

## Psychosis, insects crawl through ACT's visceral 'Bug'

Within a run-down motel room in Oklahoma, the lives of two individuals are unhinged. The room, host to a microcosm of humanity, conveys the duality of fear — the terror of loneliness and of never being alone. Strangers, who take solace in each other's existence, become infested by fear, infected by the knowledge that they aren't ever truly alone. They wage a war with parasitic creatures that may or may not exist, which culminates in a final expression of their insanity. But are they really insane?

The Don Evans Black Box Theatre hosted All College Theatre's production of "Bug" by Tracy Letts on Feb. 23 through 26. Directed by Daniel Student and assistant director John Cherney, junior psychology major, the play took the form of a pointillist painting — the details coalescing to form an incredibly raw, human image.

The use of space in "Bug" established the disconnect between the characters. The distance between Agnes (Sarah Stryker, senior philosophy and fine arts double major) and Peter (Graham Mazie, freshman computer science major) accomplished the initial awkwardness between them, further evidenced in the fact that they do not embrace face to face throughout the play. From cheap wallpaper to a closet full of boxes and clothes to a functioning bathroom, the set exuded a quality of exhausted occupancy. Yet, the symmetry of the room — two lamps, two

doors — maintained the motel room identity.

Blurred, purposely, were the subjects of this picture. Mazie played Peter, a former soldier who is being "hunted" by the government for knowing too much. Mazie was terrifying, as he evolved from the painfully awkward stranger at the beginning of Act I, to the obsessive, homicidal paranoid battling an ambiguous bug infestation with Agnes in Act II. He conveyed this consuming instability in every movement and word, especially in his psychopathic laugh while wrenching a tooth from his mouth.

Stryker played Agnes, a woman who lives in a motel, living in fear of her ex-husband Goss (Dan Loverro, sophomore biology major). Stryker's presence expressed the defeated loneliness of Agnes. Her dishevelment, combined with her tenderness toward Peter, communicated her desperation and vulnerability.

The reintroduction of Goss throughout the play interposed the supposedly real-world threat alongside the fantastical danger devouring Agnes and Peter in the motel room. Loverro's swagger embodied the abusive husband persona. Liz So, junior women's and gender studies major, as Agnes' friend R.C. provided much needed comedic relief throughout the play, delivered with a convincing southern accent. Junior English major Justin Mancini played Dr. Sweet, a psychologist that attempts to convince Agnes that the bugs tormenting her and Peter are a shared delusion. Mancini's robotic manner and slow, calculated movements signaled his perhaps untrustworthy nature.

The uncertainty of who is to be trusted in the play also derived from the relevancy of Peter's rants. Though the idea of the government planting living microchips into its soldiers seems preposterous, the implications of some of Peter's speeches spoke of less fantastical concepts, such as the status quo. He tells Agnes: "It's the way things are. It's the rich get richer, the poor get poorer. They devised a plan to manipulate technology, economics, the media, population control, world religion, to keep things the way they are."

Though much of the play adopted this dark, satirical tone, ACT beautifully achieved the juxtaposition of humorous instances. With Dr. Sweet's dead body lying on the ground, and Agnes and Peter discussing their roles as the government's pawns, a knock is heard at the door: It's the pizza delivery guy. Stryker and Mazie built the intensity of the preceding moments so effectively that this incident's contextual absurdity was magnified tenfold.

Advertisements for "Bug" cautioned audiences of the graphic nature of the play and perhaps, most notably,



Agnes (senior philosophy and fine arts double major Sarah Stryker) and Peter (freshman computer science major Graham Mazie) bond during 'Bug.' (Tom O'Dell / Photo Editor)

the full-frontal nudity. The nudity proved essential to the effect of the play's poignant conclusion. Agnes and Peter are stripped to their most basic, most human forms. Peter unravels the "delusions" of reality, and in a raw expression of humanity, the inverted Adam and Eve turn what was once their infested prison into an inferno of freewill.

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