



French Stewart and Steve Apostolina play friends scheming to sell an edition of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* in Apostolina's *Forever Bound*.

Kathy Flynn

***Forever Bound*: Ultimately, a Face-off Between Good and Evil**

DEBORAH KLUGMAN | MAY 21, 2018 | 12:55PM

Steve Apostolina's dark and thoughtful dramedy, *Forever Bound*, starts out as two disparate narratives that come together in an intense, disquieting way. Commencing as a wry comedy about a nebbish whose life is on the downturn, it culminates as a riveting face-off between good and evil, and highlights just how hard it can be to sever the formidable bonds that bind us to our past.

Edmund (French Stewart) is a book scout, meaning he searches for rare or coveted books at garage sales and thrift stores and resells them at an inflated price. But business has not been good, and Edmund is now being hounded by creditors and facing eviction from his roach-ridden apartment. He's in anxious retreat from the world when his buddy Shep (played by Apostolina) pays him a visit and suggests ripping off a wealthy collector of a valuable edition of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*. Its proceeds, Shep argues, will enable Edmund to survive until a more legitimate opportunity comes along. As the reluctant and natively law-abiding Edmund deliberates on his problems, the scenario drastically shifts, and a spotlight comes up on a cowed but lovely and intelligent young woman (Emily Goss) and a supercilious older man (Rob Nagle) tutoring her in the nuances of classic literature. When the girl complains that she's tired and needs a break, the man, with brisk overbearing, references her parents, who, he claims, have entrusted her welfare to him.

Immediately you realize there's something very wrong with this picture—but just what it is and how it connects to Edmund and his problems aren't at first apparent. When the reveal does come, it's a shocker that plays out in a gripping manner. Ultimately both Edmund and the girl, who calls herself Rosalind, must test the limits of their courage and their morality.



Rob Nagle plays an overbearing man trying to school a young woman (Emily Goss) in the nuances of classic literature.

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Directed by Anne Hearn Tobolowsky, *Forever Bound* is a solid character-driven play, its humor underscored by a gifted Stewart at the top of his game. His sad-sack bookseller gleans the essence of what it's like to be a poor but principled person in a world with no time for "losers." Apostolina, as a guy ready and willing to cut ethical corners, makes for an apt foil.

But as entertaining as this pair's scenes are together, the play really only ignites when the focus shifts away from their schtick to the depiction of testosterone-driven obsession and its evil consequences, and to just how far good people are willing to go to destroy it.

As Rosalind, Goss gives an illuminating portrayal. Nagle, a staple of the L.A. theater scene who seems constitutionally incapable of ever rendering a bad performance, is mesmerizing as the villain.

It's worth mentioning that the text is riven with quotes from Shakespeare, Coleridge, Whitman and the like, an agreeable add-on in a contemporary play. The bitterly ironic title is drawn from Helena's speech in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

GO! *Atwater Village Theatre, 3269 Casitas Ave., Atwater Village; Fri.-Sat., 8 p.m.; Sun., 2 p.m.; Mon., 8 p.m.; through June 16. plays411.com/foreverbound.*