

Written in a warm, wide-ranging manner, Rodríguez also is sure-footed in uniting the political queer stances taken by British postpunk musicians and how these ignited a flame of resistance, passion, and drive in Southern California Latinx queer working-class communities. Hands across the water, a kiss across an ocean, the lips that touch here in this book are ones devoted to enacting joyful resistance. Tender, wry, delicate, and rich, *A Kiss across the Ocean* is a love letter to the theatrically potent musical and visual gestures of the artists and bands of the British postpunk scene that made a difference in the mid-1980s and continue to do so today, even when people may have forgotten some of the bands' names.

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Middle Eastern American Theatre: Communities, Cultures, and Artists

By Michael Malek Najjar. *Critical Companions*. London and New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021, pp. xvi + 237, 5 illustrations. \$115 cloth, \$39.95 paper, \$35.95 e-book.

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With an impressive degree of nuance, Michael Malek Najjar's *Middle Eastern American Theatre: Communities, Cultures, and Artists* offers a timely, far-reaching study of an emerging genre of American theatre repeatedly sidelined by mainstream theatre institutions. Middle Eastern American theatre, as delineated by Najjar, "is in the same state that other great theatre communities (such as African American, Asian American, Latinx, and Native American) were in decades ago when they, too, were trying to create an entirely new genre" (xv). *Middle Eastern American Theatre's* aim is to give voice to the playwrights and theatre makers whose body of works evinces the diasporic, liminal space in which Middle Eastern Americans find their lives. For Najjar, all the Americas, not only the United States, fall within the scope of the word "American." Taking his cue from this definition, Najjar has selected for study a variety of representative plays from the rich multiplicity of the Middle Eastern American theatre corpus; one should note, however, as Najjar himself apprises us, that the focus of the volume is on North America.

Throughout the book, the capaciousness and vitality of Middle Eastern American theatre depicted in dramatic and comedic forms serve as reminders of the urgent "need for positive action, creative solutions, and dialogue to solve the intractable problems facing the Middle East" (xiv). This prompt acquires a high-priority significance as Middle Eastern American artists come "from many nations

and countless communities that are sometimes in direct conflict with one another. These communities have traditions that are hundreds, if not thousands, of years old. . . The contemporary Middle East is suffering through changes that began with colonialism and religious conflict hundreds of years in the making” (xiv). What makes Najjar’s endeavor particularly invaluable is that numerous plays under study in his book “are either unpublished, have never been produced, or have only had staged readings. This points to the fact that the American theatre establishment has been less-than-receptive to these works, and that these artists are often working against great odds to stage their productions” (40). In the face of these hurdles, *Middle Eastern American Theatre* creates a shared space for the works of these marginalized artists.

Aside from a theoretical and historical Introduction, Najjar’s text comprises eight chapters addressing a wide range of themes, namely, return to the homeland, persecution, diaspora, reimagination of the homeland, and conflict often found in the Middle Eastern American theatre. Titled “Polyculturalism, Transnationalism, and Diaspora,” the Introduction grapples with the contentious umbrella concept of “the Middle East.” Highlighting the Eurocentric origins of the term, Najjar, from the outset, clarifies that merely nation-state identification such as Egyptian, Turkish, Iranian, or Iraqi cannot provide a sole definition of Middle Easterners. To avoid a reductive, homogenous category eliding the complexity of the Middle Eastern American population, it is imperative that one takes into account scores of diverse factors including ethnicity and religion to gain a finer and deeper sense of what it means to be a member of these artistic communities.

Aligned with the ultimate purpose of empowering Middle Eastern American communities, Chapter 1 gives us a much-needed introduction to major companies dedicated to Middle Eastern American theatre. In so doing, Najjar recounts the historical background and financial struggles of companies such as the nonprofit Alliance for Jewish Theatre, the Iranian diasporic Darvag Theater Group, and the San Francisco Bay Area Golden Thread Productions, recognized as the first American theatre company devoted to the Middle East. Further to ensure his readers grasp the substantial contributions of Middle Eastern American theatre companies, Najjar ends this chapter by paying homage to Reza Abdoh (1963–95), the Iranian-born theatre maker and founder of Dar A Luz company, whose site-specific productions and film works have received extraordinary critical acclaim.

The remaining chapters, except for the penultimate and concluding ones centered on the current and past conditions of Middle Eastern American theatre, scrutinize plays based on their overall themes. Return to the homeland plays examined in Chapter 2, for instance, portray characters, typically those who belong to second- or third-generation American families, that undergo an intricate, mystifying experience when they visit their ancestors’ countries of birth. Najjar foregrounds the liminality of these plays by casting light on the dynamic of artistic results born out of exigent and arduous challenges—rooted in racialization in America and failure to reach full acceptance in their homelands—with which Middle Eastern American playwrights contend: “The irony of this situation is that the lack of acceptance they feel fuels their artistic production. In other words, they wrote the plays they wrote *because of* and not *despite* their experiences overseas” (35).

Broaching the topic of rising xenophobia and its specific forms of antisemitism and Arabophobia in the current nativist political climate, Najjar designates persecution plays in Chapter 3 as works that explore these issues in relation to governmental and societal persecutions. *Back of the Throat* (2005) by the playwright Yusef El Guindi is one such play produced in the post-9/11 era. In Chapter 4, Najjar specifies that diaspora plays, “[l]ike the previous persecution plays . . . deal with many complicated issues, but they are more personal and less about the outside persecution they feel around them (though many have this aspect as well)” (95). From plays set in the homeland discussed in Chapter 5, which recreate and reimagine the lost country of origin and attend to troubles stemming from occupation and colonialism, to conflict plays analyzed in Chapter 6, filled with stories concerning refugee crises and civil wars, it is possible, as observed by Najjar, to notice a pattern gesturing toward the fact that Middle Eastern American theatre is living through a renaissance of sorts as more plays and companies turn their attention to Middle Eastern American communities.

Through a shift of focus from the works of playwrights to the critical perspectives of influential directors in an interview format, Najjar concludes his book with a constructive dialogue shaped around the development of artistic creation and pivotal issues faced by the Middle Eastern theatre. Via its astute intervention in the aesthetic discourse of Middle Eastern communities in the Americas, Najjar’s text felicitously enriches the burgeoning scholarship of Middle Eastern American theatre.

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Speculative Enterprise: Public Theaters and Financial Markets in London, 1688–1763

By Mattie Burkert. Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2021; pp. ix + 284, 7 illustrations. \$95.00 cloth, \$39.50 paper, \$29.50 e-book.

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Following the 1688 revolution, England experienced an accelerated move toward financial capitalism. In the decades after William and Mary’s accession, the country’s economy came increasingly to rely on credit-based currencies, introducing unprecedented levels of risk, chance, and speculation into the nation’s already fragile financial system. In her excellent book *Speculative Enterprise: Public Theaters and Financial Markets in London, 1688–1763*, Mattie Burkert argues that many people in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries came to understand this new and fast-changing financial environment through that other risky venture