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Review: Edmond, presented by Second Thought Theatre

January 30th, 2008 by [Jerome Weeks](#) · [No Comments](#)

Regan Adair in David Mamet's "Edmond," presented by Second Thought Theatre

David Mamet's *Edmond* is one of his weaker, less-interesting dramas. It's a very linear and unsurprising *Rake's*

Progress, a story of masculine self-destruction. The playwright's best works, in contrast, are often *non-linear* and *surprising* dramas of masculine self-destruction.

But the consciously sordid, 80-minute-long *Edmond* has been given a superlative production by [Second Thought Theatre](#), under the direction of Rene Moreno: somber, chilling, noir-ish. In fact, this may be Mr. Moreno's smartest production — as crisp as the play is bleak.

Edmond Burke — yes, like the British political theorist — is a businessman told by a fortune-teller that he's not "where he belongs," a statement that triggers long-standing resentments against his respectable life. He ditches his wife, meets a racist man at a bar who tells him that white, middle-class men like themselves need ways to escape all the pressure and re-discover their masculinity (which seems to entail sex, power, adventure, religion or "self-destruction"). This starts Edmond on his rampage: getting thrown out of a brothel, getting robbed, murdering a black pimp (complete with exultant racial slurs), raping a woman, ending up in prison.

Echoing Burke's ideas of freedom and government, *Edmond* is the story of a man without a moral center who shrugs off any social controls and sinks to his worst, murderous impulses. Annoyingly — a touch comically, considering Burke's support of the free market — these selfish impulses include even miserliness: Edmond constantly haggles over the price for sex, often raging "It's too much!" to hookers and pimps. (This dates the play a bit — Edmond never has enough cash. Where's an ATM when a guy on a serious bender needs one?).

Mamet does toy with issues of destiny and free will. The play opens with the tarot reading and ends with Edmond quoting Hamlet that there's "a destiny that shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we will" — a statement that, given his pathetic lack of self-knowledge, sounds more like an attempted excuse (Stuart Gordon's 2005 [film version](#) underlines this "fatedness" by repeatedly having the number 115 show up).

But in the theater, character is fate: Edmond concludes that what we fear is often what we secretly want. That is, he tries to escape the dead-end trap of his life, strives for what he thinks of as his true self but only creates another dead-end trap for himself. In a typical, cackling, Mametesque irony, prison is precisely where Edmond "belongs," what he really wants: being helpless, faceless, sodomized by his black cellmate, fitting turnabout for his racial murder of the pimp.

This dime-store psychology isn't what's wrong with *Edmond*. After all, linking real estate salesmen to con artists, as Mamet does in *Glengarry Glen Ross*, isn't the most original insight, either. The fault is in the narrative's grim, straight-line predictability: Once Edmond starts on his downward spiral, we know precisely where he's headed. Unlike *Glengarry* or *Speed-the-Plow* or *American Buffalo*, the play could wrap up after the fourth or fifth scene and we wouldn't miss much — just the inevitable extension of what's already happened.

Mercifully, there's more to the Second Thought production. In the title role, Regan Adair starts off rather one-note zombie-ish but there's an intelligent gleam to his eyes that suggests simmering menace, and when the violence comes, he is creepily believable. Mr. Adair has probably long been embarrassed by the gushing mash notes penned for him by one local reviewer, but age has given him some weight and some lines — some character, in short, and that's all to the good. To his credit, Edmond is the latest in a line of seedy or powerful-troubled characters he's taken on (as in *Killer Joe*) — almost as if to escape any pretty boy stigma.

The rest of the cast, taking on several roles each, acquit themselves well — from Mark Oristano's dead-eyed threat as various bouncers, cops and pawnbrokers to David Jeremiah as Edmond's sympatico cellmate and Shauna McLean as his waitress-victim. No individual artist is credited in the program with the starkly modern set design, but it's one of the sharpest aspects of the show: simple, all black-and-white and moodily lit by a bank of overhead pendant lamps. Indeed, the only wrong note in the entire, exemplary effort is Heath Gage's musical backdrop — a lot of light, poppish even Latin-tinged jazz when *Edmond* cries out for big-city Chicago blues.

Or icy minimalism — like its title character.

Edmond, presented by Second Thought Theatre through February 3 at the [Water Tower Theatre](#) in Addison.

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