



# Mamet Drives Deep Into the Urban Jungle with *Edmond*

Also: Not much to like in *As You Like it*

By Elaine Liner

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Rape, robbery, murder, mayhem...something for everyone in Second Thought Theatre's *Edmond*, starring Regan Adair.

Details:  
*Edmond* continues through February 3 at Second Thought Theatre, Addison. Call 972-450-6232.  
*As You Like It* continues through February 10 at WaterTower Theatre, Addison. Call 972-450-6232.

Something terrible befalls the title character in *Edmond* just before David Mamet's terse little play begins. It's not important what that terrible thing is. Mamet, as is his way, never tells. Best guesses—that Edmond's been fired from his big job on Wall Street, that he's had a nervous breakdown, that he has been jilted by his mistress. All these work, but they don't matter. Mamet lurches into storytelling as late in the action as possible—no explanations necessary. It's like walking into an argument just as voices start to rise. As observers, we get swept into the immediate drama without knowing, or really caring, what kicked it all off in the first place. We're just along for the ride, eager to see where it goes.



So we are introduced to 37-year-old Edmond Burke, played by Dallas actor Regan Adair in **Second Thought Theatre's** sublimely disturbing production of Mamet's 80-minute one-act. In the first of 23 short scenes, Edmond sits slumped dejectedly in his trench coat in front of a card-slapping fortune-teller (Rhianna Mack). Here is a man to whom bad things have happened and are

going to keep happening. The fortune-teller tells him he's "living in the wrong milieu." She challenges him to decide if he is the "cause" or "effect" in his life. He leaves her parlor ready to make big changes.

Before the play concludes (with a gentle kiss, strangely), everything has changed for Edmond, though hardly for the better. He is an Everyman fighting urban dehumanization, but an astonishing series of events overtakes whatever plans he might have had. He abandons his wife (Allison Tolman) and then descends, for reasons unknown, into the creepy cesspit of what once was an un-gentrified Times Square. Over one long night in the early 1980s (the pre-ATM era, it's important to know), he is flotsam caught in the swirling eddies of thuggish street life. He visits a bar, a peep show, a massage parlor, a pawn shop and other shady joints—protesting the quoted prices at every turn. He becomes party to beatings, robberies, rape and murder. Punches land hard. Blood flows. Edmond ends up bruised, penniless, disheveled and...enlightened. He also goes to prison, where he at last can relax and do a little personal reflection.

There's a breathless urgency to all of these odd goings-on that is thoroughly engaging and often amusing, though the material itself can be repugnant. Like so much of Mamet's later work—*Edmond* is one of his earliest plays—the language is elegantly jazzy, but the words themselves are foul. More than a few racist

rants erupt from Edmond and other characters. Even the one nice person, a sunny waitress named Glenna (Second Thought newcomer Shauna McLean) who invites Edmond back to her place for sex, turns out to be a raving, unrepentant homophobe.

Edmond is a sad little dude who is driven to the dark side by forces stronger than himself. The shlump-turned-vigilante gimmick is familiar plot fodder, from *Death Wish* and *Taxi Driver*, which both pre-date this play, to the scores of copycats that have come after. But those are movies, and it is one thing to experience the downfall of a troubled man at the safe remove of the cinema and quite another to see it unfold in live theater. *Edmond* is tough to watch. At the small Studio Theatre in Addison, you're watching from about 10 feet away—and that's what makes it one of the great Mamet pieces to experience in person, at least when it's done as beautifully as Second Thought is doing it. Its production is a spare but stylish staging, judiciously directed by René Moreno. It gets in your face and holds nothing back.

A play like this requires a lot of its actors, who have to convince us quickly that their characters are absolutely real so we can feel the impact of their ugliness. Moreno's genius as a director is that his shows rarely allow a phony moment. With *Edmond*, it's almost too authentic. Credit for that also goes to fight choreographer Adrian Cook, who's cooked up some gut-wrenching beatings. When the audience flinches, the fight-maker's done a good job.

Regan Adair, who recently gamboled with goofy abandon as upper-class twit Bertie Wooster in *Right Ho, Jeeves* at Stage West and Contemporary Theatre of Dallas, lets his handsome features slacken and his eyes go steely-dark as Edmond Burke. He's an emasculated wimp in the early scenes. Then he makes the treacherous turn to Edmond's depraved side when he picks up Glenna, seduces her and then hectors her to admit she's not the actress she imagines she is. Few actors are so adept at being "in the moment" as Adair, who has that rare ability to make every line—even Mamet's most oblique snips of conversation—sound natural and spontaneous.

Matching Adair's intensity note for note are ensemble members Tolman, Mack, McLean, Marco Rodriguez (playing several roles, including a street preacher and a three-card Monte dealer), Mark Oristano, Elias Taylorson, David Meglino and Natalie Young. Newcomers Joshua Bridgewater and David Jeremiah make strong impressions in small roles that require maximum impact.

Second Thought Theatre, founded a few years ago by a group of talented and ambitious Baylor drama grads, has been floundering lately with weak scripts, unfocused directors and so-so casts. Now they're back in top form with *Edmond*, the company's best production since last year's *Lawrence and Holloman*. What a fine, fearsome way to begin the new year.

As I'd like it, Shakespeare's *As You Like It* would run at least an hour shorter and be many times better executed than the sad production currently dragging around the stage at Addison's **WaterTower Theatre**. Find me any theatergoer clamoring for Shakespeare comedies that go past 11:00. Nobody wants to sit through five acts of anything with only one intermission. Really, who wants to see any Shakespeare at all, unless it's for extra credit or it's in the park in the summer where you can eat snacks and drown your boredom with hard lemonade?

Why WaterTower, which usually stacks its season with contemporary comedies, a musical or two and maybe a socially relevant drama that was once a modest Broadway hit, would resort to the Bard is beyond comprehension. This is not the place for the classics. This is the place for middlebrow entertainments that go over with suburbanites.

For *As You Like It*, the first time WaterTower has staged any Shakespeare, the theater has worked with the drama department at Southern Methodist University. Besides providing cheap labor, this means the cast is full of young, pretty faces who speak Shakespeare's words with little regard to volume or crispness of diction. Mush-mouthiness prevails. Even the non-students have trouble with the language, particularly

Dan Forsythe as Orlando. "I am the youngesht shon of Shir Roland DuBoish," he shaysh.

Sho it goesh. Adding to the swampiness of the whole shebang, director Terry Martin has set the play in southern Louisiana in the 1950s. What this provides in the context of the thing, besides ladies' costumes that lean to circle skirts and pointy bras, isn't clear. It makes about as much sense as time-shifting *As You Like It* to ancient Egypt or onto the Starship Enterprise.

There is only one actor who knows what he's doing in this otherwise lethargic production. Sean Hennigan makes his entrance into the Forest of Arden (in this case, a misty cypress grove) as Jaques at approximately 9:05 p.m. and delivers the play's best-known speech: "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players...."

Hennigan's rich voice fills the theater and his performance of the brilliant 28-line rumination on the seven stages of man's life is heavenly. But his role affords scant stage time and without him, the rest goes on sans humor, sans romance, sans spark, sans everything.