Socrates’ Class: A One-Act Play

Marc Rohr*
As soon seek roses in December—
Ice in June
Hope constancy in wind,
Or corn in chaff
Believe... an epitaph
Or any other thing that’s false,
Before you trust in critics.\(^{32}\)

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[As the play begins, the curtain is closed. Before it are two young adults, MICHAEL and JUDY. MICHAEL is eagerly opening a letter, and is suddenly jubilant.]

MICHAEL: Oh, wow, I’ve been accepted to law school, Judy!

JUDY: Oh, how wonderful! I’m so happy for you, Michael! Which one?

MICHAEL: Nova!

JUDY: Oh, that is so fantastic! That’s really great! You must be so excited! (pause) Where is it?

MICHAEL: Mmm, let’s see... (He looks over the envelope) It must say somewhere... Ah, there it is: Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

JUDY: (embracing him) Oh, I’m so happy!

[They freeze, as ROD SERLING enters.]

ROD SERLING: A simple letter indicating that the recipient has been accepted to law school—ordinarily an occasion of great joyousness and celebration, and in all other respects a relatively common occurrence; but, for one Michael Balk, a ticket for a most uncommon journey—a journey into a region neither of sight nor sound, but one of mind—a journey... into the Twilight Zone.

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\(^{32}\) GEORGE NOEL GORDON, ENGLISH BARDS AND SCOTCH REVIEWERS 75 (1809).
[The familiar "Twilight Zone" theme music is heard, as the stage darkens. The lights return, and JUDY, while retreating into the wings, is seen waving goodbye to MICHAEL as he sets out for law school. Suddenly, ominous music and wildly flickering lights suggest a storm!]

MICHAEL: Oh, no! A tornado!

[The storm passes, and he finds himself on the ground. Slowly, somewhat bewildered, he looks around.]

I don't think I'm in California anymore!

[He then wanders off stage in a daze. The curtains open, revealing that we are in ancient Greece. We can tell because people are dressed in togas and sitting on simple benches. The teacher's chair, in the center, is vacant. Those present are, at left, PLATO and ZORBA, and, off to the right, AQUARIUS.]

PLATO: Boy, am I sick of this class! I'm not sure I can stand another session of this!

ZORBA: I feel the same way. I am so lost in here! What I know about Greek Jurisdiction could be written on a single drachma.

PLATO: Well, that's what you get for taking a course with the great Professor Socrates! Where is he, anyway? The sands of time are trickling away.

ZORBA: He's probably up on Mount Olympus, talking to the gods. Or maybe he's advising the Oracle at Delphi.

PLATO: You got any notes in this class?

ZORBA: Nothing, except for the questions.

PLATO: I don't even write them down anymore. He just doesn't tell you anything, you know? Just questions all the time.

ZORBA: (nodding) Don't complain. I had him for Greek Pro, too.

PLATO: All the other teachers lecture. Just this guy has to ask questions all the time.

ZORBA: The man's got his own method.

PLATO: The only law professor in Greece who teaches this way, and we have to get stuck with him. I am so out of it in here. This stuff is Egyptian to me.

ZORBA: Well, it'll be over soon, and we'll be long gone from here.

PLATO: Yeah, that's true. You got any plans for after graduation?

ZORBA: Yeah, I'm thinking of joining a small piracy firm over in Carthage. How about yourself?

PLATO: I've been interviewing with some of the big firms in Athens. I'm hoping for an offer from Hector, Achilles & Hector . . .

ZORBA: Oh, well, of course—you're on Law Slab . . . Hey, what's the going rate in Athens these days, anyway?

PLATO: 10 to 12 thousand drachmas, depending on the firm.

ZORBA: That's great! Gosh, I won't get anywhere near that much in Carthage.

PLATO: Well, you don't have the taxes in Carthage that you have in Athens. And the cost of living is so much lower . . .

ZORBA: That's true.

PLATO: Gosh, how do you compare the cost of living in Carthage to the cost of living in Athens?

AQUARIUS: Hey, will you guys give me a break? Money, money, money—that's all you ever talk about.

PLATO and ZORBA: Well, excuse us.
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PLATO and ZORBA: Well, excuse us.
PLATO: Don’t pay any attention to him; he’s just jealous. He’ll be lucky to get a job with the GCLU or the Balkan Club or something.

[MICHAEL wanders in, from right, still in a daze and quite bewildered.]

MICHAEL: Where am I?
AQUARIUS: Greek Jur., man.
MICHAEL: *Greek Jur.?* What is that?
AQUARIUS: What are you, Socrates the second? Have a seat and find out, man.

[MICHAEL sits.]

PLATO: Yeah, maybe he’ll find out. If you find out what’s going on in here, you can explain it to me.

ZORBA: Hey, where’d you get those funny clothes, brother? Are you from Troy?

MICHAEL: No, I’m from California.
PLATO: California? Is that near Macedonia?
MICHAEL: I don’t think so. Listen, I’m very confused. I was on my way to law school, and I seem to have gotten lost along the way.

ZORBA: Well, this is law school.
AQUARIUS: You’re here, man.

MICHAEL: Oh, good. I didn’t recognize the name of the course, "Greek Jur." I don’t think I have the right book.
PLATO: Don’t worry about that. It won’t make any difference.

ZORBA: Gentlemen, I think I hear our distinguished professor arriving—yep, here he comes.

[Enter SOCRATES, rushing to the center, speaking as he walks.]

SOCRATES: Sorry, I’m late, gentlemen. I was arguing a motion in the Southern District of Sparta. Okay, I have an announcement to make. There’ll be a meeting next week of all those interested in starting a legal fraternity; it’s going to be called PDP.

PLATO: What’s PDP?
SOCRATES: Those are English letters, Plato.

ZORBA: What’s a "fraternity?"

SOCRATES: Zorba, it’s a group of friends who get together to drink ouzo. At any rate, gentlemen, let’s proceed: I believe our topic for today is Divine Intervention, the extraordinary process by which a judge’s decision is appealed to the gods. Now then, uh, Plato [PLATO groans], under what circumstances should a god intervene in a contract dispute between two mortals? Suppose a simple contract for the sale of land, and the seller refuses to convey the land to the buyer. Divine intervention? Yes or no?

Ah, but just a moment—I see we have a new student in the class. What’s your name, young man?

MICHAEL: Michael, sir.

SOCRATES: Michael? Well, that’s an unusual name. And your mode of dress is unusual, too. Where are you from?

MICHAEL: California, sir.

SOCRATES: California? Is that near Thrace or Corinth?

MICHAEL: No, it’s not near any of those places. Hasn’t anyone here ever heard of California?
PLATO: Don’t pay any attention to him; he’s just jealous. He’ll be lucky to get a job with the GCLU or the Balkan Club or something.

[MICHAEL wanders in, from right, still in a daze and quite bewildered.]

MICHAEL: Where am I?

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PLATO: Don’t worry about that. It won’t make any difference.
AQUARIUS: Perhaps California is simply a state of mind, Michael.

ZORBA: None of us has ever been outside of Greece.

MICHAEL: Greece? Is that where I am? Oh, no! Hey, I've got to go home. How can I get home from here?

SOCRATES: That's a good question. How can you get home from here?

MICHAEL: That's what I just asked you.

SOCRATES: (shaking his head) That's not the way it works here, Michael. Plato, how do you think Michael can get home from here?

PLATO: He could walk, I guess.

SOCRATES: Interesting suggestion. Could you walk?

MICHAEL: But how far and in which direction?

SOCRATES: Ah, good points. How far and in which direction, Zorba?

ZORBA: In the direction from which he came?

SOCRATES: But how far must he walk? Aquarius?

AQUARIUS: As far as he came to get here?

PLATO: (to ZORBA) Is this the class? Are we supposed to be writing this down?

[ZORBA shrugs.]

SOCRATES: So, my friend, you must go as far as you came and in the opposite direction. Once again, we see how difficult problems are solved through the use of probing questions.

[PLATO and ZORBA, hearing this, glance at each other anxiously and immediately begin taking notes.]
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SOCRATES: Wings, a beak, yes... and what's the third requirement? Plato?

PLATO: Intent!

SOCRATES: Right! Of course... intent!

ZORBA: Is that the Athenian rule?

[SOCRATES waves the question away.]

SOCRATES: So, Aquarius, is Michael a bird?

[AQUARIUS looks MICHAEL over carefully.]

AQUARIUS: I see no wings, Socrates.

SOCRATES: And therefore?

AQUARIUS: And therefore he is not a bird.

ZORBA: What about intent?

PLATO: No, you need all three!

ZORBA: Oh.

SOCRATES: And if a man comes from the sky, and is not a bird, then what are we to conclude?

[All pause and reflect for a second. Then, in unison, the three students shout: "He's a god!" and fall to their knees, bowing toward MICHAEL.]

MICHAEL: (taken aback) A god?

SOCRATES: You must be. My method never fails.

[JUDY enters, in a toga.]

JUDY: Excuse me, Socrates. The Colossus of Rhodes is waiting to see you, and he says it's urgent.

[Rohr]

[Michael jumps to his feet, staring at Judy in disbelief.]

SOCRATES: Well, he'll have to wait until class is over.

MICHAEL: Judy? Can it be? Is it you? How did you get here?

JUDY: (serenely) My name is Clytemnestra.

MICHAEL: (crestfallen) Oh, ... I'm sorry. I could have sworn....

[He turns away.]

JUDY: (gazing at MICHAEL) Socrates, do you believe in retroactive reincarnation?

SOCRATES: I don't know, but it sounds unconstitutional. Why?

JUDY: That young man. He's divine.

SOCRATES: Yes, he's a god.

JUDY: A God? [She rushes to MICHAEL and bows to him.] Oh, forgive me, O exalted one! I did not recognize you!

SOCRATES: But, he seems to insist on being mortal.

[MICHAEL turns, and JUDY rises. They gaze at each other intently.]

MICHAEL: No, actually, I've reconsidered.

SOCRATES: I thought you would. So, now that we have identified him as a god, how do we get him back to California? Plato?

[PLATO groans.]

MICHAEL: Actually, that's quite all right. I think I'll be staying.

SOCRATES: Ah, staying, are you? That raises another fascinating question: Is this problem moot? Zorba?
SOCRATES: Wings, a beak, yes . . . and what's the third requirement? Plato?

PLATO: Intent!

SOCRATES: Right! Of course . . . intent!

ZORBA: Is that the Athenian rule?

[SOCTARES waves the question away.]

SOCRATES: So, Aquarius, is Michael a bird?

[AQUALIUS looks MICHAEL over carefully.]

AQUALIUS: I see no wings, Socrates.

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ZORBA: What about intent?

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JUDY: (serenely) My name is Clytemnestra.

MICHAEL: (crestfallen) Oh, . . . I'm sorry. I could have sworn . . .

[He turns away.]

JUDY: (gazing at Michael) Socrates, do you believe in retrospective reincarnation?

SOCRATES: I don't know, but it sounds unconstitutional. Why?

JUDY: That young man. He's divine.

SOCRATES: Yes, he's a god.

JUDY: A God? [She rushes to Michael and bows to him.] Oh, forgive me, O exalted one! I did not recognize you!

SOCRATES: But, he seems to insist on being mortal.

[JUDY turns, and JUDY rises. They gape at each other intently.]

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[PLATO groans.]

MICHAEL: Actually, that's quite all right. I think I'll be staying.
[ZORBA groans. All stand in tableau as ROD SERLING reappears.]

ROD SERLING: One of the few known instances in which a law student confronted Socrates and came out ahead . . . occurred somewhere between the past and the present . . . between ancient Greece and modern-day California . . . in the very center of the high cerebral plain known as . . . the Twilight Zone.

[Theme music and lights-out.]

Concise Guide to Surviving the First Year of Law School

Oren S. Tasini*

WEEK ONE

You're already behind. Don't worry. The objective is to demoralize you in the first week. Don't let it happen. Don't bother to outline the cases. Instead make friends with second year students and borrow their outlines. They have already done the work for you. (Don't bother with third year students. They want you to suffer like they did. The second year students lack the cynicism learned in the second year of law school.) If a professor tells you not to buy commercial outlines, buy them. It's a sure bet that she steals exam questions from them.

WEEK TWO

Your classmates have started to form study groups. This is a very dangerous moment for you. Pick the wrong study group and your life will be a living hell. Find a study group where the other people will do the work. If they look to you for guidance it means big trouble. The concept of admitting that other law students may be brighter or more hardworking is a difficult concept for most first year students. Therefore, you have an advantage. Use it to your benefit.

WEEK THREE

If your property professor pretends that he understands the Rule Against Perpetuities you know he is a fraud. Show him how smart you are by reminding him that most states have adopted statutes with savings clauses where the Rule is inapplicable so why bother to learn the Rule. This will

* © 1993 Oren S. Tasini. Oren Tasini is an Associate (a fancy name for indentured servant) with the law firm of Fleming, Hait, Shaw & Gundlach, P.A. in Palm Beach, Florida. He is a graduate (by the grace of God and through religious adherence to the principles set forth in the Concise Guide to Surviving the First Year of Law School) of Georgetown University Law Center. He is currently working on a concise guide to surviving the modern practice of law, tentatively entitled: Early Retirement.