

Giles Bailey  
«Fat Chance Arthur»

*Mister Paradise* was first performed at the Tennessee Williams/ New Orleans Literary Festival on March 17, 2005. It was directed by Perry Martin; the set design was by Chad Talkington; the costume design was by Trish McLain; the lighting design was by [redacted]. The cast, in order of appearance, was as follows:

A play in one act dramatising the encounter between the playwright Arthur Miller and Peyton Smith of the Wooster Group at the Chelsea Hotel in 1983.

Characters

PEYTON, a woman in her twenties.  
MR MILLER, a man in his seventies.  
ACQUAINTANCES of MR MILLER.

Scene

*A reception room of the Chelsea Hotel, New York. It is a near cartoon of a room fit to burst, stiff with celebrity and peppered with ceaselessly popping camera flashes. Several news crews make their way to and fro across the throng like ships traversing an ocean. There is a deafening roar of conversation. It is the hotel's 100th anniversary and a banner is hung across the back wall that reads 'A Century at the Chelsea'. Downstage MR MILLER and a group of ACQUAINTANCES struggle to converse over the noise. PEYTON enters arm in arm with a female friend of similar age. She looks about clearly unable to find whoever she is looking for in the crush. With an attitude of resignation and a shrug of her shoulders she indicates to her companion that they should head to the bar. As they work their way through the crowd she spots MR MILLER and with clear excitement detaches herself from the friend so she can stand at his elbow awaiting an opportunity to catch his attention.*

MISTER PARADISE

*Scene: A squalid residence in New Orleans's French Quarter.*

GIRL: Mr. —Paradise?

[Pause. He stares at her dumbly.]

GIRL: Mr. —Anthony Paradise?

[Mr. Paradise nods slowly as if confirming some awful truth. Her smile disappears completely by gradual degrees. She looks frightened and very uncertain: then opens her portfolio and produces a slender little volume of verse.]

GIRL: This is your book?

MR. PARADISE: —Did you buy it?

GIRL: Yes.

MR. PARADISE: Then it belongs to you.

GIRL: No. [With youthful conviction.] A work of art is not a commodity, Mr. Paradise. It is never bought or sold. It always remains in the possession of the person who produced it. May I come in?

MR. PARADISE: —Yes.

[She enters. She pretends not to notice Mr. Paradise's quarters.]

GIRL: Did you send my letters?

MR. PARADISE: Yes.

GIRL: All three of them?

MR. PARADISE: Yes.

GIRL: Why didn't you answer my letters, Mr. Paradise?

[*He turns slowly and crosses to the window and opens the shutters.*]

MR. PARADISE: I have not heard the sound of Gabriel's horn.

ACQUAINTANCE 1: ... and the guy is hollering from the bar over there (*he gestures*) in this crazy accent—

ACQUAINTANCE 2: He was British right?

ACQUAINTANCE 1: Welsh. And he's pretty much totally demolished. (*To MR MILLER*) And he can barely stand right? And he's shouting, (*assuming a comic Welsh accent*) "Miller you fucking idiot, you should read this" and he's waving this manuscript which he keeps dropping, and the pages are all falling out of the portfolio, shouting, "You should read this, learn a fucking thing or two!"

(*All laugh uproariously though MR MILLER seems peripheral. As the subject he knows the story and it clearly bores him. He takes a cigarette case from an inside pocket extracts a cigarette and puts it between his lips. Before he can light it PEYTON seizes the moment and touching his sleeve gains his attention. The ACQUAINTANCES are quickly absorbed by another topic and continue talking together.*)

PEYTON: Mr M-m-miller? M-m-my name is Peyton. From the Performing Garage.

MR MILLER: (*Removing the unlit cigarette from his mouth*) I'm sorry?

PEYTON: I'm from the Performing Garage on Wooster Street.

MR MILLER: Oh, hello.

(*He offers his hand and she takes it.*)

PEYTON: Mr Miller, sorry, I wanted to ask you ... Well, my friend told me you'd be here and she had a ticket and I got her to let me come so that I could speak to you.

MR MILLER: (*With a smile*) Oh yes?

PEYTON: Yes, you see the other performers from the company and I ... We wrote to the Dramatists' Play Service and they wouldn't even listen to us and so we wrote to Mr Sanjurjo at ICM—

MR MILLER: You wrote to Luis?

PEYTON: Yes, to ask for special permission to use some extracts of *The Crucible* in the new piece we're working on.

MR MILLER: I'm sorry, what do you mean 'using'?

PEYTON: Well, we perform parts of it ... Just the high points.

MR MILLER: (*He laughs*) Just the high points?

PEYTON: Yes, well the piece is about a particular era and your play fits into it really well.

MR MILLER: (*After frowning his brow in momentary thought he widens his eyes in recognition*) Wait, I do remember something about this. Luis mentioned it a week or so ago maybe.

PEYTON: Yes, I play Mrs Proctor—

MR MILLER: (*Smiling*) I see.

PEYTON: —and we hoped you might come see what we're doing, you know, come to the performance.

MR MILLER: Oh, well yes, I do want to come and see the show.

PEYTON: Yes, so you can see what we're doing, understand why we want to use the play. We have open rehearsals tonight so please come.

GIRL: I remember it. I sat up there in the powder-room for heaven knows how long. I read it through once more and then again and again. It was like—bells ringing inside me. Great big solemn cathedral bells that shook me through and through! Mother came upstairs. "Good gracious," she said. "Everyone thinks you've run away from the party! What on earth is the matter?" "Mother," I said. "Who is Mr. Anthony Paradise? Have you ever heard of a man named Paradise?" No, she hadn't and neither

ly. Stuff like that don't with!" "I'd like to buy book?" He spread his "You can have it for mind me that mother slipping the little vol-ff to another cocktail and life is a round of his afternoon. I don't wonder and passion. arts, a great big furi- scraps of ribbons or book which I suddenly liked Bryn Mawr for my infinite wonder I ly. A great big furious scraps of ribbon or—

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ONE-ACT PLAYS

MIS-

MR MILLER: Tonight? Hmm.

*(He takes a small black book and pencil from the inside pocket of his jacket) So where is the theatre? Actually (he hands her the book and pencil indicating a place where she should write) just write the address here. (She takes it and writes.)*

PEYTON: *(Giving back the book)* Thank you Mr Miller. I'm sorry to bother you. Please come if you can.

*(She turns and disappears into the crowd. MR MILLER returns his book to the jacket pocket, places the unlit cigarette back in his mouth and turns back to his acquaintances.)*

ACQUAINTANCE 1: *(Placing his hand on MR MILLER's arm)* Hey Arthur, should we go get a drink someplace else?

MR MILLER: What? Oh, no. I should go see this show.

ACQUAINTANCE 1: OK, see you later.

MR MILLER: Sure, see you.

*(MR MILLER removes the cigarette from his mouth again and replaces it in the case which he pockets. He makes his way through the crowd and exits. Curtain.)*

So—so—so:

MR. PARADISE: Here you are, and here I am—yes, indeed. What are you intending to do about it?

GIRL: Oh, don't you know? Can't you guess? Mr. Paradise, I am going to give you back to the world!

MR. PARADISE: Give me back to the world?

GIRL: Yes, the stupid, blind, negligent world that let you slip away.

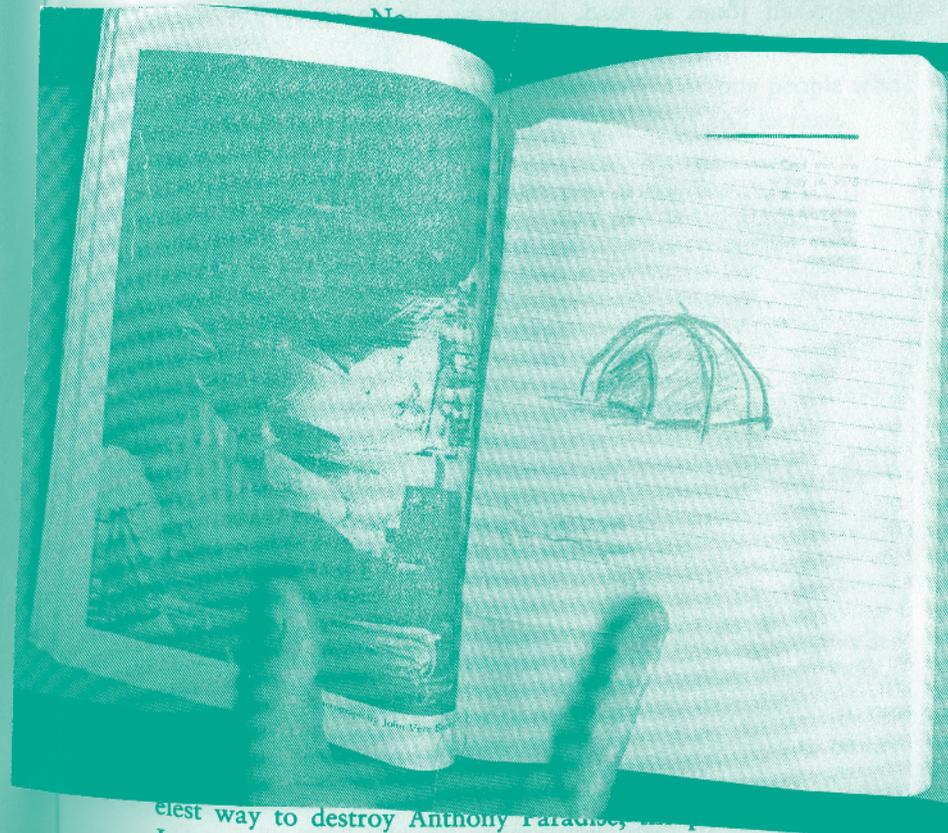
MR. PARADISE: Suppose I don't want to go back. Suppose I prefer to remain in oblivion, young lady.

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adise, and here you are!

GIRL: You can't, I won't let you! It's useless for you to resist! Don't try, Mr. Paradise, don't try! I've already set the ball in motion.

MR. PARADISE: Then stop it quickly, please.

GIRL: No. I've written letters to influential people, writers and publishers that I know in the East. I've already created a great deal of interest in you. When I leave here you're going to leave here with me.



eldest way to destroy Anthony Paradise, and I  
Jonathan Jones, the man—or what is left of the man. Don't you

see that? What a grisly spectacle I would present on a college lecture platform. Look at me! You're not blind. What do you see?

GIRL: The way you look doesn't matter.

MR. PARADISE: Oh, yes, it does. Maybe not to you, because you're young and generous. No, no, the time isn't ripe. Keep the book, remember my name, and watch the obituary column. Someday you will see the name of Jonathan Jones. Then come back again and look up Mr. Anthony Paradise. That will be his time—when Jones is dead. Jones is a living contradiction of Paradise. Paradise won't have a chance to breathe till Jones has stopped breathing. Take my word for that—and be satisfied.

GIRL: Can't you be Anthony Paradise now? Again?

MR. PARADISE: No. No, it's too late. I'm too old. Death is the only thing that can possibly save my reputation. Go back to school, little girl. There's an end to everything, even to supplies of gunpowder. When they're exhausted people will start looking again under broken table legs for little volumes of forgotten verse. By that time Jonathan Jones will be safely out of the way. The sun will be shining in a clean blue sky. Wind will stir the grass on the tops of hills. Children will dig in sand on sunny beaches. The world will be warm and serene and as young as tomorrow. Then all the old, sweet, gentle voices will be distinguished once again. You will hear wind in the trees and rain on the roof and the songs of long lost poets. Guns explode and destroy and are destroyed. But this— These little songs, however little and unimportant they are, they keep on singing forever. They have their times of eclipse. But they rise again. The motion of life is upwards, the motion of death is down. Only the blindest of all blind fools can fail to see what life, my dear girl, has in store for all their singing. Singing.

[A horn sounds.]

MR. PARADISE: Is that your chauffeur?

GIRL: —Yes.

MR. PARADISE: You'd better go.

GIRL: Mr. Paradise—

MR. PARADISE: Yes?

GIRL: Maybe you're right. I'm going to do what you say, keep the book and remember your name—

MR. PARADISE: And watch the obituary column!

GIRL: —Yes. And when the time comes—you can depend on me, Mr. Paradise.

MR. PARADISE: Thank you, my dear. I shall *depend* on you.

GIRL: I promise you I won't fail you. Your future is safe in my hands— And now, Mr. Paradise—won't you kiss me goodbye?

MR. PARADISE: —No.

GIRL: Why not?

MR. PARADISE: No. —For the same reason that I wouldn't touch a clean white table cloth with—mud all over my fingers.

GIRL: —Oh. [*Gravely extends her hand.*] —Goodbye, Mr. Paradise.

CURTAIN