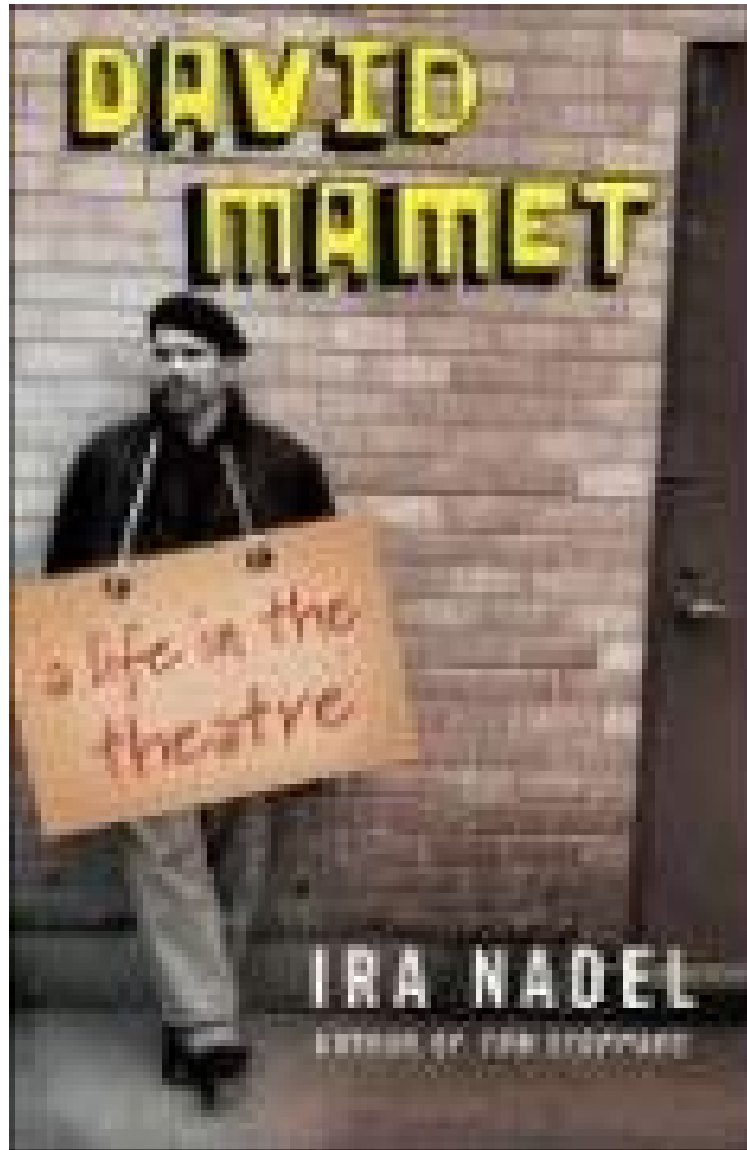


[Download free ebook] David Mamet: A Life in the Theatre

David Mamet: A Life in the Theatre

Ira Nadel

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#2319285 in Books 2008-04-13 2008-02-05 Original language: English PDF # 1 9.26 x 1.10 x 6.66l, 1.13
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Ira Nadel : David Mamet: A Life in the Theatre before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised David Mamet: A Life in the Theatre:

8 of 9 people found the following review helpful. Textual Verbosity in Chicago By www.maninchair.com I was a David Mamet fanatic in high school. I had every play, essay, and acting text he wrote and would often read scenes with my friends from his most obscure works, like The Shawl (how did I not get beat up in high school?). Later in life, a monologue from his play, Squirrels, was at the forefront of my auditioning repertoire. As an actor, I was fascinated

with the amount of information his scripts didn't give me, forcing me to fill in the blanks. As a reviewer of Squirrels once noted of Mamet's unique style, "The words of the script are read to establish the idea of what is happening. Then, they go to work on the sub-text that lies below the written word." I've recently been wading my way through Ira Nadel's just-released biography of Mamet called *David Mamet: A Life in the Theatre*, and find that even I am not enough of a Mamet-phile to appreciate the minutia of biographical facts which fill its covers--down to the street addresses of Mamet's various dwellings. The writing has a very academic feel to it, as though I am reading someone's doctoral thesis on the playwright. Were I directing a Mamet play, or doing research on him for some other reason, the book would be invaluable. A page turner, it is not. The book begins, as most biographies do, detailing Mamet's childhood in East Hyde Park, Chicago, tracing the origins of his strong work ethic, love of language and no-nonsense personality to the upwardly mobile aspirations of his parents, specifically his father, Bernie, a labor lawyer who drilled into Mamet at a young age that he'd better "be good at something," and who trained him daily to improve his awareness of language. We follow Mamet through the various phases of his theatre-centered life--ushering at Off-Broadway's *The Fantasticks*, dabbling unsuccessfully in acting, and discovering his true talent as a writer, director, acting teacher and eventually moving into screen writing. What stands out to me as his most important roles, which will likely leave the largest footprint on the theatre landscape is his role as teacher--of acting, writing, directing--and his essays about what a life in the theatre should be. He earned the nickname "Teach" amongst his poker-playing buddies in the early 70s, which eventually became a character in his Pulitzer-Prize-winning play, *American Buffalo*. Among the most fascinating journeys the book lays out is the organic development of Mamet's style of writing and acting--sparse and at its extreme almost zombie-like--the rhythm of which is instantly recognizable as his. He began his studies in Sanford Meisner's Neighborhood Theatre Playhouse, and continued to mold the ideas originated by Stanislavsky and revised by Stella Adler until he had created his own unique style, in which action reins supreme, and the text of the play is merely a framework to express what the characters want. "Good drama," he writes, "has no stage directions." We increase our enjoyment and involvement by the absence of the descriptive. The best productions occur in the mind of the audience; consequently, the best acting is straight up, emotionless, and clipped. "From his *Bambi vs. Godzilla*, *On the Nature, Purpose and Practice of the Movie Business*, Mamet says the three "magic questions" in writing any scene are Who wants what from whom? What happens if they don't get it? and Why now? Nadel's style of writing, like his subject's, is very down-to-business. There is a wealth of information contained in these nearly three hundred pages. Unlike his subject, however, there is very little humor along the way. I was delighted to find this little anecdote about a third of the way in, which at least made me chuckle on the shuttle from JFK into the City. "One evening, [David] Mamet left the theatre unhappy with his work.... A woman came up to him and said 'God Bless you: You are the Savior of the American Theatre. I have been to see your play six times.' I cheered up and thanked her," Mamet writes, and told her 'she had given me hope and that, yes, I, was going to go home and write. I thanked her again.' 'Not at all, Mr. Durang,' she replied." Nadel places two Mamet quotes on the page between the dedication and the introduction to the book. One of them, from Mamet's *A Life in the Theatre* sums up what the reader is about to get him/herself into: Robert: How do you want it? John: Give it to me straight. That's exactly what you get in Nadel's book: just the facts. If you want more than that, pick up a copy of *American Buffalo*, or *Glengarry Glenn Ross*, or *The Duck Variations*. Mamet's life is in there too, and it's probably a more interesting read. 5 of 8 people found the following review helpful. As Mamet might put it...By NYScriver...What a f***in' waste of time. Whether you're a fan of Mamet's or---like me---find Big Dave an increasingly sententious, contentious, and pretentious self-parody, there's one thing I hope we'll agree on: Nadel's biography is to be avoided. How did a book this badly written, this badly edited, this badly designed make its way into print? Factual errors abound and typos hover like flies over carrion. Combine these mechanical flaws with a steadfastly uncritical attitude to the book's subject and the dreariest sort of academic prose and you've got something that's only taking up space on the shelves. The contents are poorly organized, chronologically confusing and sometimes downright unintelligible. Mamet's worth a biography, all right, but this ain't the one.

Author, essayist, playwright, and screenwriter, David Mamet is often referred to as the quintessential American writer. His works are known for their clever and terse dialogue and have earned him a Pulitzer Prize for *Glengarry Glen Ross* and Oscar nominations for *House of Games* as well as *The Spanish Prisoner*, *Wag the Dog*, and *The Verdict*. This comprehensive biography uses extensive theater and film archives to reveal in detail his ideas on writing--including the genesis for many of his plays--acting, and directing. Beginning with his Chicago origins, the work goes on to cover his relationship to Judaism, his reputation for machismo, as well as discussions of and excerpts from early plays and stories that have never before been referenced in print. Also included are interviews with key actors and directors such as William H. Macy, Mike Nussbaum, Robert Brustein, and Neil Pepe.

"Nadel aims high....synching up the full range of Mamet's work with his closely guarded personal affairs. It helps that the raw material on both counts is memorably vivid."--*The New York Times Book* "This is compelling stuff--front row seats to the life of one of America's most influential playwrights. Mamet moves me and makes me jealous like

few other writers can; this little jewel of a biography helps me appreciate the man as much as the work. An essential read."Neil LaBute, Writer/Director"I worked on more than twenty of David Mamet's plays, and I still learned a lot.Ira Nadel did his #%*\$ homework."--Gregory Mosher, Director, Arts Initiative,Columbia UniversityDrawing upon David Mamets essays, interviews, and literary works, as well as the recollections of actors and directors with whom this seminal has worked, Ira Nadel has written a thoughtful, compelling, and often gritty account of the life and career of one of the 20th centurys most gifted writers. Nadel's biography skillfully juxtaposes Mamets life in Chicago and Vermont with the machismo, marginality, and Jewish identity that inform Mamets life and work.Leslie Kane, Emeritus Professor of English, Westfield State College and author Weasels and Wiseman: Ethics and Ethnicity in the Work of David Mamet"A fascinating biography of one of America's greatest living playwrights. A must read for anyone interested in the theatre."--Amanda Foreman, author of the Whitbread-award winning Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire"Nadel's style of writing, like his subjects, is very down-to-business. There is a wealth of information contained in these nearly three hundred pages."--Man in Chair