

Annie and the State of Paradise
By Camille Atebe

Dramatis Personae

Annie Venables: *A fixer of other people, recently dead. 30+*

Malcolm Ecks: *A citizen of paradise, lyre player. 30+*

Len, Nadja & Franke: *Heavenly revolutionaries*

Will Shakespeare, Winston Churchill, Mao Tse Tung

Dan Macaulay: *Annie's killer*

Todd: *Citizen of Hell*

Fiona: *Dan's daughter, generally evil*

Sphincter: *A do-good demon*

Lloyd and Amelia: *Self righteous citizens of Hell*

Annie's Angel, Female, of uncertain race. Will play angels:

Blue: *Welcoming angel.*

Pink: *Answers angel.*

Grey: *Integration*

Yellow: *Celebrity management*

White: *Justice*

Note

The angels in the play are each to be played by two different actors. One actor will play all the angels, whenever Annie is interacting with them, then different actors will assume the roles when Annie is not interacting with them.

Setting

The scene begins as a tableau of boulders, chairs, a hodgepodge of indoor and out, with a cityscape in the background, changing as the actors move pieces to suit the scene.

Act 1

Scene 1

A white-hot light comes on, and then fades to a gentle blue, revealing a woman, Annie. Not old but not very young, standing C. She is blinking and startled in the sudden light. She begins to look around, trying to figure out where she is. A man, Malcolm, strolls past, reading a book. She stops him as he passes.

Annie: Excuse me? Where am I?

Malcolm: Hmm? Oh, you're new! The fellow in blue will be along shortly to help you. Just hold tight. *(He continues on, exiting)*

Annie stands confused for a moment. A woman dressed entirely in blue soon enters and heads straight for her.

Blue: Annie?

Annie: Yes?

Blue: Hello, Annie. Welcome to Paradise.

Annie: Paradise?

Blue: Yes. I'm the welcoming angel.

Annie: Why am I here?

Blue: *(Rolling her eyes)* Because you died.

Annie: Yes I know. But why..

Blue: I don't answer questions. I just welcome.

Annie: Who answers questions then? I have a lot of questions.

Blue: Questions about the nature of life? Questions about eternity, and God, and why good people do bad things and bad things happen to good people and what purpose do mosquitoes serve and is there intelligent life on other planets and Why the Hell does God allow something as horrible as AIDS?

Annie: Yes! Can I talk to God? Can I ask her these questions?

Blue: No. God has better things to do.

Annie: Like what?

Blue: Well, at the moment he's very busy giving cancer to small children.

Annie: *(shocked to her very core)* Giving cancer to...!

Blue: Just kidding. No, really, he's just fed up with all your stupid questions. Generally, if you need to resolve things we just let you go back.

Annie: Back?

Blue: Back to earth. *(Her watch beeps)* Got to go. People dying all the time. I keep busy. The guy in pink will be along shortly. *(Exits)*

Annie sputters after the angel, but to no avail. Malcolm re-enters. His book is in his pocket, and he seems to be searching for something.

Annie: Hello.

Malcolm: Hello. Have you seen a lyre anywhere? I've lost mine.

Annie: I don't even know what a lyre is.

Malcolm: It's a bit like a harp. Not quite, but sort of. Same general idea, I guess you could say.

Annie: You play the harp in paradise? That's very clichéd.

Malcolm: No, I played it when I was alive, and brought it with me for something to do. But I seem to have lost it. *(Pause)* Oh well. I'll make another, I suppose. Has the fellow in Blue been by?

Annie: A woman in blue came through.

Malcolm: Ah yes, that's him! Fun guy. Oh! I know where I left it! *(Runs off the way he came in)*

Annie: What do you mean, that's him...?

Annie realizes that Malcolm is gone and her question will remain unanswered, and she trails off into a perplexed silence. She is peering about her rather forlornly when a woman in pink enters. Played by the same actor as Blue, she is nonetheless a completely different angel.

Pink: Hello. Sorry I'm late.

Annie: Late? You were just here. Why did you change clothes?

Pink: I didn't. I always wear this. That way people know who I am. I'm the one in pink.

Annie: But you were just wearing blue.

Pink: No, that was the guy in Blue. I'm the guy in Pink.

Annie: And why are you all using the masculine pronoun? You are the same woman, only in different clothes!

Pink: Well, the masculine is easier to use.

Annie: Easier? But you're female!

Pink: *(Feeling self)* At the moment, yes. *(Looking at hands)*. A brown female. Not that I mind. The change is nice. I'm usually Chinese.

Annie: Chinese?

Pink: There's an awful lot of Chinese in the world. Billions, actually.

Annie: What does that have to do with anything?

Pink: They expect to see Chinese angels, usually. You expect to see ethnically diverse females, apparently.

Annie: So you are whatever I expect you to be?

Pink: We all are. That's why Blue showed up in the same skin. We change all the time. That's why we wear a specific colour, so you can tell us apart.

Annie: Oh.

Pink: Any more questions?

Annie: Can I talk to God?

Pink: Ooooh. No. Maybe you should go back.

Annie: Blue suggested that too.

Pink: Yeah. It's generally what we do with angry questioners like yourself. We send the so-called fundamentalists back too, as well as anyone heavily involved in partisan politics or sub-prime mortgage lending. You're all too much trouble up here. This is Paradise, you know. We have standards to maintain.

Annie: Angry questioners?

Pink: Sorry, but you are.

Annie: I am not! I'm a socially minded person who believes in equality for all...

Pink: Yeah, I know. And you want to ask God why poverty, pain and misery exist, right?

Annie: Yes! Shouldn't I be able to ask her that?

Pink: No, you shouldn't. Because you won't understand if you're told. You need to figure it out for yourself. God gave you free will. If he didn't he could have just told you the point of everything right off the bat. But free will means you've got to figure some things out on your own. Sit down?

Annie: *(Ignoring Pink, who sits in a comfy chair UR)* It sounds like you're trying to escape responsibility. You don't have an answer, do you?

Pink: Oh yes, there's an answer. It's just better if you experience it, that's all.

Annie: So you send me back? I go back to earth, and this is all just a near-death experience?

Pink: No! There's no point in sending you back as yourself, is there? No, you go back as someone else. As someone who will hopefully find the answer to all of your questions.

Annie: And if I don't find the answers?

Pink: Next time you die, we re-evaluate, and if you are still, well...

Annie: An angry questioner?

Pink: Or worse, then we send you back again. You would know it as reincarnation. But don't worry, we won't send you back as an animal. That's just weird. Human forms only. You can have as many goes as you need. So let's see...in your last life you were a...*(consults a notebook)*

Annie: A social worker. But wait. What if I don't want to go back?

Pink: It's better if you do. Let's see...how about if we birth you in Tibet? That was one of your favorite causes.

Annie: No! I don't want to go back. I want to stay here!

Pink: Here? But you can't get what you want here.

Annie: Why not?

Pink: Well, this isn't life. This is Afterlife. You can't learn life lessons in the afterlife.

Annie: I don't see why not. You aren't being very accommodating.

Pink: You aren't very easy to accommodate.

Annie: I'm very open-minded.

Pink: That's entirely beside the point. (*Consulting notebook*) How about something in China?

Annie: No. I don't want to go back.

Pink: A wheat farmer in Saskatchewan?

Annie: You might as well just send me to hell.

Pink: Saskatchewan's not that bad!

Annie: If you don't want me up here, you might as well just send me to hell. I don't want to be reincarnated.

Pink: Why? You don't want to walk a mile in someone else's shoes?

Annie: I am very open-minded!

Pink: You've mentioned that before, but I have to say, I'm just not seeing it.

Annie: All I want are answers. I want to talk to God.

Pink: Are you scared of being murdered again? Because the odds of that happening are very low. Unless I send you to Miami.

Annie: Miami is a vibrant, safe and positive city. The murder rates there are no higher than...

Pink: I was joking. Geez. Maybe I'll give you a sense of humour in your next life. (*She makes a note in the book*).

Annie: I have a sense of humour!

Pink: Of course you do.

Annie: And I'm not scared of being murdered again. I just don't want to go back.

Pink: Are you sure?

Annie: Yes.

Pink: You'd rather stay here?

Annie: Yes.

Pink: You know, when you do finally get here for good, you can pick any one of your past forms to live for eternity in.

Annie: I don't want any other forms. I want to stay.

Pink: I guess I can't stop you.

Annie: *(Changing the subject, looking around)* This place is really quite odd.

Pink: It is what it is. It is anything to everyone.

Annie: And what does that mean when it's at home?

Pink: Paradise is what you make it. People aren't all the same. You know the saying "You can't please all of the people all of the time"? Well, here all people are pleased. Because Paradise alters for the individual. It is what you make it.

Annie: So I can make it what I want?

Pink: That's the idea.

Annie: I'll make it better, then.

Pink: Well, no, it's already perfect, see...

Annie: I will make Paradise a true Paradise.

Pink: It's really just a matter of perception, individual realities within a broader reality...

Annie: I will make it Utopia.

Pink: Fantastic. *(Closes notebook, stands)*

Annie: Yes. It will be.

Blackout. A spot comes up on Pink, who shakes her head sadly at the audience, and walks off. Annie walks into the spot. The lights come up to half, and Annie looks over the set. It is a jumble of odd things, oddly placed. She turns to the audience.

Annie: Paradise should be open. Paradise should be happy. *(She moves into the jumble, the spot following her, and starts to sort things out, moving chairs, rocks, trees, tables, etc. into*

orderly rows and settings, separating the indoor from the outdoor. She pauses between moves to speak) There ought to be answers for every question. The higher ups must be accountable. If God is perfect, then she should answer for what she has created. In a proper Paradise, people will be truly free. Intellect will rule. Paradise is not a place for complacency. Paradise is a place for higher things. Higher Thought. Higher education. Higher hopes. Paradise should be more logical. It will be beautiful. Wonderful. Perfect.

As Annie sorts the set, Pink has changed into Grey. As Annie finishes her speech, Grey enters and a spot comes up on her, UR. Grey examines herself. Annie's spot fades as she moves the last piece, and Grey's brightens. Annie, in the dark, seats herself on a lounge.

Grey: You know, most people jump at the chance to go back. Most have to go back, too. People just don't get it the first time. After a couple of lives they clue in, though. But when they refuse to back and get a life? *(She shakes her head)* We're operating on a principle of free will here. It's hard. It's very hard. And I had to land the hardest job of all.

The lights come back up to full, and we see Annie sitting on the lounge with a laptop, typing madly.

Grey: What'cha doin' Annie?

Annie: *(Looks up, does a double take)* Oh. You're wearing Grey. You're someone else, aren't you?

Grey: You catch on fast. That'll save me a headache.

Annie: I'm writing a manifesto and drafting a constitution.

Grey: A constitution?

Annie: For Paradise. I'm going to perfect it.

Grey: It's pretty much perfect already.

Annie: 'Pretty much' isn't perfect.

Grey: *(About to say something, thinks better of it, takes a deep breath and says..)* I'm Grey. I'm here to help with integration.

Annie: Oh, I don't plan to integrate.

Grey: Right. *(Pause)* Well, if you need anything..

Annie: I'm sure you'll be right there when I need you. *(snaps her fingers)*

Grey: No. I don't read minds. You'll have to give me a call.
Extension 115.

Annie: Where's the phone?

Grey: Oh, it'll show up. 115. If you decide to integrate. *(She moves to exit L)*

Annie: Wait! Can I ask you something?

Grey: Okay.

Annie: Why have you all appeared to me in the same form?

Grey: *(Shrugs)* It's what you've expected.

Annie: Do you appear the same to everyone? I mean, I know that you appear as people expect you to, but does each person see all the angels as the same person?

Grey: No. Open minded people see us as we really are. We're each of us unique, you know. *(Continues to exit)*

Annie: Hey! I'm open-minded!

Malcolm enters. He is carrying his lyre.

Malcolm: Was that Grey? Fatalistic bastard *(affectionately)*.
Nowhere near as fun as Blue.

Annie: You found your lyre.

Malcolm: Made a new one. So you're staying, are you? Mind if I sit down?*(Without waiting for an answer, he sits)*

Annie: I'm Annie. Annie Venables.

Malcolm: Malcolm Ecks.

Annie: Like the activist?

Malcolm: What activist?

Annie: Malcolm X.

Malcolm: That's my name.

Annie: Is your last name really X?

Malcolm: Why shouldn't it be?

Annie: But it's only one letter.

There is a long, confused pause.

Malcolm: It's four letters. E-C-K-S. Ecks. What's wrong with that?

Annie: Nothing. I thought it was the letter X, like the famous African-American civil liberties activist.

Malcolm: Never heard of him. Mind if I play? *(He starts to play the lyre)*

Annie: That's nice.

Malcolm: It's alright.

Annie: How long have you been here?

Malcolm: All my death. *(grins)*

Annie: *(completely missing the joke)* But how long have you been dead?

Malcolm: I dunno.

Annie: Do you like it here?

Malcolm: Of course. It's Paradise.

Annie: Do you ever talk to God?

Malcolm: Nah. He's busy. Though we do play bocce on occasion.

Annie: God plays bocce?

Malcolm: Sure. Why not?

Annie: How did you die?

Malcolm: Can't remember. Doesn't matter though, does it?

Annie: Why not?

Malcolm: Why?

Annie: I was murdered.

Malcolm: So were a lot of people. You're hardly alone.

Annie: Do you believe in Justice?

Malcolm: Justice who?

Annie: I mean, don't you think there should be justice?

Malcolm: I think there should be Mojitos on a day like this. *(He steps off L and returns immediately with a flask and two tall glasses on a tray. He sets them down on a table and pours himself a drink.)* Ah! Do you want one?

Annie: I don't drink.

Malcolm: That's odd. Perhaps you weren't murdered. Maybe you just died of dehydration.

Annie: I don't drink alcohol.

Malcolm: Even now? What's it going to do, kill you? *(he laughs, and pours himself another)*

Annie: Do you think Paradise is perfect?

Malcolm: Pretty much.

Annie: But not completely.

Malcolm: Nothing ever is, completely.

Annie: Shouldn't Paradise be?

Malcolm: Never thought about it.

Annie: Why not?

Malcolm: Why?

Annie: You're very frustrating.

Malcolm: Well, you don't have to talk to me if you don't want to. After all, this is Paradise. *(He drains his drink, pours another, picks up his lyre and leaves)*

Annie: But...

A ball of string rolls across the stage, unwinding as it goes. A fourth angel, Red, runs after it, her arms full of string which she bundles as she chases.

Annie: Hey, wait.

The Red angel stops and looks back at her.

Red: What?

Annie: Can you help me?

Red: Help you with what?

Annie: I need some answers.

Red: That's not my job. I'm trying to sort this thing out, in case you haven't noticed.

Annie: But that's just a ball of string.

Red: It's a Time Line. If you need help, call Blue or Grey. They'll send you back. *(She continues in her pursuit of the string)*

Annie: I don't want to go back! *(Shouting)* I just want to have an intelligent discussion with some like-minded people!

Red: *(From off)* Go find some then!
Lights down