



LIFE CAN BE A BITCH – SO CAN WORKING IN FASHION RETAIL, AND SO CAN YOUR FAMILY. WAYNE TUNKS REVEALS THE FAMILIAR BITTERNESS AT THE HEART OF HIS LATEST PLAY.

**THE TERM** “dysfunctional family” was first used by therapists in the 1960s. It gained traction as a concept in popular culture in 1987 with the TV show *Married... With Children* and *Roseanne* in 1988, and was spearheaded by unruly talk shows hosted by Phil Donahue and Jerry Springer.

But the dysfunctional family goes back much further. Is there a play by Tennessee Williams without one? Shakespeare, of course, is built in them – particularly in royal households.

Whatever your ethnic or cultural background or class, crazy domestic unrest is something we can all relate to in one way or another and it makes for great theatre. Enter playwright Wayne Tunks, who last year brought us *Fag Boy* and *The Married Guy*.

Set in the western-Sydney suburb of Penrith, *Bitch* offers a snapshot into the life of the Post family. Heading up the clan is matriarch Julie, a casual racist with a drinking and gambling problem. There’s her son Jimmy, a sexual abuse survivor, and daughter Robyn who works in fashion

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retail. Robyn’s family includes 17-year-old twins, Emma (who has a troubled boyfriend, Matt), and gay Clint (who has a boyfriend, Reid). While Robyn is dealing with her nightmare boss, Fiona, Clint is facing his own crisis with gender identity.

“This is a very Australian play,” says Tunks. “That’s what I write. I love that some people will see it as a drama, while others will think it’s a comedy. I see it as a black comedy; an exploration of one very Aussie family and the many mistakes they make. There’s some serious issues at play, but some beautiful light as well. They are characters who love deeply, and there’s a beautiful gay teenage love story.”

As the title suggests, *Bitch* is full of animosity, spite, bitterness and rancor. As we well know, the word can also apply to unpleasant situations or circumstances, and for Tunks, inspiration came from many directions.

“Funnily enough, I was working in fashion retail and everyone was lovely, except the assistant manager who disliked everyone except her own



**BITCH BOYS**  
 ANTON SMILEK AS BAD BOY MATT, NICK SINCLAIR AS CLINT  
 AND JASPER LEE-LINDSAY AS HIS BOYFRIEND REID.

manager. She'd be nice when she was around, but then the rest of the time she'd be a right royal bitch. I was telling someone about her, calling her a bitch, and then felt guilty - but the idea for the play was born. All these characters are called, or call themselves, a bitch. There are so many meanings for one word, plus I get to 'have a bitch' myself, about working in fashion retail!"

Julie the bitchy matriarch is one of the strongest characters and is played by Felicity Burke, a gifted actor and herself a director.

"I've worked with Felicity a number of times," says Tunks. "She appeared in my 16-women opus *Hell Hath No Fury*, where she played an amazing bitch, and she directed my Mardi Gras show *Silvertop Ash*, a play about gay teenage suicide in rural Australia. I knew she had the comedic chops and the ability to understand the drama. I also knew she desperately wanted this role and may have skinned me alive had I not given it to her!"

With themes around family dysfunction, sexual assault, gender identity, porn addiction and the fashion retail industry, *Bitch* has all the ingredients for a delectable night at the theatre.

**MORE:** *Bitch* plays at The Depot Theatre, Marrickville, May 31 to June 17. Go to [www.thedepottheatre.com](http://www.thedepottheatre.com)



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