

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

of London life: the public theatre. Although earlier scholarship has tended to think of the patent companies that were established by Charles II in 1660 as operating on an older model of aristocratic patronage, in which the interests of the nobility governed policy decisions and economic strategies, in fact, Burkert demonstrates, the theatres of the long eighteenth century were first and foremost profit-driven ventures, complete with boards of shareholders who oversaw—and often determined—management decisions. Burkert productively compares these institutions to other types of joint-stock venture, such as the East India Company or the South Sea Company, observing that “the patent theaters of the early eighteenth century were financial operations licensed and backed by the government in which private investors could ‘adventure’ for a profit” (13).

This “figurative relay between financial and theatrical markets” Burkert terms the “theater–finance nexus” (4), which, she contends, constitutes a discursive space—an emerging public sphere—in which individuals could come together to debate the pressing economic issues of the day. Central to Burkert’s thesis is that the theatre, as a site that consolidates heterogeneous groups into theatre audiences for the shared endeavor of watching a play, works to produce what Michael Warner terms a “counterpublic,” one that challenges standard conceptions of the bourgeois public sphere, as exemplified by Jürgen Habermas’s classic account of coffeehouse periodical culture. These counterpublics butt up against the kinds of Enlightenment debate typically championed by Joseph Addison and Richard Steele in their periodicals *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*; for Burkert, the theatre–finance nexus thus has “the potential to be counterpublic-forming” precisely because it “controvert[s] the notion of rationality as the defining feature of public life” (7) that such publications adumbrate.

The book is in two parts that each concentrate on the theatre’s engagement with a particular financial crisis, bridged by an “Interlude.” Part I, “The Great Recoinage, 1695–1698,” examines how the theatre mobilized the debates and discourses surrounding the currency depreciation of the mid-1690s to undertake “concurrent debates about dramatic genres and taste” (14) following the division of the United Company. In Chapter 1, Burkert reads Colley Cibber’s first play, *Love’s Last Shift* (1696), not as the prototypical sentimental comedy of earlier criticism but rather as a “self-conscious exploration of the changing function of comedy in post-1688 society” (15). Through a compelling reading of the plotlines of *Young Worthy* and *Sir Novelty Fashion*—the part played by Cibber himself—Burkert shows how the play articulates a critique of contemporary obsessions with reform and novelty through the language of financial innovation to ask searching questions about his society’s fundamental problems. Chapter 2 then expands the scope of this argument by examining a range of prologues and epilogues printed between 1695 and 1697 that theorize the relationship among economic value, public opinion, and the dramatic repertory. In Chapter 3, which serves as the connecting “Interlude” between the chapters covering the recoinage of the mid-1690s and those that cover the later crisis of the South Sea Bubble in 1720, Burkert turns to the works of the “Playwright-Adventurer” Susanna Centlivre, including *The Gamester* (1705), *The Busie Body* (1709), *A Bold Stroke for a Wife* (1718), and her poem *A Woman’s Case* (1720). Whereas Burkert shows how the theatre–finance nexus functioned “as a privileged sphere” (17) for women like Centlivre to act as independent economic agents, the chapter also demonstrates how Centlivre’s plays themselves

thematize the notion that such public-forming sites can all too easily be co-opted for private interests at the expense of the public good.

Part II comprises two chapters that investigate how the theatre–finance nexus responded to a financial crisis that has since come to define modern ideas of speculative enterprise: the South Sea Bubble (1720–2). Chapter 4 covers Richard Steele’s short-lived periodical *The Theatre*, which ran for three months in the wake of the bubble in 1720, as well as his play *The Conscious Lovers* (1722). In a fascinating excavation of Steele’s reflections on the bubble and its aftermath, Burkert shows how his work, like Centlivre’s, ultimately gives “voice to the concern that elites could use new market structures and dynamics to hijack what appeared to be middling-class sentiments” (123). The book concludes by returning to Cibber and a late comedy, *The Refusal; or, The Ladies Philosophy* (1721), to show how another writer with middling-class sympathies used his position within the theatre to “theoriz[e] the relationship between changing class structures, speculative investment, and public opinion” (156). Burkert ends with a brief coda that discusses the Half-Price Riots of the 1760s, showing how the theatre–finance nexus persisted into the second half of the century.

Burkert’s thesis is highly compelling, and I cannot do justice here to the erudition and deftness of her argumentation and analysis. Through her careful contextualization of the plays and other works within the history of financial crises, she overturns long-held critical assumptions about, among other things, sentimental comedy and its relationship to the emergent middling class. This stimulating account shows how the early eighteenth-century theatre responded to the economic crises that so materially determined its own opportunities for success and failure. The book will prove an extremely valuable contribution to scholars working on the theatre history of the period, as well as on cultural representations of, and engagements with, finance and economics in the early eighteenth century.

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The Theatre of Nuclear Science: Weapons, Power, and the Scientists behind it All

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Jeanne Tiehen’s *The Theatre of Nuclear Science: Weapons, Power, and the Scientists behind it All* theoretically investigates theatrical representations of nuclear science.