

THEATRE REVIEW

Animal power

THROUGH THE LEAVES by Franz Xaver Kroetz (Company Theatre). At the Tarragon Extra Space (30 Bridgman). To October 3. 416-531-1827. See Continuing, page 78. Rating: **NNNN**

The **Company Theatre's** production of **Franz Xaver Kroetz's** **Through The Leaves** is absorbing, but nearly unbearable in its intimacy – offering the sick pleasure that comes from reading a stranger's diary.



Martha, a proud but lonely female butcher (the expert **Maria Vacratsis**), keeps a journal to mark, page-by-page, the arc of her relationship with the loutish Otto (**Nicholas Campbell**), who's the kind of

Maria Vacratsis and Nicholas Campbell are bloody good.

rumped figure you see shuffling around Yonge and Dundas in a greasy suit. He comes and goes from Martha's life, as palindromic as his name.

The actors are captivating; a few opening-night slips in pacing only emphasized how naturally they respond to one another. Director **Philip Riccio's** restrained staging puts the performances in the foreground, while **John Thompson's** set beautifully suggests the recessions in their relationship, the foul butcher-shop backroom of the heart. Buzzing neon lights add a harsh, clinical theatricality to the wide playing space.

Kroetz's dialogue is witty and packed with telling details about the two complex characters, the dialogue full of double and treble meanings. Animal and meat imagery abounds.

The play can be disturbing – filled with subtle pain and then not-so-subtle pain, riding through the tension of an unremarkable relationship. It's hard to know when or why the play will end, but when it does, it cuts right to the bone.

NAOMI SKWARNA

NOW

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★★★★ (out of five)

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By Naomi Skwarna

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