

# Players Club's 'Misery' thrills

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The Players Club of Swarthmore continues its 96th season with an impressive production of Stephen King's "Misery." Adapted for the stage by Simon Moore from the original novel and subsequent motion picture, the Players Club's mounting of "Misery" runs through Nov. 4.

"Misery" works remarkably well as a thriller despite the nagging fear that King wrote it after having seen at least two too many of the later films of Joan Crawford: "Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?" and "Straight Jacket." One of the two characters in "Misery" - the romance writer Paul Sheldon - spends as much time in a wheel chair as Miss Crawford did playing Blanche Hudson in "Baby Jane." The play's other character - the suspiciously discharged former nurse, Annie Wilkes - actually wields an ax at one point in the story, not unlike the same Miss Crawford in "Straight Jacket."

And yet, in spite of these disquieting similarities, "Misery" succeeds as an incantation of fear, loathing and terror as well as a revelation of character. King's portrait of Paul Sheldon, a popular and manipulative writer of satisfying if contrived romance novels, could stand as a perfect facsimile of so many successful Americans in all spheres of contemporary society: spoiled beyond contempt for those they presume and pretend to serve, utter failures in their actual relationships despite their ability to create supposedly enivable fictional versions, shocked into sniveling servility when confronted with something or some-

one brutally real.

Annie Wilkes is the reverse side of this bad penny in a debased coinage of humanity. Allowed to fall between the cracks of a fast-paced, hard-edged world, her simplicity warped and twisted into medieval yet undeniably imaginative cruelty, she has become the worst nightmare of anyone hapless enough to fall into her clutches.

"Misery" is not a nice play. It's a rather repellent one, rather like a human trainwreck from which one cannot avert one's eyes because it says an awful lot about all of us as it swings wildly across its field of dreams, some rewarded and some dashed.

The Players Club's production is physically impressive. Joseph Southard's set design is arresting, functional, and sinister. Bruce Nutting's lighting is dramatic and spooky. Dennis Bloh & David Weiler-Stone's sound design is pointedly creepy and deceptively rustic.

Jim Carroll's overall direction, however, lacks the taut tempo and scintillating rhythms the genre demands. There were too many flaccid moments Friday night when stretches of dialogue were delivered one sentence at a time, as though they were separate observations rather than links in a violent chain.

The two-member cast, however, is stupendous. Michael Hagan and Gerre Garrett are a match made in Hell: the former a whining wimp, the latter a witch on wheels. Garrett caught Annie's demented belief in the reality of Sheldon's feverish drivel with dead-eye accuracy, modulating her voice with incredible



"Misery" stars Gerre Garrett and Michael Hagan.

agility so as to tonally turn on a dime from childish pleasure to demonic mayhem. Hagan captured the impotence of a writer out of touch with a world in which he cannot command and conduct the twists and turns of

life's storyline. His fearful frustration was convincing and unnerving.

For ticket information, call 610-328-4271 or visit [www.pctheater.org](http://www.pctheater.org).