

# The Final Word

by George Sapio  
Copr 2017

## CAST

Virgil.....*Roman poet, cranky tourguide*  
Dwayne Munson.....*President of Greater Athens University*  
Joshua Sanford.....*member of board of trustees*  
Lizzie Featherstone.....*editor Greater Athens University alumni magazine*  
Marcia Dane.....*VP of Marketing/Alumni Development*  
Dawson.....*Lizzie's spouse*  
Olivia Holmes.....*attorney for Greater Athens University*  
Joanna Gitlow.....*attorney for Lizzie Featherstone, ACLU*  
John Clark.....*attorney for Greater Athens University*  
Brandy Lewis.....*attorney for Molly Schenck*  
Molly Schenk.....*Greater Athens University Distinguished Scholar*  
(In cases where casting proves difficult, some roles may be cast as another gender. Take care to change the pronouns.)

**Settings:** In and around Greater Athens University, Lizzie's home.

**Time:** The present.

**Synopsis:** Lizzie Featherstone, editor of the Greater Athens University alumni magazine, prints a first-hand essay from a distinguished student about three months spent in Fredonian-occupied Sylvanian territory. Pro-Fredonian factions in the board of trustees begin to work against her, and she is forced to defend her decision to print and the student's right to write about what she saw. The issue becomes a legal battle that serves as an allegory for the record of SCOTUS free speech cases in the 20th century. Chances are, you may not know how tenuous free speech is in America.

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*[A basically bare stage. There are stage blocks upstage that the cast will sit on in between scenes, always visible to the audience. In the wings, encroaching, are the set pieces: a desk, etc. At all times the cast will be aware of what is happening on stage. No comments will be made.]*

*VIRGIL enters. After a moment the rest of the cast will enter from backstage and assemble upstage sitting on the stage blocks]*

## Prologue

### **VIRGIL**

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. Good evening, whores and virgins. Good evening saints and demons, the enlightened and the intolerant, devotionally faithful and the eternally damned. Welcome also the left, the right, the fence-sitters, the straight, the queer, and every rainbow shade in between. Welcome the gloriously hopeful and the spiritually crushed.

My name is Publius Virgilius Maro, but for the sake of simplicity please call me Virgil. I will be your tour guide tonight and I am here to—Excuse me. *[Turns to cast gathering upstage]* Will you please keep it quiet back there? *[Turns back to audience]* One minute in and I've broken not only the fourth wall but also the fifth...

The reason I am here, besides for cheap, royalty-free dramatic effect, is that I, through no real fault of my own, seem to have become a go-to specialist for guiding trips through the existential nether regions of the human soul. Who would have guessed that my epic poem Aeneid, which contained a trip to Hades, would spur Dante Alighieri to steal, I mean appropriate that device for his epic, The Divine Comedy? As you see tonight, it seems that anyone with a penchant for contrived significance can resurrect me, so here I am once again. It's not that I'm geared for reluctance. I'm simply more prone to recumbence.

### **ACTOR PLAYING MUNSON**

Can we get started already?

**VIRGIL**

Oh, forgive me, Lord Olivier! (Fucking actors.) Fine. We start tonight with two cell phones. The first goes to the president of Greater Athens University, Dwayne Munson. Dwayne, where are you? Here. Catch. Stand over there. [*MUNSON does*] And the second goes to Joshua Sanford, a member of Greater Athens University's board of trustees. [*SANFORD stands*] Here's your phone. I want those back, by the way. Everyone ready? Excellent. Go.

**SCENE ONE**

**MUNSON**

Of course I understand your point. It's three ayem, by the way.

**SANFORD**

No, I don't think you do. And the fact that you have no idea what I'm talking about makes me think you're not up to this job.

**MUNSON**

Okay, okay. Hang on. I'm looking for it.

**SANFORD**

You haven't even seen it? It's been out for three days!

*[MUNSON looks around for prop. VIRGIL tosses him a magazine. MUNSON opens to back inside page.]*

**MUNSON**

It's the university magazine. I don't read these things. Other people do. I don't have time.

**SANFORD**

I do not fucking believe this.

**MUNSON**

Just wait a second. Need my glasses.

*[VIRGIL hands him glasses]*

Okay.

**SANFORD**

Do you have any idea how that got into the magazine? I open up the damn thing and there it is.

**MUNSON**

I'm trying to read this.

**SANFORD**

Who the fuck does she think she is?

**MUNSON**

Uh-oh.

**SANFORD**

Yeah. Uh-oh. How would you like it if some of the funding I bring your school went bye-bye? You think I want to pay for that kind of racist anti-Fredonian propaganda?

**MUNSON**

Shit. SHIT.

**SANFORD**

You better do something about this and fucking quick.

**MUNSON**

I'll take care of it.

**SANFORD**

You better. This is your fault.

**MUNSON**

My fault? How?

**SANFORD**

You're the one who runs the place. Like the captain of the fucking Titanic, you need to be aware of all this shit. Especially when we have such a large representation of Fredonian-Americans. And we all know how much weight we have.

**MUNSON**

I'm well aware of how much / they fund us.

**SANFORD**

So, Captain Iceberg. Read the little twerp's article, make sure some fucking heads roll and *fix it*.

*[SANFORD ends call]*

**MUNSON**

Douchebag.

*[MUNSON ends call]*

**SANFORD**

Mama's boy.

**MUNSON**

[Stares at magazine] Shit.

**VIRGIL**

That'll do. Phones, please. As we all know from basic physics, what goes up the chain of command eventually comes down. So who's next? Why not bring in the editor of the offending magazine, one of the two culprits responsible for this late-night conniption, Ms. Lizzie Featherstone. *(signals to actor playing Lizzie)* Thank you. And possibly the writer of the piece? [*MOLLY SCHENK steps forward*] No, no, no, no. That's wrong. My mistake. I'm sorry, you're just backstory. I apologize. [*MOLLY SCHENK leaves stage*] So who, then? How about Ms. Featherstone's boss and vice president of alumni development, Ms. Marcia Dane. If we're going to fully see Miz Dane in her best light, let's drop back in time four weeks. Please, everyone, if you don't mind. We need Lizzie's office.

*[CHORUS assembles office]*

**SCENE TWO**

**MARCIA**

*[Enters Lizzie's office]* Omigod. I can't thank you enough. It's perfect.

**LIZZIE**

Thanks.

**MARCIA**

And once again you saved my ass. I know admissions materials aren't your purview, but you are amazing at this. I can never see it, and then you look at it and it all seems so simple! How many versions did I make you go through? Never mind. You did a great job.

**LIZZIE**

You're welcome.

**MARCIA**

And yes, I'm sorry, but they decided to keep the slogan "Greater Athens University: An Enlightened, Progressive and Stimulating Education for an Ever-Changing Global Future."

**LIZZIE**

I really shouldn't have said anything.

**MARCIA**

But you're right. It's complete drivel and has no real meaning whatsoever, but everyone agreed it was the perfect way to describe the University. And President Munson agreed. So it's done. What do you think of him? First impression, I mean.

**LIZZIE**

He seems like a decent guy. He's been here only two months. You're getting along with him?

**MARCIA**

I get along with everybody. It's my job. But yes, everybody's showing a lot of pearly whites, shaking hands and raising the bullshit level to mammoth proportions.

**LIZZIE**

I'm so glad I don't have your job. I don't know how you do it, being everybody's best friend.

**MARCIA**

Hah. Behind this chipper veneer I'm really a demon from Dante's Inferno.

**VIRGIL**

[*Chuckling*] Oh, that's good.

**LIZZIE**

Which circle?

**MARCIA**

To hear my ex-husband tell it, all of them. How's the new issue coming?

**LIZZIE**

As usual, it's a struggle. But. There is a light at the end of the tunnel.

**MARCIA**

What's the cover story?

**LIZZIE**

The new sports complex.

**MARCIA**

Lots of pictures?

**LIZZIE**

Thousands.

**MARCIA**

Good. What else do I need to know?

**LIZZIE**

T features: one on a faculty member who just came back from a weather study in Nebraska.

**MARCIA**

Snore. Pictures?

**LIZZIE**

Of Nebraska? A few. And the second is a big donor.

**MARCIA**

Ka-ching.

**LIZZIE**

Just started a new branch of his film company in Botswana. And the Final Word essay is by Molly Schenk.

**MARCIA**

Who?

**LIZZIE**

Molly Schenk. She's the Greater Athens Distinguished Scholar who got the Fulbright right after graduating. Winner of last year's Outstanding Senior Award? You had your picture taken with her?

**MARCIA**

Oh, well then. No problem. Those kids are worth every two hundred and twenty-three thousand seven hundred and forty-one dollars we put into them. Nice work. Can't wait to see it.

**LIZZIE**

Marcia. Look. I really do need some help. Every week I'm putting in at least a dozen hours over what's manageable.

**MARCIA**

I know, Lizzie.

**LIZZIE**

I can't write, edit, and put it all together by myself. Somewhere along the line a mistake will be made.

**MARCIA**

I'm working on it. Trust me, it's a priority, okay?

**LIZZIE**

Okay. I've been asking for a long while, though.

**MARCIA**

I know how much you work, and I understand the strain. Hang in there; we need you. We'll find a way to get you some help. Soon. I promise.

**VIRGIL**

And that'll do it. Thank you both. Lizzie, off. Marcia, you stay. It's now your office, your desk, your chair. Move something so we have a set change. [*MARCIA makes a small change in set*] Right. Let's bring in El Presidente for this one. Got your magazine? And, go!

**SCENE THREE**

**MUNSON**

Where the hell do you come off printing this kind of crap?

**MARCIA**

I'm sorry?

*[MUNSON throws the magazine on her desk]*

**MUNSON**

That. Who the hell approved that?

**MARCIA**

Approved what? [*Reads while MUNSON talks*]

**MUNSON**

Is it established procedure to use the college magazine to print anti-Fredonian propaganda?

**MARCIA**

I don't see /what you mean.

**MUNSON**

That article. By that kid.

**MARCIA**

This kid? She was a GAD scholar.

**MUNSON**

What the fuck is a GAD scholar?

**MARCIA**

Greater Athens Distinguished Scholar. They're the cream of our crop, get a full ride. And she got a Fulbright.

**MUNSON**

I don't care if she cured cancer. Explain to me what that trash is doing in the magazine. Didn't you read it before it went in?

**MARCIA**

No, I...

**MUNSON**

That's perfect. Why don't we just replace the Greater Athens logo with the Sylvanian Liberation Front logo? And while we're at it, let's put a bomb in the cafeteria.

**MARCIA**

What are you talking about? There's nothing offensive /about this.

**MUNSON**

It's pro-Sylvanian.

**MARCIA**

Not really. It seems to be just anti-violence. Like the title says, "Stop / the Violence."

**MUNSON**

The call I got at 3 ayem said it was anti-Fredonian. That makes it pro-Sylvanian Liberation Front.

**MARCIA**

It's not pro-SLF at all. There's not even one mention of the SLF.

**MUNSON**

Members of the Board of Trustees find it offensive, and therefore so do I.

**MARCIA**

Who complained?

**MUNSON**

Someone with a lot of money. This woman will write an apology.



**MARCIA**

The author?

**MUNSON**

No. Yes. I want one from her, too. I meant the editor.

**MARCIA**

What?

**MUNSON**

And I want it in my inbox by this afternoon. It's going online.

**MARCIA**

I'm not sure / that's the best way of...

**MUNSON**

And then I want her resignation.

**MARCIA**

Lizzie Featherstone's been the magazine editor for five years!

**MUNSON**

I'm writing a disclaimer, and it's going online at the same time.

**MARCIA**

Dwayne, really, / I don't think that...

**MUNSON**

There is no way we're going to let people think we support terrorists.

**MARCIA**

Terrorists? What?

**MUNSON**

Articles like this support terrorists. In case you don't know, the Sylvanian Liberation Front rules the Sylvanian Commonwealth. SLF is a terrorist organization. That article supports the SLF.

**MARCIA**

All it talks about are innocent people, civilians, being attacked by soldiers and armed colonials.

**MUNSON**

Civilians? You know this for sure? Those colonials have a historical right to be there.

**MARCIA**

I am not going to discuss / politics.

**MUNSON**

Damn right you aren't. Does this magazine come under your purview?

**MARCIA**

Well, yes. But she has friends. Seriously. She's a community darling!

**MUNSON**

Are you on her side?

**MARCIA**

I am on the college's side. I am also aware that I have been spearheading the fundraising efforts for the last eleven years. And I also know that, even though you could fire her at any time, a lawsuit will cost us more in unrealized funds through bad publicity than it will to buy her off. You want to fire her? Go ahead. But this is not the right-wing religious college you came from. This is Greater Athens, a progressive hub, nestled smack in the city where old hippies and Volvos go to die.

**MUNSON**

You don't talk to me like that.

**MARCIA**

Look. If you demand apologies the whole campus will think you're a Nazi who'll want to censor academic research. Buy her off. Be generous. Be very generous. Be undisclosable generous. Everybody has a price.

**MUNSON**

No fucking way. She apologizes and she goes.

**MARCIA**

Why would she apologize if she goes anyway?

**MUNSON**

Because you won't tell her she's going until she writes the apology.

**VIRGIL**

Well, that was nice and sleazy. [*To audience*] So what do you think our Miz Dane does in this situation? Young lady/man? Sir? Madam? [*Entertain two questions/responses from audience members in ad-lib*]. Interesting. So let's find out. You, Mr. Big Shot...

**MUNSON**

Stop calling me that.

**VIRGIL**

Sit the fuck down. Next. Dane, don't move. Let's have Miz Featherstone back. Go.

**SCENE FOUR**

**LIZZIE**

Established procedures? I've been doing this job for five years, and the established procedure is that you ignore what I do six times a year! When was the last time / you actually checked the content?

**MARCIA**

That doesn't matter! Procedure is you are supposed to run this by me!

**LIZZIE**

And every time I did, you just waved me off and said, “Go ahead, I trust you!” I told you she wrote an essay.

**MARCIA**

You didn't tell me the piece was potentially controversial. You let me down.

**LIZZIE**

Are you serious?

**MARCIA**

You think you run this magazine? You think you can just put in whatever you want?

**LIZZIE**

If we go by what's happened before, that's exactly what happens. I produce the magazine, single-handedly, with only a halftime assistant to handle correspondence. That's it.

**MARCIA**

I don't want to hear it. It's immaterial.

**LIZZIE**

Immaterial? I work fifty-plus hours a week to put this / out!

**MARCIA**

So? You've done it for five years, there's no reason to complain about it now. You've never demonstrated a true need for help—

**LIZZIE**

I've been asking you for help for years! I have submitted numerous requests!

**MARCIA**

Yes, and the magazine has gotten out every time.

**LIZZIE**

Oh and what? I should have let it crash and burn?

**MARCIA**

Based on that, the college determined that additional resources were best spent elsewhere. If you thought it was too much to ask of you, you should have gone somewhere else!

**LIZZIE**

Why are you doing this?

**MARCIA**

Do you have any idea what you've done?

**LIZZIE**

There was no reason to not include that piece! This is a first-hand account of an important world situation by a journalism-political science double major who graduated summa cum laude at the top of her class.

**MARCIA**

Lizzie, you know what I'm talking about.

**LIZZIE**

How do you expect me to not print something someone will disagree with?

**MARCIA**

This is not investigative journalism! This is a PR vehicle! We do not want to provoke our audience into doing anything except opening their wallets.

**LIZZIE**

The mission statement clearly says "Enlightened, Progressive and Stimulating Education." And I was hired to bring my journalism expertise to this magazine.

**MARCIA**

A publication that is designed to appeal to alumni. We don't need challenging reportage, we need donations, and all this magazine is supposed to do is show everyone how great this college is. Happy smiling faces and lots of bright colors.

**LIZZIE**

That's not what I bring to it and you know it. And now you're hanging me out to dry.

**MARCIA**

You asked for it.

**LIZZIE**

Who was it?

**MARCIA**

Immaterial.

**LIZZIE**

I have the right to confront my accuser.

**MARCIA**

Not here you don't. And you are to write a public apology.

**LIZZIE**

No.

**MARCIA**

It's your job if you don't.

**LIZZIE**

It'll be my job whether I do or not.

A public apology will not make this go away. It will only / bring more attention to it.

**MARCIA**

The administration is not interested in your advice. You've done enough.

**LIZZIE**

I'm sorry?

**MARCIA**

We can fire you at any moment.

**LIZZIE**

But you won't.

**MARCIA**

This conversation is over.

**LIZZIE**

The issue isn't.

**MARCIA**

Write that fucking apology. And get another one from the kid who wrote this piece of shit.

**VIRGIL**

Hoo-wee. Now that was laden with tension! What's she gonna do, folks? Write it or not? Well, let's see what happens next. Did you know our plucky heroine was married? She is! And the lucky wife (Dawson) is sitting right...hmmm... there. Yep, that's you tonight. Marcia? Bye-bye.

**SCENE FIVE**

**DAWSON**

Brilliant.

**LIZZIE**

I'm sorry.

**DAWSON**

I doubt that.

**LIZZIE**

You're right. I'm not.

**DAWSON**

That's not my argument.

**LIZZIE**

Then what is?

**DAWSON**

The small matter of my continuing unemployment, the car loans, the mortgage.

**LIZZIE**

Money?

**DAWSON**

Yes, money! That green stuff that we fork out every month that you, and only you, bring in.

**LIZZIE**

Are you saying I shouldn't have published that piece?

**DAWSON**

I'm saying we don't need this! If I had a job I'd say "Fuck 'em." Let 'em go to hell.

**LIZZIE**

You think I'm wrong.

**DAWSON**

Should you have gotten that piece okayed? Lizzie? Should you / have run it by—

**LIZZIE**

Probably.

**DAWSON**

Okay. And now you've pissed off one of the biggest political forces in the country. I know you know how powerful the Fredonian Homeland Movement is.

**LIZZIE**

Marcia says the president is furious.

**DAWSON**

Gee. Wonder why. First semester on the job and he's probably got some rabid colonialist Fredonian-American screaming at him over the phone threatening to withdraw...how much funding?

**LIZZIE**

A lot.

**DAWSON**

I'd be screaming, too.

**LIZZIE**

I was hoping you'd be on my side.

**DAWSON**

I am *always* on your side. I will back you up every time.

**LIZZIE**

What about now?

**DAWSON**

Now I back you up by telling you the truth. You overstepped. You should have gotten it vetted. Then at least you could have had deniability.

**LIZZIE**

Do you think the article was biased?

**DAWSON**

Absolutely not.

I've been around enough political forums to know the difference between solid content and whacknut, true-believer hysteria.

**LIZZIE**

Then why are we arguing?

**DAWSON**

Because we can't afford this kind of trouble right now. Someone in this house has to be practical!

**LIZZIE**

Do you think it should *not* have been published?

**DAWSON**

No.

**LIZZIE**

"No" it should not have been / published?

**DAWSON**

No, it *should* have been published. Lizzie, you did the right thing.

**LIZZIE**

Thank you.

**DAWSON**

Just at the completely wrong time.

**VIRGIL**

Damn. I think I like this lady. Okay, Miz D, have a seat. Lizzie, it's all you.

## **SCENE SIX**

**LIZZIE**

As the Greater Athens University Alumni Chronicle editor for the last five years, I have been the person primarily responsible for what appears in the pages of the magazine and on our website.

For our most recent issue, I asked recently graduated GAU Distinguished Scholar Molly Schenk to write about her experiences in the Sylvanian steppes over the summer. I could not be more proud of her and the "Final Word" essay she furnished, titled "Stop the Violence." Her strengths as a journalist and as a person of deep commitment to peace and human rights shine through every word.

In the case of publishing her essay, however, I didn't follow editorial procedures. I ran the story without having anyone else on campus review it first. I was remiss in this case. For this I am very sorry, and I am particularly regretful that people who are close to Greater Athens University and care about it passionately feel hurt by the institution. The institution is not to blame. I am the only one at fault here. The last thing I intended was to fuel more conflict. Elizabeth Featherstone, editor

**VIRGIL**

Not bad, Miz Featherstone. You're pretty clever. At least you believe in something. Your kind, however, usually ends up on display in some latter day Golgotha<sup>1</sup>. Anyway. So let's see what happens next. When one person speaks, there must be a response. Let's see what Mr. Bigshot comes back with. Part of me hopes that he chooses to take the high road.

**MUNSON**

The past few days have brought to the attention of the Greater Athens University community a highly controversial issue. One of our recent alumni, Molly Schenk, a Distinguished Scholar in whom the college invested substantially, wrote an essay published in the most recent Greater Athens University Alumni Chronicle.

While GAU firmly believes in knowledge and positively encourages its students to get as much of it as they can, Ms. Schenk clearly over-reached her abilities when she described her limited experience in the Sylvanian steppes this past summer.

Reaction to the article has been strong and loud. While a few readers allow Miss Schenk wide latitude in expressing a single viewpoint, many have found issue with the issue.

At Greater Athens University we believe in the free expression of points of view, as long as those viewpoints are fairly balanced by legitimate opposing viewpoints.

The Fredonian/Sylvanian conflict has been a subject of much discussion for many years in many places by many people, and the GAU campus is no exception. However, to avoid these ill-informed discussions, especially in the flagship alumni magazine, the administration has decided to create a supervisory editorial board to supervise editorial content and bar any further opinions from the GAU public arena. We thank you most sincerely for your continuing support. Sincerely, Dwayne Munson, President.

**VIRGIL**

Well, so much for the high road. Have a seat, Dwayne. Lizzie, come on back. Who shall we have play opposite? Ya know what? I wanna see more of Dawson. And let's watch as they peer into the interwebs to see what the all-important peanut gallery has to say. Come on kids, let's set up the scene.

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<sup>1</sup> goal-GOTH-a