poll. I have friends who've been going to the concerts.

W: Then it might be a disappointment for some of you to hear this, but I'm actually making headway with the cancelation of the Living Music Festival. I was able to pitch my plight face-to-face with a few members of the Cabinet, and I think I argued my case pretty well!

V: Dear God, you're the worst kind of philosopher.

W: What do you mean?

V: You not only get to have stupid opinions, you've been granted the power to enforce them. Cut to commercial.

Promotional Material

(unknown reader): Hey Alpis! Feeling a little down? A lot of stress this semester? Maybe you struggle to get up in the morning, fearing the wrath of all your unmet responsibilities collectively rearing up on you? Sure, you can scroll through your phone for a few hours and maybe forget that you're losing total control of your ability to stop self-loathing. But, what if I told you that there's a better form of escapism? Alpis Conservatory is proud to present Wagner: In Concert! In anticipation for this famed composer's campus residency for the Living Music Festival, each major ensemble will be performing an excerpt from Wagner's

beloved operas, culminating in an unforgettable production of *The Ring Cycle*! Forget that your life is on fire! Come down to the concert hall and see the magic for yourself!

Monologue, Movement I

[radio static]

Postlude

W: Wait, wait! Where are you going? The show's not over!

V: I'm kind of done, Picardy. Are you following me?

W: No, I just – Can't we talk some? Off mic?

V: Oh! I didn't realize there was an after show! What, do we get to cuss now?

W: Please, Mauve. What do I have to do, beg?

V: Fine. [beat] Consider it my final favor to you.

W: I just wanted an honest conversation.

V: What do you want me to tell you?

W: I – what do students think about me? Is my show okay?

V: Christ, you're incapable of listening. Again, what do you *want me to tell you*?

[pause]

W: I want you to tell me I'm doing a good job and people respect my opinions.

V: What else?

W: I want you to tell me I have a good sense of humor. I want to hear that I'm nice, that I'm open-minded, and that I'm becoming a better person. I really, *really* want to hear that my job, even if it's just a joke to you, is actually helping someone.

V: [beat] Doesn't that feel good?

W: I mean...a little bit.

V: If you're looking for "actionable advice," you might enjoy therapy.

W: [laughs] I...wish it didn't feel like I'm the same person.

V: I know what you mean.

W: How can you? You have your whole life ahead of you!

V: A “whole life” isn’t worth as much to my generation, I don’t think.

W: Right, sorry. Climate change. But still, it’s not too late.

V: To change?

W: To become who you are!

V: [beat] Wow, you really don’t stop? With the whole Nietzsche sermon?

W: Of course not. [laughs]

V: I owe you an apology, then. You’re not the worst kind of philosopher.

W: [laughs] It means the most from you.

[pause]

V: You know what pisses me off about philosophy the most?

W: What?

V: It’s the fact that no matter what person I think I’ve created for myself, a philosopher is there to take credit. They want to understand me *so bad*, it’s infuriating I can’t just believe things without being a “Kantian” or whatever. It’s messed up that people have just put up with these people literally *owning* ideas.

W: I... don’t know if I follow or not.

V: And even when they’re not trying to prescribe me some bullshit, they’re obsessed with describing me. Why don’t they get real jobs?

W: [laughs] If they’ve done a good job at describing, though, that gives us a model to strive after. Don’t you care about ethics, or –

V: I’m better off on my own, thanks.

[pause]

V: Did you want to be a Great Thinker?

W: A least a little bit. Much more when I was your age. Seems like a worse idea these days, though.

V: Well, you know what would be a surefire way to cancel the Living Music Festival?

W: If Wagner woke up dead tomorrow?

V: If *you* woke up dead tomorrow.

W: Jesus, Mauve.

V: I'm just kidding, obviously. But think about it: you set up a story of this misunderstood genius, trying so hard to warn people of this disaster, everyone ignores you but you're just *so smart* – and wham, you kick it, with no visible sign of death. Alpis would scoop you up and build you a memorial on the same day, finally able to claim for itself a Great Thinker. They'd call you a martyr for the school.

W: You think it wouldn't matter if I was actually a Great Thinker or not?

V: Not at all.

[pause]

V: Don't tell me you actually think you're going to die.

W: It was your idea!

V: Listen, as much as I love to see you like this – vulnerable, at my whim, it's a treat – you gotta pick yourself up. We were all going to die originally, when did that stop being the plan?

W: It's human to be scared of death.

V: It's way more scary to live the same life forever.

W: What if I was the person who didn't fear the eternal return?

V: You'd probably be a prick. Because while the rest of the world is commiserating, you'd be...what – telling everyone it's okay to die?

W: Telling myself, more like!

V: I've been telling myself that for a while. I'd never tell that to someone else though. I'm always a little afraid of being wrong. So I try not to tell other people how to live.

W: Not ever?

V: [sighs] I'll put it this way: I don't host an advice radio show.

W: [pause] Well, I can change the mission a little.

V: I don't care. I just got sick of hearing you be such a hypocrite.

[pause]

V: I should go. [beat] For what it's worth Picardy, you shouldn't sweat whatever qualms I take with your show, honestly.

W: What? Why?

V: Haven't you heard? [more in the distance] It's the end of the world! [laughs, fades out]

W: [breathing softly, a few seconds] ...I've heard! [laughs]

[10 seconds, soft outdoor noises of whippoorwills, other birds]

End

Become What You Are – Episode 5 “Transvaluation”

SSSSTTTCHHHSSSHHHCCCCSSHXXXSSCHH – tick

And then, if I just increase the microphone gain – woah, too much! There we go, I think that’s right...levels look okay. The dial seems to be...bouncing? I really should have asked what all these meters mean. Alas.

So...I guess...I’ll start! What you’re hearing right now is me, Walter Picardy, struggling to single-handedly turn on a radio station. I have no idea if this is working or if I’m just talking to myself...well, of course I’m just talking to myself, nobody else is here! But you know what I mean. I don’t really have a way to know if I’m on air or not.

This is Become What You Are, a show that didn’t *really* know what it wanted to be. With all the free time I’ve found myself having, I thought I’d listen back on the previous installments. Yikes, ha! I know I’m only repeating what everyone says, but it feels so long ago. Four weeks ago, I was tasked with a job to make Alpis University a happier place for students. I think I overestimated my capabilities as a...an, orator? I don’t know, maybe it’s more that I thought I could pick something up and immediately be successful at it. And maybe I would’ve gotten good! If I had four more weeks, maybe I would’ve gotten around to being profound and moving, or something like that.

Ah, me doing this last broadcast might seem a little self-indulgent. And if you feel that way, you’re instincts are spot on! The administration made it pretty clear that after classes were postponed, I would be relieved of this responsibility. All the same, I think they forgot I had a key to the station, and...uh...am I incriminating myself?

I just needed some closure. I hope this isn’t too irresponsible.

...

Ding

Hm? Oh...the text line! Yes! It’s alive! We’re live, people, we’re live!! I’ll read it for everybody:

Hi Professor, can’t believe you’re the only thing left on radio. I’m not complaining, but shouldnt you be at home?

Great question! I think if I get in trouble, I can make the case that I assumed that my job was essential. Nobody has told me otherwise, yet! Hah!

I definitely feel what you were saying before. Writing papers for you is pretty much a process of bsing until the deadline, then just as im about to bs a conclusion, it hits me what the point of the paper is actually about. But what am I about to do, go back and deleate everything? it’s due in 20 minutes!

Heh heh! It took me a while before I could muster the willpower to go back and edit. But radio, you can't go back and edit! That's probably why I feel I did a poor job at this quote unquote, assignment. Thanks for texting in!

Wow, another one?

Dear Walter,

I am sitting at home, enjoying a "livestreamed" concert of Sibelius' Sixth Symphony. It made me think about you and how you're probably dancing a jig on Wagner's grave and the cancelled Live Music Festival. Imagine my shock when I turn on the radio, just on a whim, and up comes your voice! Congratulations, sport. I suppose you've won. Oh, and I doubt you'll be busted for breaking into the radio. Wotan's spear carried the contracts and laws of all humanity - I don't think there's a need to elucidate when I say: there's no more rules!

Truly,

Hampshire Van Thronckh

P.S: I also listened back to the show I appeared on. What are you talking about, it was a hoot!

Maestro! Thanks for the message. I hope you're fairing okay, I can only imagine how much this has impacted you. And no, I haven't been dancing on anybody's grave...even when we talked, I never would have wished for this. I certainly don't feel like I've won anything, at least. Do you think that defense will hold up in court? Hah!

If my first texter is right, and I'm the only one on air...It's probably only a matter of time before the wrong people catch on.

Mm. I really don't know what to say. Hosting a show alone is really hard, isn't it? What do I even talk about? Would this have been the time to prepare a speech? No, heh.

Let's see...I'm sitting in a swivel chair in a smallish room full of very complicated looking equipment...I have a few monitors, one has the weather pulled up, the other the text line...And the lighting? Pretty bad, folks.

Oh, thank god, another one. I'm loosing my head over here.

It's good to hear you're on air, Picardy. And I'm not the only one who thinks so!)

I wish I could entertain you all better! Thanks for the kind words.

...

I'm terribly sorry, to everyone who was kind enough to keep me company. But...I've run dry. It's actually quite hard to just keep the sentences coming one after the other. I need some sort of

I guess I'll have to figure out how to shut this thing down...I mean, is there just a chord I could unplug? Do radio stations have plugs?

...

What the hell do people do when they run out of things to say?

Ding

Check behind the monitors. Our stash should still be there.

Stash? Of what? Let me...oh! There's a lot of CDs back here! Wow, Fly and Family Stone, George Clinton, Earth Wind and Fire...there's dozens of these. Can I play them on air?

...yeah, of course you can. What do you think DJs do, exactly?

Ha! I'm so excited! This is the best I've felt in days! So many choices...it's a shame I haven't heard of most of them.

Here's one, let's pop it in. Let's see, which button to press...oh, CD, duh.

This one comes from a band called *Vulfpeck*, from the album *Vollmilch*. The song is "Outro". Enjoy!

End

Artistic Reflection #1 (Written February 23rd)

Become What You Are is the piece I needed to make in order to prove to myself that I have changed. I am not here to write about the piece itself, or what virtues it represents about me. What's important about BWYA is that it became a task which required me to reflect on all too many things.

Let's please settle a few things and get them out of the way. BWYA, the Honor Scholar Thesis, is not about Nietzsche and Wagner, it's not about podcasting, it's not about anything really worth being evaluated as an educator/academic. So, I owe a few apologies. Sorry to all who I sold this project to as being something remotely academic. When I was first conceptualizing BWYA back in September 2019, I had hoodwinked even myself into thinking this was going to be an intellectual endeavor. Even when writing the first episode, I was deeply struggling with how BWYA should've looked like. I was thinking about how it would look to my sponsor and readers. I wanted to please them by writing something that was a holy triumvirate of musicology, philosophy, and reckless creativity. Let's examine some reasons I may have gotten into that trap ---

1. I have a very conscious desire to please my perceived superiors. A hypothesis: professors are paid to know more than students. Students pay *real money* (for some more real than others) to get something out of . Authority is vested in professors for a number of reasons (degrees, salary, age, ect.), but the most poignant of them all is simple: either professors are transcendent arch-deities of wisdom, or I'm wasting a spectacular amount of money.
2. The Honor Scholar Program. Whoops, sorry! Truthfully, I have gotten a lot of benefit out of those classes, which more often than not seemed like a chance for the professors to experiment with stale formulas. However, the way the Thesis is framed to students is that being interdisciplinary means being academically impressive to as many people as possible. Of course, there are lots of Honor Scholar theses which have explored the outer realms of academia with creativity. Why, then, carry around the luggage that makes the Thesis something that it doesn't have to be? Why have a committee with archaic titles? Why have arbitrary page count minimums? Why call it a Thesis? All these things have been like cement blocks I've had to lug around, realizing until this moment that I don't need them to create what I want to create.
3. Sounding smart is more highly-valued than being authentic. That's right, I'm blaming *society, man*. It doesn't matter if it's accurate or not, just that I have the vindication to claim something is *wrong with the system*. What's with all the *phonies*?

The above is not an exhaustive list, though I do feel tired after writing it out. After realizing these things, I knew that BWYA had to be for nobody but myself. However much I may enjoy taking classes on musicology and philosophy, I am neither a musicologist nor a philosopher. And it would just look silly if I tried to be those things. So what am I, then?

I am a messy fool who's constantly afraid of falling short. I'm afraid that I won't ever be a great musician. I'm afraid that all I can't achieve my greatest potential because of laziness. I'm afraid that there wasn't potential to begin with! I'm afraid that nobody would respect me as

non-binary. I'm afraid that even if I do my best to chase happiness, it will always just be a chase. I'm afraid that there is no cure, just treatment.

The above is not an exhaustive list. And thinking about any of these, let alone a dozen, is enough to ask myself, "Why not nihilism?" This is what BWYA is born out of. It's this tangled monkey's paw of horrible voices which tell me that everything is going wrong, and there is nothing in my power to say otherwise. It's a siren song to a black hole which promises numbness from misery.

Walter Picardy is someone who honestly believes that he can cure nihilism. He feels inspired by Nietzsche to help others who he thinks are dealing with existential fear. What stays with him through the arc of the story is that earnest desire to help. Even if it that means he's just helping himself, he feels that he has a responsibility (beyond his job) to make better.

Artistic Reflection #2 (Final Draft)

Overarching Themes

Why the weird premonitions to each episode? Each episode except the fifth opens with a prelude that begins with the phrase “Imagine yourself in your loneliest loneliness.” This probably catches the eye of anyone familiar with Nietzsche. The strangely memorable tongue twister “loneliest loneliness” is from *The Gay Science*, aphorism 341 titled “The heaviest weight.” It’s a pretty famous aphorism for its poetic description of a central Nietzschean concept: the eternal return/recurrence. The quote in its entirety:

The heaviest weight. - What if some day or night a demon were to steal into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: 'This life as you now live it and have lived it you will have to live once again and innumerable times again; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unspeakably small or great in your life must return to you, all in the same succession and sequence - even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned over again and again, and you with it, speck of dust!' Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus? Or have you once experienced a tremendous moment when you would have answered him: 'You are a god, and never have I heard anything more divine.' If this thought gained power over you, as you are it would transform and possibly crush you; the question in each and every thing, 'Do you want this again and innumerable times again?' would lie on your actions as the heaviest weight! Or how well disposed would you have to become to yourself and to life *to long for nothing more fervently* than for this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal?

Good stuff! Anyway the premonition begins this way each time as a nod to the eternal return. As if at 8:00 PM every Funk Friday, the demon comes back to plant a different seed of despair/hope. This “character” doesn’t have a notated speaker, which is pretty important for reasons I’ll get to later. But it does have a vaguely Picardy-like voice. The premonition describes a vague phenomenon and offers a choice for how to interpret it. The premonition is suggestive, though, in ways that hint at what Picardy is going to stave after.

Why AP News? Well, I began this project with the express desire to make it as true to actual radio as possible. My own experience as a four-year DJ (not bragging) on a campus-run radio station largely informs *Become What You Are*. I strayed away from the angle of total realism, but I kept this segment because I thought it was a reliable way to build the world. We’re only given little snippets of what this world is like, but right off the bat we learn two important things:

1. The World is similar to ours (Earth) in most ways. There is an Associated Press, there is a place in Greece called Thebes, ect.
2. There are beings called “Great Thinkers” which seem to describe what our world would call “philosophers who died”. Great Thinkers are immortal for reasons

completely not understood, but it's not all that weird because...they've been around forever.

The news is fun. It feels a bit more natural than the characters being forced to give a recap of current events.

Why the headings (Dialogue, Movements, Monologue)? This gets into why I think I prefer *Become What You Are* in written form over audio form. These headings were originally intended as ways for me to make sure I was diversifying the action. It's not like I literally intended a voice to say "Dialogue, Movement II" aloud before the scene takes place. The flow was supposed to be totally diegetic, and those markers helped me feel like I had organization.

Then I thought: "Picardy would do the exact same thing." In a radio show, it's not really a common thing for people to just unleash five-minute diatribes. I took a step back and had to examine why exactly it would make sense for the show to be broken up into neatly categorized headers.

The answer, to me, is that Picardy wrote this show expecting to have a total handle on things. His idea for how good philosophical discussions take place is like something out of the *Phaedrus*. Unlike Socrates' interlocutors, however, Picardy's guests don't really play along. In fact, they foil him at every step. Every episode shows the tidiness of the headers falling apart in some, totally foreseeable way.

For me, they represent the somewhat comic manner in which Picardy's expectations are subverted due to a lack of understanding of how human conversations (or radio shows) work. If the headings are Apollonian, their dissolution is Dionysian. A lot goes on in the fifth episode, but part of the reason the headings have been done away with is because Picardy is humbling himself before a chaotic world that's not worth any feeble attempts to box up.

I think I'll also take this time to discuss a pretty important question on my mind: who wrote *Become What You Are*? I think this document, this literal pdf, exists in Picardy's world (minus the Preface and Artistic Statement, although I was *very tempted to write these in character ALSO*). I'm toying around with the following interpretation right now: the radio show happened, and at some point between the fourth and fifth episodes, Picardy decided to transcribe the audio. This explains the extensive detail to when people pause, when they laugh, and why we know what happened in the postludes (when they go off the mic). The fifth episode happens, but it is transcribed by somebody else. Maybe it's the "new" Picardy, maybe it's Mauve, maybe it's an omniscient deity pleased by Picardy's metamorphosis. If it's true that this world lives in an eternal recurrence, and there is a demon whispering to Picardy the things that he wants to preach, it could be feasible that they're caught in a bootstrap paradox. Maybe the folded up pieces of paper Picardy brings to the booth are the literal transcripts of the show! Ooooo. Isn't this wild? Are you having fun? I'm having fun.

This is the most important reason I'm writing this Artistic Reflection: *I wrote Become What You Are to be totally self-contained*. I am the author of this world and these characters, but what happens within the pages of this documents may well have been written by Walter Picardy.

The Characters of *Become What You Are*

A quick note before I give my thoughts on these characters: it is not my intention, in any shape or form, that my fictional creations lampoon the existence of any real life people (especially members of my Thesis committee). There are real-life parallels in the world of *BWYA* to ours (DePauw University is a big one), but it is not my slightest intention to mock the lives of people that I truly respect and admire. And I know I've been real tongue-and-cheek throughout this Artistic Reflection, but I mean this *one* paragraph to be in earnest.

Walter Picardy

Poor guy. I think for all the talk he does about trying to emulate Nietzsche, he initially treats *Become What You Are* as if he were Plato writing the *Republic*. He sees this opportunity, his position as the Director of High Morale, as a vehicle to create his magnum opus. The story is tragic because he doesn't get that, and he doesn't achieve what he set out to do a very long time ago: become a Great Thinker. By the time this story occurs, those dreams are much subdued, but there's definitely a part of him that longs to join this inner circle of Certified-Intelligent People. Maybe a more psychological way of putting it is that Picardy wants approval and the external validation that he is smart.

Picardy and I share that in common. He and I both feel like this is our big, capital 't' Thesis. We both feel as if our value as members of a university is to appear as smart as possible. I got over this once I decided to stop making this a Thesis. I don't think anybody reading *Become What You Are* will find themselves saying, "Wow, Jules is an expert on music *and* philosophy! Amazing!" This is a good thing. Because really, my personal knowledge of Wagner and Nietzsche only scratches the surface of the huge body of literature on the subject. I like to think Picardy changes his attitude on this also.

Picardy's name comes from a term in music theory called a "Picardy Third". It describes a major chord at the end of a piece of music whose primary key is mostly minor. The cadence is like a sweet little surprise, a happy ending to an otherwise sad story.

And if this is clear already, I just want to say: Picardy is not me. I am not Picardy. We hold different views, philosophically. And if you glue all the characters in *BWYA* together, it's not like you'll make a Jules Shinkle, either.

Dean Flygloss

Yuck. The most 2-dimensional of the characters, and the one I think I have the least in common with. The way she behaves in the first episode sort of makes her a difficult character to sympathize with. As the face of Alpis University's Administration, you might call her the closest thing to an antagonist this story has. If you were looking here for a backstory that explains why she is the way she is, you won't find it. Sorry.

Her name is ripped from Pangloss, the hopelessly optimistic philosopher from *Candide*. We live in the best of all worlds! I think I wrote her as a way of expressing my frustration towards a lot of powerful people who put on the mask of "Everything is FINE" in order to preserve

the status quo. A lot of people think that change is impossible, or at least not worth doing. Don't protest, don't feel bad: grow your garden.

Russ

Named after Wagner's dog. Is Russ a literal dog? That's the beauty of interpretation.

Maestro Tronckh

What a guy. Also a name stolen from *Candide* (Baron Thunder-ten-tronckh). There's no hidden message to this literary reference. I just thought it was a hilarious German-sounding name. Voltaire probably did too. And when I think of conductors, I think of giant European personalities. So it could be said that Tronckh's character is somewhat stereotyped, and I own up to that.

Tronckh is someone who is supposed to be the polar opposite to Picardy. The unfortunate thing for Picardy is that they have way more in common than he would like. They're both dramatic people with a flare for showmanship, but Tronckh is much more aggressive and dominates the conversation. Tronckh has been a Wagnerian for seemingly most his life and not just in the nerdy sense like Picardy, who just talks about Nietzsche a lot. Tronckh feels like the authority in this conversations because he holds a relationship with his music in a way that very few people are able to. His emotional connection with Wagner's music is substantially more intimate than what Picardy can claim about Nietzsche. Picardy is a casual fan of Wagner's music, but he doesn't totally grasp just how important Tronckh's art is to him.

Professor Martin

The last reference to *Candide*, I swear. Martin is the pessimistic philosopher in *Candide* who is constantly at odds with Pangloss. In *BWYA*, he's not so much pessimistic as he is beaten down. Martin is someone who I think resembled Picardy in spirit at a younger age. Even though he is referenced by Picardy to have a very strong working knowledge of Wagnerian aesthetics, he doesn't feel motivated to fight Picardy in a battle of wits. What's more, Martin is implied to not be particularly happy in the place of stagnation where he's at. He doesn't want to take away Picardy's fun, but he's a little resigned to a world that he sees can't change.

Martin is significant in *BWYA* because he may be the sole person who agrees with Picardy that nihilism is spreading. While Picardy was worried about the students, Martin was more worried about the world. There's some instinct that's told Martin that the world is going to end, and that nothing matters. So in a sense, Martin is the face of nihilism, but Picardy just can't see it because he knows him as a brilliant musicologist.

Picardy's crusade against Wagner is motivated for the right reasons. The problem is so much bigger than Alpis' Living Music Festival and only Martin sees that.

Mauve

The only character who I respected too much to not name after something. I was very close to having them be named “Baldr” in reference to the Norse god who survives Ragnarok, but I honestly would have felt bad. Mauve seems to have a distinct awareness and hatred towards the fact that they live in a clown-world. Having their very existence boiled down to a cute reference would have infuriated them to no end.

Mauve is a punk with love for funk, and I would be lying if I said there wasn't a big part of my heart that I share with them. Mauve is much more indignant towards authority than anybody I know, which is a shame. If there were a single personality at DePauw that resembled even 10% of Mauve's spite, there would be a student cult praying for the ruination of all things in no time. And that's a threat!

Mauve takes very uncharitable positions against philosophy for reasons we don't really know. We just know that they're fed up with the love of knowledge. Like Martin, they have some instinct that's told them that everything will end. Mauve doesn't blame Wagner or nihilism, though. They just want to be left alone. Picardy, and the world at large, is obsessed with these god-like figures and what they can do to save humanity. Mauve knows the gods can't help us now. It's time we stopped worshipping.

I'm not saying Mauve had the best opinion. We're not the same person, either. I don't think Mauve would have done something like enroll as an Honor Scholar Student. But I do think they would have created the best thesis the world has ever seen

Final Thoughts and Acknowledgment

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Thank you for reading this absolute madness. I am very happy to have made it out of this project alive and with most of my sanity intact. I am also happy to say that it was worth it; I got everything out of this project that I wanted. I am without a doubt a different person because of this endeavor.