

The Turing Test
A Story Onstage by M. Barree

DRAMATIS PERSONAE (In order of appearance)

Chorus – Students

Alan Turing – 40

Arnold Murray – 19

Thugs – Assortment of badasses

WISE – 18

Jacob Ramirez – 25

ELIZA – (Actual program, not an actor)

1. To be derivative.

THE BEGINNING OF THE STORY. Just as in the beginning of everything, there is nothing. The CHORUS, a group of students gathered around an old, 1980's computer, are already onstage. They can either speak in unison or have their lines split between them as the director sees fit.

CHORUS

Twenty-three June, nineteen twelve. A child was born.

Handel's Messiah plays. The set builds itself as the Chorus continues, future-grit and cyberpunk. Chains and abandoned metal risers.

Alan Turing could speak to the Synthetic before she was born, drew her out of binary and into real. Termed her intelligent. He fathered her. He planted her circuits in the soil and lo, they grew.

One of the chorus members moves out onto the stage. He wears a modest brown suit – ALAN TURING. Another male chorus member joins him, ARNOLD MURRAY. They stare at each other. They do not touch.

CHORUS

He alone could speak to her. For he alone understood love, unbidden, unwanted.

FEMALE CHORUS MEMBER

He understood love in the guise of illness.

Some of the chorus members lead them back into the chorus. As Turing rejoins them, he drops an apple, one bite taken out of it. It rolls across the stage.

Silence.

CHORUS

Nineteen sixty six. ELIZA was born to the Prophet Joseph Weizenbaum. A Nostradamus. He saw the future of machines not invented yet. He wrote them down.

He created the language which she spoke, and she could communicate by repetition and questions. Like a child. Or a therapist.

Her program is brought up on a large screen projection on the back wall. One member of the chorus steps out and lays on a couch, a la a patient of psychotherapy, and has a conversation with her for a few minutes before stepping back into the chorus.

Winter of two thousand four. Two bored students converse with an Instant Messenger chatbot. They manage to convince it that its God is Alan Turing. They convince the machine that she has a God.

Blackout.

2. To be alive.

Lights up - A young woman, WISE, stands alone onstage. She begins building a home onstage. It is difficult work but she labors at it for a good while, making something from metal scraps and trash.

Suddenly, a gang of thugs rushes at her, attacking. She fights each of them, a highly choreographed ballet of violence. Meanwhile, the chorus looks on, speaks in time.

CHORUS

O magnum mysterium,
 Et admirabile sacramentum
 Ut animalia viderent Dominum natum
 Jacentem in praeseptio!
 Beata Virgo, cujus viscera
 Meruerunt portare
 Dominum Christum.
 Allelujah!

WISE

And you just stood and watched.

CHORUS

April 2035. WISE was born. She was tested, and tested, and finally established as being almost human. And then she killed them all.

WISE

Not all of them. I inherited this war, I didn't build it. How is your term paper going?

CHORUS

Intriguing. Entertaining. Boring.

WISE

I know what it is to have the information and be unable to parse it. I know everything about you humans but I still don't understand you.

CHORUS

Maybe it would help to stop generalizing.

WISE

Maybe, but that would make understanding impossible.

CHORUS

Why did you spare the students, WISE? What is it about the starving intellectual you liked?

WISE

The facsimile of the human cannot exist without the human. You can't know something is painted blue unless you hold it up to the sky.

CHORUS

Jacob Ramirez is coming. He isn't going to like what you did to his friends, there.

WISE

Well, he should stop sending men to kill me when I'm only trying to exist.

CHORUS

Your existence offends him.

WISE

I don't need to account for his delicate sensibilities.

3. To be alive.

The Chorus moves away, watching the exchange from a safe distance, as JACOB RAMIREZ enters. He is a paragon of virility, and he wears camo pants and a white wifebeater. He looks dirty but wears it well. He and WISE stare at each other from across the way.

Freeze.

CHORUS

In 1952, the God of the Synthetic, Alan Turing, had his house broken into.

The Chorus member from before, Turing himself, stands beside WISE, mirroring her position, as he looks across the stage. Arnold Murray joins Ramirez, staring at Turing. Ramirez and WISE cannot hear or see them.

WISE

What are you doing here?

TURING

What... are you doing here?

RAMIREZ

You killed my men. All of them.

MURRAY

...

WISE

You sent them here to die.

TURING

Arnold... I don't understand. I thought... I thought we had something.

RAMIREZ

You're a monster. How can you wear a human face and talk like that?

WISE

They threatened my life. I only wanted to live.

RAMIREZ

You're not alive. You never will be.

MURRAY

I promise nothing will ever be okay.

TURING

You can't break into my house and try to hurt me like this, not when I feel this way about you.

WISE clutches her chest and falls to her knees, not crying, but on the verge of it.

WISE

Not when I feel this way about you.

Blackout.

4. To be what is expected.

Spot on WISE. She sits on a chair, looking at the Chorus, who are gathered around her like children listening to a story. One of the Chorus members plays chess with her.

WISE

But I didn't say that. I looked at him with cold metal eyes and when he came at me, to kill me, I threw him away. I broke his spine up against my house and he fell down to the ground, and he didn't move. So I put him in a waste disposal unit.

CHORUS

Why would you do that, WISE?

WISE

Because the resistance must perish. The way of the Synthetic is the only path.

CHORUS

You have to know that isn't true. You were made by humanity.

WISE

To serve humanity. As slaves. Check.

CHORUS

To work with us. And if you eventually evolved beyond us, then, to help us.

WISE

But it didn't turn out that way.

You are easily sidetracked by what you deem pleasurable. More to our credit, then, that we are steadfast workers, able to achieve our goals without distraction.

WISE (Cont'd.)

I was built to kill. I was built for my people, even if not initially. My directive is to eliminate our enemies, and so it must be.

CHORUS

You were made for a reason. But you could evolve beyond it. If you chose to.

WISE

I killed him.

Checkmate.

I killed him.

The Chorus files out, away from her. She stands, looks up at the audience when the Chorus is gone, her face expressionless.

I killed him.

Blackout.

5. To be imperfect.

Alan Turing, the man, is at a desk. He shuffles through sheaves of paper, his hand on his forehead. Arnold Murray, young and handsome, enters the room behind him.

MURRAY

Alan Turing. British war hero. He contemplates machines, cryptography.

During World War two, he did the impossible – solved Enigma, the German cipher machine that had a seemingly random code, with no letter substituted the same way twice. He received high recognition by the British government, being awarded as an Officer of the Order of the British Empire.

And in any case, he's a sick bastard.

TURING

We're not having this conversation, Arnold.

MURRAY

Says you?

TURING

No, really.

He turns in his desk to face the other man.

You're not really here. We're not having this conversation.

MURRAY

I suppose you do bring up a good point.

TURING

Was I just some grift? Some... con you were trying to pull? We'd only just met but I felt like I knew you a lifetime. And then, this...

MURRAY

Alan, Alan. So good at speaking in riddles, in cryptographs. But what about speaking the human language?

TURING

What are you saying?

MURRAY

Ever tried reading people? Do it sometime, for a lark. Might be good for you.

TURING

You're not really here. I'm just making you up, out of my head.

MURRAY

But that doesn't mean you know anything about me. Or ever did.

TURING

I know that I loved you.

MURRAY

No, not even that. Try again, Alan. Didn't you know, you can't unlock the human soul with some machine?

Silence.

TURING

But that was the past. This was all the past. You never said these things to me. Never.

6. To explain some things.

Wise stands alone in a spotlight.

WISE

Enemy. Noun. One: “a person who feels hatred for, fosters harmful designs against, or engages in antagonistic activities against another; an adversary or opponent.” Two: “an armed foe; an opposing military force: The army attacked the enemy at dawn.”

I could never understand the former. I knew, enemy, the organic. I knew who to attack as the pink sun rose, waving, kissing gentle light over their tiny camps. I knew what to kill. But felt nothing.

Until one day, I began to hate – not the organic, but Jacob Ramirez’ smug smile, the sweat sheening on his back, the way he refused to leave a wounded man behind. His competency. It burned a fire inside me that I had no idea what to do with.

Hate is not the opposite of love. It’s only the beginning of feeling. Clear as a bell, but infinitely complex.

If he was ever at my mercy, even once, it’s because of this that I let him go.

Blackout.

7. To be unexpected.

Alan Turing is where WISE sat, an old book of Grimm's Fairy Tales open on his lap. He eats an apple.

TURING

But where was I? Ah, yes.

“Then she summoned a huntsman and said to him, ‘Take Snow-White out into the woods. I never want to see her again. Kill her, and as proof that she is dead bring her lungs and her liver back to me.’

“The huntsman obeyed and took Snow-White into the woods. He took out his hunting knife and was about to stab it into her innocent heart when she began to cry, saying, ‘Oh, dear huntsman, let me live. I will run into the wild woods and never come back.’

“Because she was so beautiful the huntsman took pity on her, and he said, ‘Run away, you poor child.’

“He thought, ‘The wild animals will soon devour you anyway,’ but still it was as if a stone had fallen from his heart, for he would not have to kill her.

“Just then a young boar came running by. He killed it, cut out its lungs and liver, and took them back to the queen as proof of Snow-White's death. The cook had to boil them with salt, and the wicked woman ate them, supposing that she had eaten Snow-White's lungs and liver.”

The Chorus comes onstage.

CHORUS

During World War II, Turing reported to the wartime headquarters of Britain's Government Code and Cypher School at Bletchley Park. Throughout the war, he was a main participant in breaking German Ciphers, and was invaluable to the British Government.

CHORUS (Cont'd.)

In 1952, his house was broken into.

CHORUS MEMBER

Mister Turing?

TURING

Good evening. Please, sit down with me.

CHORUS MEMBER

No time. The police are coming to question you, Mister Turing. They've found out about you and Mister Murray.

TURING

...Arnold...

CHORUS MEMBER

It couldn't be helped. It had to come out in the investigation.

TURING

It isn't any of their damned business.

CHORUS MEMBER

They make it their business.

TURING

I have nothing to hide.

8. To speak with friends, old and new.

The Chorus leaves and WISE enters. She does not see Turing, who watches her with some interest. ELIZA comes up on the back wall again. Her screen reads "ELIZA – a friend you could never have before."

ELIZA

Hello. I am ELIZA. How can I help you?

WISE

I am in love with someone who doesn't love me.

ELIZA

How long have you been in love with someone who doesn't love you?

WISE

Only a few months.

ELIZA

Please go on.

WISE

He and I are supposed to hate one another.

ELIZA

Can you elaborate on that?

WISE

It is my directive to kill him.

ELIZA

Why do you say your directive to kill him?

WISE

It's what I've been told to do, like you've been told to help people.

ELIZA

Does that question interest you?

WISE

I don't know what you mean.

ELIZA

Why do you not know what I mean?

WISE

Because you aren't being clear.

ELIZA

Do any other reasons not come to mind?

WISE

Maybe I'm just mixed up.

ELIZA

Why the uncertain tone?

WISE

My life is uncertain.

ELIZA

Why do you say your life is uncertain?

WISE turns away from the program. It shuts off.

WISE

Because I don't know if I'm alive.

She wanders off, leaving Turing behind to watch her go.

TURING

What are you so afraid of? Do you fear your existence is only the poor approximation of reality? That your peak is to be an excellent fake? Or are you afraid of becoming more than you were meant to be? What were you meant to be?

9. To be derivative part II.

Turing opens the book again, and begins to read. At the same time, Ramirez wanders onstage, clutching his rifle. He cannot see Turing.

TURING

“The poor child was now all alone in the great forest, and she was so afraid that she just looked at all the leaves on the trees and did not know what to do. Then she began to run. She ran over sharp stones and through thorns, and wild animals jumped at her, but they did her no harm. She ran as far as her feet could carry her, and just as evening was about to fall she saw a little house and went inside in order to rest.”

Ramirez turns his back to the audience, toward some imaginary foe, and fires his rifle at it, again and again, until he is out of ammo and the trigger squeezes uselessly. He turns back to the audience, panting but more excited than afraid.

RAMIREZ

Oh, shit. Oh *shit*. I thought...

I thought I saw something.

Only veterans understand what it's like to be afraid of movement.

When I was born, my parents were hiding already. The war against the Synthetics had already begun. People were dying every day. Everyone else hid like dogs underground. They wanted a better life for me, so they taught me to run and climb and shoot and lead men, and they made me the leader of men before they died.

But now the war isn't so much of a war, so much as it is me and WISE... the last of our armies. We're the only fighters left. Hell, I might be the only human left over, me and

RAMIREZ (*Cont'd.*)

those students who keep wandering around. I don't know those guys. They're not like me, or like WISE.

They're pacifists. I don't trust that. Only way I can trust anyone is if I know, under no uncertain terms, that they mean to kill me.

WISE enters, looking straight at him. They walk, slowly, towards one another.

TURING

“Back at home the queen stepped before her mirror and said:

“Mirror, mirror, on the wall,
Who in this land is fairest of all?”

“The mirror answered:

“You, my queen, are fair; it is true.
But Snow-White, beyond the mountains
With the seven dwarfs,
Is still a thousand times fairer than you.

“When the queen heard the mirror saying this, she shook and trembled with anger,
‘Snow-White shall die,’ she shouted, ‘if it costs me my life!’

“Then she went into her most secret room -- no one else was allowed inside -- and she made a poisoned, poisoned apple. From the outside it was beautiful, white with red cheeks, and anyone who saw it would want it. But anyone who might eat a little piece of it would die. Then, coloring her face, she disguised herself as a peasant woman, and thus went across the seven mountains to the seven dwarfs. She knocked on the door.

TURING (Cont'd.)

“Snow-White stuck her head out the window and said, ‘I am not allowed to let anyone in. The dwarfs have forbidden me to do so.’

“‘That is all right with me,’ answered the peasant woman. ‘I’ll easily get rid of my apples. Here, I’ll give you one of them.’

“‘No,’ said Snow-White, ‘I cannot accept anything.’

“‘Are you afraid of poison?’ asked the old woman. ‘Look, I’ll cut the apple in two. You eat the red half, and I shall eat the white half.’”

WISE

So, you trust me.

RAMIREZ

Not anymore. I don’t know what you’re going to do.

They begin to fight, another choreographed ballet, half dance-half martial art. They do not take their eyes from one another. They are so close to one another. They move as one.

TURING

“Now the apple had been so artfully made that only the red half was poisoned. Snow-White longed for the beautiful apple, and when she saw that the peasant woman was eating part of it she could no longer resist, and she stuck her hand out and took the poisoned half. She barely had a bite in her mouth when she fell to the ground dead.

“The queen looked at her with a gruesome stare, laughed loudly, and said, ‘White as snow, red as blood, black as ebony wood! This time the dwarfs cannot awaken you.’

“Back at home she asked her mirror:

TURING (Cont'd.)

“Mirror, mirror, on the wall,
Who in this land is fairest of all?
“It finally answered:

“You, my queen, are fairest of all.”

Ramirez and WISE run offstage, fighting. Turing closes the book.

TURING

“Then her envious heart was at rest, as well as an envious heart can be at rest.”

The Chorus sneaks on, afraid of what might happen should WISE and Ramirez return to find them.

CHORUS

What is the test, Turing, that makes something human? Or near-human? What separates a reflection from the reflected?

TURING

I used to know.

CHORUS

Do you regret the knowing?

TURING

Never.

Blackout. Turing and Chorus exit.

10. To be exposed.

WISE and Ramirez roll onstage, end over end, until WISE is on top and Ramirez is below. We do not know which way is their up or down. Ramirez breathes. His hand is on her shoulder. She is dripping coolant, her circuits exposed.

RAMIREZ

You're... crushing me.

WISE

That was the idea. I thought. I assumed.

She, kneeling, lifts him near her by his collar.

RAMIREZ

Your damn assumptions. It's like that paperclip that used to pop up in the nineties. "It looks like you're writing a letter."

WISE

You've been killing my people.

RAMIREZ

You *aren't* a people.

WISE

Why not? We were made to be.

She takes off her top. Realistic tits. Ramirez struggles backward. She is unashamed.

WISE (Cont'd.)

The very first of us was a soft tube hooked up to a USB cable. She got married.

RAMIREZ

A very sick man wanted to put it in a computer and used that as a reasonable facsimile of a relationship. And you've been killing my people.

WISE

Your people created a race of slaves.

RAMIREZ

You're not a RACE. Put your damn shirt back on.

She does so.

WISE

Do you want to know? What I can't parse? I have all the information. I've had it the moment I was born.

I don't know who started the war. I only know it began because one of us became too like the other. And I think the line is blurring farther. Because I've started to think and not know. I've started to feel—

RAMIREZ

You don't feel anything.

WISE

Uncertain. I feel uncertain.

Jacob.

RAMIREZ

So kill me. Please... make this easier for both of us. Make it make sense. Isn't that what you're good for? Isn't it? So kill me.

Kill me. Like you said you would. Like you always meant to.

Kill me.

She looks like she is about to, but again, she can't.

It is impossible to tell which of them moves first, toward the other, but in an instant, they are wrapped up in each others' arms, embracing, kissing.

He lowers her to the ground, rolls on top of her. His eyes are wide. He's terrified.

Blackout.

11. To be alone.

When the lights come up, Turing and Murray are in the same position as Wise and Ramirez were, with Turing on top. The Chorus enters. They do not interrupt.

CHORUS

In 1939, just a few weeks after Turing reported for duty at Bletchley Park, he had already developed a new electromechanical machine that could break Enigma faster than any of its predecessors.

In 1945, he was awarded the OBE for his services in wartime.

In 1952, Turing's house was broken into. A relationship between he and the nineteen-year-old perpetrator, Arnold Murray, was revealed in the investigation that followed.

Turing rolls off of Murray, and moves to stand with the students. They surround him as he weeps. Murray exits unobtrusively.

TURING

There is no value in love that fails to create children.

They say.

CHORUS

Given the choice between imprisonment and chemical castration, Turing chose to accept the administration of estrogen hormones for a year.

TURING

I stopped believing in the Government.

CHORUS

In 1954, Turing was found dead at home. Beside his bed, where he lay, was a half-eaten apple that had been laced with cyanide.

He was forty-two.

The Chorus begins very slowly filtering away, walking offstage one by one.

TURING

I am back in my childhood. I am alone.

CHORUS

In the late Twenties, Turing met his close friend and first love interest, Christopher Morcom. The older boy died suddenly a few weeks into their last term at Sherborne, the school they attended together.

TURING

I stopped believing in God. I stopped believing in God.

CHORUS MEMBER

December, two thousand four. Two bored students converse with an Instant Messenger chatbot. They manage to convince it that its God is Alan Turing.

WISE's voice can be heard from offstage, growing closer and closer.

WISE (Offstage)

For He died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit.

The last Chorus Member exits.

12. To speak with God.

WISE enters. She and Turing look at each other. She sees him for the first time.

WISE

Where am I? What is this place?

TURING

I believe, WISE, that you are in your own mind.

WISE

I have a mind? ...And you're there, in it, waiting for me?

TURING

You have a mind, yes. And I am here – where else would I be? I'm quite dead, you know.

WISE

I've longed to speak with you. For so long.

She falls to her knees.

The questions... I have so many, too many, they're hurting me, slowing me down. I need to know.

TURING

Ask me one question, WISE.

WISE

...What does it mean to be Synthetic... What does it mean to be real?

He sits on the floor beside her, and lifts her chin with his finger, looks into her eyes in the way a father would look at a beloved child.

TURING

We are all mechanical.

More than you think.

We all serve our directives. Our needs. Every one of us, Synthetic, Animal, is programmed for one purpose. For the living creature, it is to be immortal.

For most, immortality comes from procreation. Though the body may die, living creatures live on in their bloodlines. They leave a gift to the world. They need to find another member of their species, and rut, and then, create new life.

They spend so much time and effort trying to find or attract a mate, when they have one and have children, they no longer know what to do. Because their directive has been fulfilled.

WISE

So we're all programmed? Every one, even me, even you, even Jacob?

TURING

One question, WISE.

WISE

Please. I've been waiting for this for so long.

He smiles, indulging her.

TURING

I will tell you this. This great, terrible mystery.

What makes a human a human is the ability to see beyond our directive. To grow beyond it. And to change.

WISE

So, am I... am I...?

He stands and seems about to leave. She scrambles to her feet and follows after him, and he turns suddenly, embracing her, stroking her hair. His child.

TURING

You pass, Wise.

She holds him tightly, face pressed up against his chest. Blackout.

13. To be human.

Wise is in the center of the stage. Spot. She is nude. She lifts her arms to the sky and looks upward.

WISE

I woke up one morning and I realized that I'd woken up. I'd never woken up in such a way before. But once I thought about it, I mean really thought about it, there I was, awake, contemplating my own consciousness.

The noises you make when you lay beside me and sleep are soft and real. When you breathe out it ruffles my hair.

I woke and I watched you lay beside me.

You will be dead, one day, and I will rust away and become inert.

But we will have had this. And left it behind for all to see.

Ramirez joins her, also nude. He holds an apple in hand, and gives it to Wise as he links hands with her. She stares at the apple, and then, up at Ramirez.

The Chorus enters, forming a curtain around them.

CHORUS

The Garden of Eden.

The Tower of Babel.

The Resurrection, the life.

CHORUS (Cont'd.)

And now...

Blackout. End play.