

Irony, Ahoy!

By Nina Rutherford Christou

PLOT

The play deals with the ironies of the Greek bureaucratic system and is about a British expat in Greece who has applied for official certification and recognition of her London-based degree as an authentic university degree; a prerequisite for re-entering university for further studies. The play has three scenes; At the Hellenic Academic Recognition of Documents Office; Outside a park on the way to the University; At the University's English Department's office.

CHARACTERS

MIA PSIHI – British National and prospective University student

MINA, Mia's friend

CIVIL SERVANT at Hellenic Academic Recognition of Documents Office /

SECRETARY of the University's English Department.

SCENE ONE

(Enter Mia into a public office, seemingly empty of life. Without speaking, she cautiously approaches the high reception window of the counter and looks slowly around the room. The civil servant pops up from behind counter just as Mia turns around, making her jump)

MIA

(Loud and obviously shocked) AHH!!!

CIVIL SERVANT

Can I help you?

MIA

(Visibly shaken) Yes, ... sorry... scared me a little... yes... I received an email that a decision has been made concerning my degree from the University of London being officially recognised by the Greek government.

CIVIL SERVANT

Name?

MIA

Mia Psihi... erm Mia MacGregor Psihi.

SECRETARY

Identity card?

MIA

I don't have an identity card. I have a passport because I'm English.

CIVIL SERVANT

But your name's Greek?

MIA

Greek grandfather...

CIVIL SERVANT

Ah, you're Scottish then.. MacGregor?

MIA

No, English. It's a long, complicated story... ancestors of grandmother came from the MacGregor clan... Scottish general who won an important battle... gave me the surname as a second name... it's complicated!

CIVIL SERVANT

So, you are not Scottish?

MIA

No.

CIVIL SERVANT

And you are not Greek?

MIA

No.

CIVIL SERVANT

But you have a Scottish and Greek name?

MIA

Yes.

CIVIL SERVANT

You look Greek.

MIA

But I'm not.

CIVIL SERVANT

You don't look Scottish.

MIA

That's because I'M NOT. *(Throws arms up in the air)* What can I say? I'm a conundrum!

CIVIL SERVANT

Just a minute...

(He disappears down behind the window again. Rustling of papers can be heard going on out of view of Mia and the audience. Rustling gets more frantic until he pops up again suddenly)

Here you are. Sign here!

(Mia signs something, takes the envelope and opens it as she turns to walk away. She stops suddenly, then turns back)

MIA

Sorry ... excuse me, it says here that my degree is not recognised as a proper degree, I don't understand...

(Civil servant is now stamping documents. Mia waits while stamping gets more frantic before he stops)

CIVIL SERVANT

Give!

(Mia hands him the document. He looks at it briefly and hands it back)

Yeah, it won't be recognised as a proper degree.

MIA

Why not?

CIVIL SERVANT

It was only three years.

MIA

What was?

CIVIL SERVANT

The degree course.

MIA

No, it wasn't. It was a four-year course; the first two years and the fourth year were completed at the University of London but the third year was at the Aristotle University here in Thessaloniki.

CIVIL SERVANT

Yeah.... It still won't be recognised.

MIA

But I also sent in the certificate from the Greek University for the third year.

CIVIL SERVANT

Yeah, that wasn't recognised.

MIA

What wasn't?

CIVIL SERVANT

The Greek one.

MIA

The GREEK certificate?

CIVIL SERVANT

Yeah...

MIA

From the GREEK University?

CIVIL SERVANT

Yeah...

MIA

It WASN'T recognised?

CIVIL SERVANT

Yeah...

MIA

By the GREEK Government?

CIVIL SERVANT

It wasn't recognised as part of the original degree. And the transcript of the original degree has only three years.

MIA

But it says 'year four' as the final year.

CIVIL SERVANT

Maybe you took a year off.

MIA

(Losing her patience) It was PART OF MY DEGREE! I studied Modern Greek and Byzantine Studies at London University and the third year was at a Greek University!

CIVIL SERVANT

It still won't be recognised as a full university degree. Degrees are four years here, so anything less is not considered a proper university degree. *(Long pause)* It will be recognised as a degree from a technical college.

MIA

A what?

CIVIL SERVANT

A degree from a technical college.

MIA

So it will say I have a degree in Modern Greek and Byzantine Studies ... from a TECHNICAL college?

CIVIL SERVANT

Yeah.

MIA

A HUMANITIES degree from a TECHNICAL college?

CIVIL SERVANT

Yeah.

(Civil servant resumes stamping documents. Mia looks at him with a bewildered look on her face. Fade to black)

SCENE TWO

(Mia and her friend Mina are walking past a park on the way to the University. They stop by an entrance to the park)

MIA

(Really exasperated) Can you BELIEVE it? A HUMANITIES degree from a TECHNICAL college! What would happen if I took my Masters in to be recognised? An MA in Linguistics FROM KNITTING CLUB?

MINA

Calm down, it's not that bad. It doesn't matter because you can still sit the entrance exams with a degree from a technical college. Forget about it! Your dream of studying English Literature will finally come true.

MIA

But it's just so annoying that I did a degree at King's College, LONDON University, a prestigious university, and it's not recognised! It's just NOT logical.

MINA

Well, it is if you think about it, actually. Three years and four years are different.

MIA

But I DID FOUR years! *(She freezes looking at the park entrance and fence. She looks to the left, then to the right and back again)* Hang on a minute! Why are there rolls of barbed wire on top of that fence?

MINA

So people don't climb over the fence to get into the park.

MIA

But there are NO GATES on the entrance. And it doesn't look like there were EVER gates on the entrance. Just a big gap to WALK THROUGH! So, why put barbed wire on top of the fence?

MINA

I told you, to stop people climbing over the fence.

MIA

(Getting really exasperated) There are NO GATES ON THE ENTRANCE! Why would people CLIMB OVER the fence?

MINA

Well, they wouldn't, would they? There's barbed wire on the top of it...

(Fade to black)

SCENE THREE

(Mia meets Mina at the English Department office at the university. They greet each other with a hug)

MINA

CONGRATULATIONS! You passed the exams!! You get to study English literature!!

MIA

Yeah, I studied Greek in England and now I'm going to study English in Greece!!!

MINA

Ah, my crazy English friend!! Only you would do that!

(Reception window opens and the secretary appears)

SECRETARY

Can I help you?

MIA

(Struggling to contain her excitement) Yes, hello! I've come for the results of my exams! I read on your website that I am one of the candidates who passed.

SECRETARY

Name?

MIA

Mia Psihi... erm Mia MacGregor Psihi.

SECRETARY

Just a minute... yes, here we are... you passed all three exams...

MIA

(Looking excitedly at Mina) Oh, greaaattt!

SECRETARY

...so you'll be going straight into the second year!

MIA

Sorry, what?

SECRETARY

As you passed all three exams, you go straight into the second year. All the first-year courses will be registered as having been completed and you won't need to do them.

MIA

(Slightly deflated) But I WANT to do them. The reason I applied for this course was to study literature and attend classes. Why would I sit the exams if I DIDN'T WANT to go to the lectures? It makes no sense.

MINA

Hey, you'll have the more interesting subjects of the second year to do and you don't have to worry about the first year. It's good, you'll see.

MIA

But I WILL worry about the first-year courses because I haven't done them. Won't there be important terminology to know and things like that?

MINA

You worry too much! You need to chill out a little more, my little English friend.

You'll see... EVERYTHING will be fine!

SECRETARY

Ok.... welcome to the English department! Lessons have already started so you can start attending while waiting for your registration to be completed. It's a four-year course, but you will be starting from year two...

MIA

Hang on a minute!! It's a FOUR-YEAR course?

SECRETARY

Yes, that's right.

MIA

But I'm starting in YEAR TWO, right?

SECRETARY

Yes, that's right.

MIA

So technically, I'll be doing only THREE years.

SECRETARY

Yes...

MIA

So, let me get this right.... I'll be doing THREE years, but the degree will be recognised as a FOUR-YEAR course???? (*Mia throws arms up in the air once again*)

MINA

See I told you EVERYTHING would be alright?? (*Fade to black*)

THE END