



# Paul Gross and Martha Burns face off in Canadian premiere of Bruce Norris's martial drama



Bruce Norris's *Domesticated* is not so much a battle of the sexes as an all-out gender war, explosively staged and masterfully performed by real-life couple Paul Gross and Martha Burns, in a new Company Theatre and Canadian Stage co-production now playing at the Berkeley Street Theatre.

The play opens with politician Bill Pulver (Gross) publicly admitting to having been discovered by the bedside of a prostitute who is now in a coma. His wife Judy (Burns) stands by stoically during his speech, but this moment marks the beginning of the end for them. Fast-forward to a tense scene at the family dinner table and it's clear that the privileged life they took for granted is crumbling around them.

For the entire first act Bill is silenced while women talk: Judy expresses her outrage and disgust at his actions, especially when she discovers that the incident was not the first of its kind. Bill's lawyer (and Judy's best friend) Bobbie (Torri Higginson) also has a lot to say on the subject of Bill and women, as does Bill and Judy's smart-ass daughter Casey (Kelly McNamee) who refuses to let her dad off the hook. Even Bill's mother (Nicola Lipman) puts her two cents in. And if this is not shameful enough for Bill, the unconscious prostitute Becky (Vanessa Smythe) and her mother Jackie (Sarah Dodd) are interviewed on national television by a sensational Talk Show Host (Akosua Amo-Adem).

At this point, the audience might feel sorry for Bill if he never opened his mouth again. However, it all comes out in the second act during a series of encounters between

Bill and various women played by members of the cast—a bartender, a transgender bar patron (Salvatore Antonio), female patients at the clinic where Bill was formerly a respected gynecologist, even his own daughter. The more Bill tries to defend his actions the guiltier he appears, and the further he falls, the more his misogyny is exposed for all to see. It's not a pretty picture.

But in the end it's hard to tell who the real victim is in Norris's view—he leaves it open-ended and it's up to us to decide.

If there has to be a victim it is certainly Bill and Judy's adopted daughter Cassidy (Abigail Pew) who is literally sickened and stuck dumb by her parents' behaviour. The play opens and closes with her giving a presentation showing examples of mating rituals in the wild, including an image of the zombie worm (an example of a species where the microscopic male lives inside the body of the female). The symbolism could not be more effective.

Philip Riccio's evenly paced production keeps the audience engaged throughout the 160-minute run time, while the ensemble delivers strong performances across the board. Don't miss this challenging and darkly comic dissection of monogamy—it's guaranteed to get under your skin.