# Culture Magazine

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## Jordan's Islamic Culture

## Finding Portugese Food in San Jose

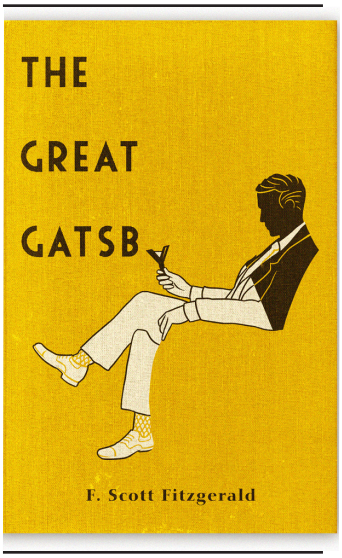
## SJSU's Failed Attempt to Bring Gatsby to the Stage

# The Play That Never Roared

**By Candice Angeloo**

It was opening night for the theatre department at San José State University, and at 7pm the crimson curtains would be pulled back. The story line of one of my favorite books, The Great Gatsby, would be brought to life, so I thought.

I will admit my expectations for this play were high. Last spring, I sat in the same theatre (due to a class assignment) wishing I was eating Japanese barbeque; however, to my surprise, I left the play feeling inspired. Questioning, could I be a play writer? The aspiration quickly drifted, but the inspirational high that I was on due to the actors' renown performances didn't. *Zoot Suit* was produced by Broadway director, Luis Valdez, and was the finest production I had ever seen. The play told the story of Henry Reyna and his gang, who were being tried for The Sleepy Lagoon murder in 1942. Everything about the play was impeccable. The simple setting allowed the actors to change scenes flawlessly, the actors were engaging and energetic, and the costuming took me back to the 1940s in Los Angeles, where the men wore high-waisted dress pants and long coats with large shoulder pads, amidst the developing skyscrapers of the tenacious city. That being said, when I went to see *The Great Gatsby*, I thought I was again going to leave the SJSU theatre feeling inspired and enthused.




*The Great Gatsby* had the potential to be just as great as *Zoot Suit*. All of the elements were, for the most part, the same. The only difference was that I went to see *The Great Gatsby* for pleasure. It was again opening night, most of the same main actors filled the stage, and the setting, which consisted of stairs and white curtains illuminated by dreamy blue and purple lights was exquisite. As the clock neared 7pm, the theatre began to quiet. The next thing I knew Nick Carraway, the book's narrator, was opening the play with his explanation of how he, once again, found himself in the presence of Tom and Daisy Buchanan. For the first five minutes of the play I could barley hear what brought Nick to East Egg. Of course, I already knew the circumstances, but I felt concerned for people in the audience who had possibly never read the book.

As I patiently sat in my seat waiting for the faint voice of Nick Carraway to finish his lines, disappointment washed over me. Instead of being dressed in costumes with sequins, rhinestones, and fringe, the actors were dressed in dingy moth-eaten dresses. The actors looked like they were wearing thrift store finds, which would have been fine if the actors had at least been dressed in the appropriate decade. Like a setting, a major part of bringing a story to life includes good costuming, especially if the play is set in a different era. Not only were the costumes disappointing, the actors were as well. Besides Daisy, who embodied exactly what "a stupid little fool" should be, there was absolutely no energy on stage, and being that I had seen most of the individuals act before, I was dumbfounded. The actor who played Daisy, on the other hand, did an excellent job. Her mannerisms were dainty and elegant, and she portrayed Daisy exactly the way I pictured her every time I've read the novel. Daisy brought to life all of the American conventions Fitzgerald aimed to critique.

However, the production missed the point: that Fitzgerald wrote the *The Great Gatsby* in order to expose the fallacies of the American Dream, an ideal which states that every individual has the same opportunity for success no matter what circumstances they were born into. Fitzgerald portrayed this by writing his characters as deceptive individuals who would do anything to get ahead, which included lying, cheating, and partaking in illegal activities. Fitzgerald put a lot of faith in his readers, and he expected them to come to conclusions about relationships and events on their own. Take the relationship between Nick and Jordan, Daisy's friend. In the novel, their relationship is implied, however;

the director of the play wanted it to be more explicit. Because of this, many of the scenes where the actors showed affection toward each other were distasteful. During the scene where Nick and Tom visit with Myrtle and her sister in New York, there were extra characters, which consisted of a man and woman groping each other on a couch. It was completely overdone, and didn't add any meaning to the scene. Relationships between characters could have been portrayed in a better way that didn't have to include an actor spreading her legs around another actor.

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Unlike the poorly done New York apartment scene, a scene that was done extremely well was the murder of Myrtle. From the beginning, I wondered how the director was going to pull it off because of course, cars simply cannot fit on a stage. Instead, once again, they used lighting to their advantage. Before I knew it, Myrtle was screaming as a blazing light projected over her body, and she was dead. It was a dramatic scene, as it should be, and the lights went out leaving the hairs on my neck standing. Even though this scene was done well, if the producer was going to make anything clearer for the audience, it should have been the fact that Daisy was driving the car when Myrtle died, and Gatsby was not. If I had not read the book, making this fact ambiguous would have made me leave the play feeling confused and having to Google the plot of *The Great Gatsby*. After all, the fact that Daisy is never held accountable for Myrtle's murder is the betrayal that leaves Nick devastated.

At the end of the play, Nick bumps into Tom and Daisy on the streets of New York. In this added scene, Nick expresses his disgust with them for not taking responsibility for their actions and hiding behind their money. Not only did this scene characterize Tom and Daisy further, it also showed the power that comes with being grossly rich. This scene again, under minds the American Dream, and implies that the rich will always get away with incidents that the poor couldn't. Although other added scenes made by the director could be easily questioned, this scene was logical and complimented the play's ending.

The added scene between Tom, Daisy, and Nick did not compensate for the other terrible aspects of the play. Frankly, I am still pissed off for wasting $25 and a Friday night. I'm not quite sure why the same actors couldn't pull this play off. After the curtains closed, I sat in my seat wondering. Was it because the director was different? Did the actors focus too much on getting the themes in the book across? Or, were they simply uninterested in the story line of *The Great Gatsby*? As for people who had never read *The Great Gatsby* and maybe didn't have any expectations, I still wouldn't be surprised if they asked for their money back. If I hadn't gotten a student discount, I would have. The SJSU theatre failed to recreate the roaring 20s in almost every aspect.

# Eating in Little Portuga

By Emily Barcelos

Anthony Bourdain said, “Food is everything we are. It’s an extension of nationalist feeling, ethnic feeling, your personal history, your province, your region, your tribe, your grandma.” Speaking as someone from the Azores islands, nine Portuguese islands in the middle of the Atlantic so tiny that they’re specks on a world map if they even show up at all, this rings so true to me. And yet, when my boyfriend James, as American as they come, asked me what Azorean food was like, I couldn’t actually reply. It was like asking what air tastes like; there are no words for it because it’s always there. You don’t have to think about it. It just *is*. So, I decided to show him what it is, and in the process learn to describe it for myself.

James and I both grew up in San Jose, but we have a little bit of an inverse Uptown Girl dynamic: I grew up in East San Jose, while he’s from the more affluent Alameda. Before we started dating, he had one Portuguese friend. Me? I spent my childhood in Little Portugal. James never heard of it before he started dating me.

We leave my side of town and start driving down Alum Rock Avenue. I’m distracted by pointing out where three of the four Portuguese bakeries in San Jose used to be: Five Star Bakery was across the street from Fast Bicycle, Faial Bakery was on Alum Rock and Jose Figueres, and Padaria Açoreana, along with all the other businesses in the building across the street from the Mexican Heritage Plaza, was kicked out for renovations. The newly renovated and repainted building currently stands empty and covered by graffiti.

Eventually we park in Trade Rite Market’s lot (I shoot down his suggestion to park on the street; even I’ve become a little gentrified on the inside) and make our way inside. He wonders if we’re in the right place, but I explain to him that Trade Rite Market and Bacalhau Grill are actually the same business. The former is the front of the shop, and its cramped shelves are stuffed with Portuguese, Azorean, and Brazilian imports. I pause at the refrigerated section and gaze longingly at golden wheels of São Jorge cheese, named after and made exclusively on the island where I’m from. They’re labelled with price tags that proclaim that exclusivity to anyone not yet familiar with its creamy sharpness. Generations of my family raised the cows that produced the milk for that cheese. I close my eyes and remember what it was like to go milking the cows with my grandfather, Padrinho Fernandinho: the crisp smell of lush pastures, the tang of sea salt in the air, and even the odor of manure providing an earthy counterpoint.“Hey, that’s got your name on it,” James says, breaking me out of my bucolic visions. He holds up a package of Barcelos linguiça.

“Oh yeah,” I reply, “My dad’s cousins own that company. But even Mãe says that Goulart’s is better.”

James’s ginger-blonde eyebrows furrow together. “Mine?” he asks, but that’s not quite what I said. It’s just as close as he can come to cutting through my accent. I didn’t notice my voice going straight from Californian to Azorean, but he stumbled over it.

“Mãe. It’s Portuguese for mom, remember?”

“Oh, right,” James says, sheepishly. “I’ll remember that.” And he probably will, eventually.

We make our way to the back of the shop to the deli counter that serves as the Bacalhau Grill. Like a good boyfriend dating the daughter of an immigrant family, James *says* he’s game to try anything. So, I order him the most Portuguese thing on the menu: the bacalhau plate. Bacalhau is the Portuguese word for codfish, and it’s the Portuguese national dish. It used to be that a woman wasn’t allowed to get married until she knew how to make bacalhau 365 ways: one for each day of the year. You can’t have Portuguese Christmas Eve dinner without bacalhau on the table. However, it’s not the fresh cod you’re used to having in your fish and chips. Instead, it’s

preserved in salt and canned. Cod isn't native to Portugal's shores, so this was how it was preserved on the long trip home from the North Atlantic fisheries. All bacalhau preparations start by soaking the fish in water to get some of the salt out, but much still remains.

As for me, I'm looking for something I wouldn't get at home and that reminds me of my summer semester in mainland Portugal. So, I go for the *bife a portuguesa*: a pounded steak with gravy and a fried egg on top, usually served with fries. Bacalhau Grill's comes with a salad and rice, too. It was my go to last summer because it was usually cheap and filling, perfect for the broke college kid in Europe.

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We're warned that the bacalhau takes at least twenty minutes, but James is fine with it and I want to see how he handles being a fish out of water anyway. We take a table in the seating area near the front of the store. Two TVs hanging from the wall each show a different soccer match. The Serie A game is ignored by a table of four older Portuguese men, the only other customers, in favor of Academica vs. Vitoria de Guimarães, two Portuguese teams that are best described as average with the occasional good season. I catch snippets of their conversation: they're talking about the best places to go fishing on Sao Jorge. I smile to myself, but then I have to explain to James why.

While we wait, I sip at my passion fruit soda. While I'm in the Azores I drink at least a can or two a day, but in America I have to ration it. Between customs and shipping, a soda that's maybe a euro in the Azores is $2.50 in California. James is used to seeing me pound down Mexican Cokes, so he's surprised at my restraint.

A couple our age, but both most likely Portuguese, takes a seat at a table nearby. Then, two families come in with their kids. We're no longer the youngest people here, but James is definitely the only Portuguese person here. His blue eyes and dirty blonde hair scream *American!* among the dark gazes and darker heads of hair here. For once, he's the other, but he placidly doesn't seem to notice.

Instead, he's asking me questions about the soccer game (I like Academica better because they're based in Coimbra, where I wanted to go to grad school), coaxing me into sharing my soda (he prefers his Coke), and just looking around (the work of local artists portraying not so local Azorean scenes hangs from a nearby wall). I can see that he's trying to understand this part of my life that he hears about all the time but is still exotic to him.

Our plates finally arrive. James's fish is smothered in a tomato based sauce with grilled onions and peppers, which he loves, and comes with a side of boiled potatoes that don't seem to impress him as much. "You're going to need those," I say. The saltiness of the bacalhau is usually paired with potatoes or some other bland starch to balance it out.

I'm not sure he heard me, but I start plowing into my steak and eggs. The connection between food and memory is real, but sometimes it can set you up for disappointment. My food was probably started at the same time as James' bacalhau, and so it's started to go cold by the time I get it. Instead of this meal taking me back to my summer in Lisbon, to having dinner outside on the cobblestone squares of the Rossio as the sun went down and cast slanted bars golden light and welcome shadows after a hot day, I'm reminded that Little Portugal is a dying neighborhood. This is the first time I've ever been disappointed with my food here, but I refuse to let it show.

I clean my plate because my mother raised me right and I don't want James to know just how much this upsets me. Not just the food, but the fact that the neighborhood I grew up in is fading away and that some part of me feels guilty for

that. “How’s your food?” I ask, to distract myself. “It’s pretty good,” he replies, but I wonder how much of that is diplomacy. “Pretty salty, though.” “That’s what the potatoes are for, remember?” I reply, and I inwardly cringe at how defensive I sound. “Coffee?” I say, and the moment of tension is diffused. Full of lukewarm steak and egg, I think to myself, *um café caía bem.* A coffee is just what I need after a Portuguese meal, so we head to the aptly named Cafe do Canto (The Corner Cafe) around the corner.

I order what I usually did after summer night dinners in Lisbon; a bica, or a long shot of espresso. “Do they have lattes?” James asks, looking at the half Portuguese, half English menu.

“That’s what a *galão* is,” I reply, eyeing the pastry case. “Look, they have *queijadas*! Want to try some?”

“Kay whats?” he asks. “Are those desserts?” “Yeah, they’re custard tarts,” I say, looking over the selection and translating them for his benefit: plain custard, orange, almond, spice. I’m disappointed that they don’t have *pasteis de nata*, my favorites, which are custard tarts wrapped in puff pastry. “*Posso ter um de cada?*” I ask the barista.

“*Ah, a menina fala português!*” she replies, and we launch into a conversation about how I’m trying to teach my American boyfriend about Portuguese culture. Meanwhile, the aforementioned American boyfriend shuffles awkwardly beside me, without even a Spanish class in his past (he took German) to help decipher the flood of words he knows are about him.

I eventually realize my faux pas, put in our order, and we take a seat. Two older ladies, who are probably the grandmothers of someone I know, are watching a *telenovela.* The bright blue and red walls finally start to feel like the Portugal I know. Several blue and white tiles, *azulejos*, line the walls. Their folk sayings and painted scenes are ubiquitous in Portugal.

I laugh at one of them. *A vida e dura para quem e mole.* “What’s that mean?” James asks.

“Life is hard for when you’re soft. My Grandfather Fernandinho had that in his house,” I reply. I remember to say Grandfather and not Padrinho, so that James knows what I’m talking about. Our coffees and pastries arrive. I start cutting the *queijadas* in half so we can both try them, but my boyfriend the coffee snob immediately goes for his latte. “Wow, this is really good!” he says without prompting.

Tension I didn’t even realize was coiling in my stomach is suddenly released. “Well yeah, it’s because it’s Portuguese coffee!” He laughs at my obvious favoritism, but as I launch into Portuguese teacher mode, I realize that for the first time that one of my lectures is relevant to him. He’s not humoring me and sitting through yet another rant about Fernando Pessoa’s genius or King Sebastian’s madness.

So I start tell him about Portuguese coffee, how it comes from their former African colonies, how it’s slow roasted and brewed under higher pressure, how it’s way better than Italian coffee but it’s a damn shame that no one knows it. It’s thicker, richer, almost syrupy. It tastes as good as American coffee smells first thing in the morning before it inevitably disappoints you. “I maybe put a little packet of sugar in it and it’s basically like drinking adult hot chocolate.”

“Yeah, I can’t believe you’re drinking your coffee black,” he says. I don’t blame him. He’s used to my usual Starbucks order of a caramel macchiato or some other sugar bomb that only vaguely tastes like coffee.

The pastries are next. I go straight for the orange, but Jim grabs the spice one. His blue eyes light up. “This is like… a snickerdoodle, but a cake!” It’s a comparison I would have never thought to have made, but as soon as I hear it, it rings so true. To me, spice *queijadas* have always tasted like spice *queijadas*. They’re not even called

spice-flavored in Portuguese, they're just called *queijadas de Sintra*, named after the town outside of Lisbon that they originated from.

We linger over our coffee and *queijadas*, and it's as close as I've felt to being in Lisbon again in the past year. Part of me knows that outside the door lie the remnants of the Little Portugal I knew growing up, but for a few moments I can pretend that the broken streets and incomplete construction on Santa Clara Street are gone, replaced by the rippling black and white cobblestone *calçada* of the Rossio. For the first time, taking James to Portugal with me someday isn't just idle talk. For those few moments, we're already there.

## What to Expect When Travelling to Jordan

By: Christine Farris

A thundering alarm echoed in the air. My body stirred shaking the blanket off as I rose from the mattress. I blinked adjusting my eyes to the darkness. The deep cry continued like a horn warning the city. *What's happening?* I thought, but the alarm wasn't coming from inside the apartment. The tone of the alarm changed, and I could hear a male voice amidst the noise. I turned around and heard the call coming from the window. I slowly slid it open towards the right. The neighboring apartments and streets were still. The echo reverberated and the man began to sing a low hymn as if he was mourning. It was like a ghost lamenting in the streets and I was waiting for it to appear. I squinted through the darkness until I saw light waning behind green glass in a faraway tower. I stared at it, listening to the sad man, until the echo ceased into darkness. I called him "the singing man."

For newcomers, traveling to Jordan in the Middle East is a new experience because the lifestyle and social norms are influenced by Islam, the state religion. In order to adjust easily, it is good to have a general understanding of Muslim customs.

I was 12 years old when I first visited Amman, Jordan. I was asleep in my grandmother's apartment when a voice woke me up. I never

could have guessed that the alarm at 5:00 a.m. was a man or that it had a religious connotation. I wanted to discover the mystery behind "the singing man." I asked questions, such as, "Who is that guy?" or "Is he allowed to do that?" The man is allowed to sing and has a very important role for the Muslim community.

In Arabic, the man is called a *muezzin*. He is a priest appointed at the mosque to recite and chant five times throughout the day. He reminds Muslims that it is time to pray. Historically, the appointed man climbed to the top of the mosque and stood on the minaret, which was a tall spire stretching from the mosque. On my first night, I saw the minaret from the balcony of the apartment. It had an onion-shaped top and the chamber had green glass windows circling it. At night, it radiated a green light like a lighthouse. The *muezzin* grabbed people's attention with trumpets and he chanted his prayer loudly. Now most mosques contain loudspeakers at the top of the minaret, and the *muezzin* uses a microphone to sing. The loudspeakers are believed to be an excellent invention because the calls can be heard from miles away. However, living in an area where there are two mosques nearby can be an issue because the voices overlap.

Daily prayers are obligatory for the Muslim people. When they hear the call to prayer, many people exit shops to pray. One evening, my little sister and I walked to the ice cream store around the corner from our apartment. We were crossing the street when suddenly the call of prayer commenced. We watched the shopkeeper emerge onto the sidewalk and kneel on the ground. He bowed while reciting the prayer. He rose occasionally to do the sign of the cross, and then he bowed again. Danielle, my five-year-old sister, looked at me for instructions. A few blocks down, we could see other shopkeepers emerging to pray.

"What do we do?" she whispered, squeezing my hand.

"I don't know!"

I was about to turn around and return to the apartment, but we did not want to draw attention. We could not go inside the shop because it was rude to interrupt the shopkeeper's prayer. I hesitantly bent my knees and tugged my sister down too. We did not pray, but we sat on our knees to show respect for the people around us. When the shopkeeper finished praying and rose, he nodded in our direction and welcomed us inside his shop. Still, I was curious about what *muezzin* was saying that moved people spiritually.

The *muezzin's* prayer is called the *adhan*, and it comes from the Arabic word *adhina*, which means "to listen." The *adhan* is a call to prayer where the *muezzin* acts like a church bell, letting the people know it is time to come to the mosque and pray. When I woke up during my first night, the only word I could comprehend was *Allah,* meaning "God." The following morning, my mother told me the man was saying *Allahu Akbar*, meaning "God is greater" or "God is the greatest." Here is the prayer and the translation for the *adhan*:

| | |
|---|---|
| Allahu Akbar | God is the greatest. |
| Ash-hadu an-la ilaha illa llah | I bear witness that there is no deity except God. |
| Ah-hadu anna Muhammadan-Rasulullah | I bear witness that Muhmmad is the Messanger of God. |
| Hayya 'alas-salah | Come to pray. |
| Hayya 'alal-falah | Come to success. |
| Allahu akbar | God is the greatest. |
| La ilaha illallah | There is no deity except for God. |

The lyrics for the call to prayer are short, but the prayer lasts 15 minutes because each line is sung at least twice. The first time hearing the call to prayer is surprising and different, especially to any foreigner or non-Muslim. Like any tourist, I eventually became accustomed to it.

Besides the Muslim call to prayer, there are also different holidays that affect the lifestyle as well. In the United States and other parts of the world, many businesses and schools close

on Saturday and Sunday. However, Jordan's weekend consists of Friday and Sunday. These are important prayer days for the Muslim and Christian community, so people do not work. There are also certain Muslim holidays where almost all places are closed. One of the largest holidays for the Muslim community is Ramadan.

Ramadan begins on the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. The holiday lasts for approximately 29 to 30 days, depending on the cycle of the moon. The Muslims are required to fast from sunrise to sunset. During this month, Amman's lifestyle temporarily changes. The streets and markets are closed from the morning until sunset. When the moon appears, the streets are filled with cars and many shops stay open until sunrise. There are also specific customs people must follow in daylight, such as no eating, smoking, or swearing.

I recalled my father smoking outside on the balcony. We had our aunts, uncles, and cousins visiting us at our grandmother's apartment. One of the neighbors saw my father smoking outside.

"Do you have any idea how disrespectful you are?" he yelled at my father in Arabic.

My dad was lost, as the man began to lecture him about fasting. Mom and my uncle apologized to the man and brought my father inside. Even if we are not Muslim, we must respect the culture and the social customs. During Ramadan, our parents never took us anywhere until the middle of the night. It is a wonderful and different experience because it the only time in the year where the streets are lively and busy all night.

The call to prayer and the holidays weren't the only part of the country's lifestyle I needed to adapt to, but also the implicit dress code. The Middle East is like a huge desert, and the temperature exceeds 100 degrees every day. During my stay, I dressed like any common American girl in shorts and a tank top. When I walked downtown with my cousins, I noticed people glancing at me. I'd walk past the markets, and both men and women stopped what they were doing to watch me. Some men whistled or nodded their heads, while others shook their heads. The women were expressionless; it was difficult to make out what they were thinking. I nudged my cousin.

"Why is everyone looking at me?"

"You are from America, where it is common to dress in this way," she gestured at my apparel, "but here it is not."

I scanned the crowd and noticed many women wore veils to cover up their face even in the scorching heat. The veil is called a *hijab*, which means "a curtain," and it covers a woman's hair and chest. The common stereotype for the Arabic culture is that all women wear these veils. In high school, I had a Russian friend who always teased me saying, "You're Arabic right? So like… where's your hijab?" However, the veil isn't part of the Arabic culture at all. It comes from the Islamic laws, and symbolizes modesty. The Quran emphasizes that Muslim women should dress conservatively covering up their chest and face. Men must always lower their gaze when talking to women as well. Remember, modesty is the key.

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The only way I could stop drawing attention to myself is by dressing modestly. I never wore the *hijab* because it wasn't a mandatory for women, but I avoided wearing shirts that exposed my shoulders or chest. If I did expose my chest, I compensated by wearing a jacket over it. I wore skinny jeans and a T-shirt, but if I wore shorts, I complemented it with a long-sleeve shirt. No matter the temperature, I kept skin exposure to a minimum. It wasn't until my family and I toured Petra, that I managed to wear a tank top again.

My outfit was socially acceptable because many tourists also dressed less conservative.

Travelling to different country is fun, but it is also different. Every country has their own social norms and customs that affect the lifestyle. The United States and other countries have Christian holidays, such as Christmas and Easter, where schools, markets, and businesses are closed. Jordan celebrates both Christian and Muslim holidays. The call to prayer, modest dress code, greeting, and weekend are the norm for the people. The trick is to know the basics of the customs because it will make the visit easier. Jordan may have a different lifestyle but it is a wonderful place to visit because it is different.