Discussion Series

The Artistic Perspective, hosted by Artistic Director Anita Stewart, is an opportunity for audience members to delve deeper into the themes of the show through conversation with special guests. A different scholar, visiting artist, playwright, or other expert will join the discussion each time. The Artistic Perspective discussions are held after the first Sunday matinee performance.

Page to Stage discussions are presented in partnership with the Portland Public Library. These discussions, led by Portland Stage artistic staff, actors, directors, and designers answer questions, share stories and explore the challenges of bringing a particular play to the stage. Page to Stage occurs at noon on the Tuesday after a show opens at the Portland Public Library’s Main Branch. Feel free to bring your lunch!

Curtain Call discussions offer a rare opportunity for audience members to talk about the production with the performers. Through this forum, the audience and cast explore topics that range from the process of rehearsing and producing the text to character development to issues raised by the work. Curtain Call discussions are held after the second Sunday matinee performance.

All discussions are free and open to the public. Show attendance is not required. To subscribe to a discussion series performance, please call the Box Office at 207.774.0465.
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How Do You Give Back

With each play that I direct, I strive to make a tangible, active connection to the community relating to the content within the play. While art in itself certainly provides an important service to communities, I believe that my responsibility as an artist also involves a connection for the audience between the art and the actions they take beyond the theater. In the past, one of the ways in which I have made this connection is through raising awareness and collecting donations for related charity organizations including The SAFE Alliance (a shelter which provides housing, healing, and support for survivors of domestic and sexual violence in Central Texas); The Trevor Project (an organization dedicated to suicide prevention efforts among LGBTQ youth); and The Matthew Shepard Foundation (a LGBTQ outreach organization that works on the local, regional, and national levels to erase hate and replace it with understanding, compassion, and acceptance). Each of these organizations provides a life-saving service to their respective communities from the individual to the national level, and any additional donations or awareness that can be raised for them could make a huge difference in people’s lives.

- Katie Baskerville, Directing & Dramaturgy Intern

Some of the most community-conscious years of my life were spent as a dedicated member of Sursum Corda Service Organization at my university. Sursum Corda is a Latin phrase which translates to “hearts lifted,” and we strove to do so with our community service. Through those years, I worked at homeless shelters, soup kitchens, tutoring centers for underserved students, and animal shelters. I participated in events where we cleaned the beach and painted schools.

Since graduating and leaving Sursum Corda, I’ve found it harder to have a regular service placement. But working with the organization ingrained in me the importance of finding ways to lift hearts however I can. So, I’ve been making do with the hours I have, often doing things that become part of my lifestyle. I pick up litter whenever I can, and work to lower my own waste output. I also chose to make my life more environmentally and politically conscious, choosing to eat vegan, as well as buying fair trade and organic products when possible.

When I do have the time, I make community-oriented activities a priority. For example, during my winter visit home, I organized and hosted a benefit dinner with one of my best friends to raise money for Planned Parenthood, an organization for which I care deeply. There are always easy ways to give back and raise hearts, whether you have plenty of time or close to none!

- Kayla Minton Kaufman, Directing & Dramaturgy Intern
to Your Community?

I love reflecting on all the different communities that I am a part of: as a queer, hearing-impaired, New York City native, and Portland resident, I fall under a lot of different umbrellas. When I have time and resources to give, I particularly enjoy seeing my contributions have an impact on these communities. Direct actions of support, like shopping at locally-owned businesses, donating to smaller charities that have less funding, giving to GoFundMe campaigns, and lowering my environmental impact through reducing, reusing, and recycling are all ways in which I try to make a difference. Some of my very favorite causes to support include the Ali Forney Center, which serves homeless LGBT youth in New York City; Books Through Bars, which delivers free books to incarcerated people; and ADAPT, a grassroots organization of disability rights activists.

- Clare McCormick, Directing & Dramaturgy Intern

For my senior thesis project in college, I interviewed seven elderly community members at a local elder day center in my college town. I wanted to break the college bubble by getting to know more local people before I graduated. In return, I wanted to bring something to them. I set out to create a play about the lives of elders to learn more about the town, the state, and elderhood. I soon realized that it was a joy for both me and the elders to have someone there to listen to their stories, as many elders face isolation at later stages of life. Later that year, five college students and I created a verbatim play based on their interviews. We performed the play twice for elders at the center as well as once on the college campus. It was incredible to see the elders recognize themselves in the play. I felt a great responsibility to tell their stories accurately and respectfully. Ultimately, I wanted to give them the gift of memoir theatre. Since this project I have enjoyed working with the elderly and celebrating their lives. I hope I can continue learning from the perspective of elders whom I meet throughout my life.

- Celia Watson, Education Intern

For me, dedicating my time to teaching others is what feels most meaningful. One of my favorite volunteer experiences in college was reading books to students at a local public school. Similarly, a personal mission for the past several years has been to give back as much as I can to the community theater group that supported me while I was growing up. I try to support young people in the New Surry Theatre of Blue Hill, Maine, as much as I can. I love teaching theater workshops and helping others find safety, fulfillment, and joy in their lives. I hope to build my professional life around empowering students through art, to hopefully pay forward what members of my community once did for me.

- Nolan Ellsworth, Education Intern
Focus Questions

BY CELIA WATSON AND NOLAN ELLSWORTH

1. What is generosity? What traditions of generosity are important in your culture?

2. In Babette's Feast, Martine and Philippa initially see Babette as a stranger after she arrives from another country. What steps can we take to welcome those who are from a different nation or culture?

3. How do you give back to others in your school, neighborhood, or home?

4. What defines a rich life?

5. How can sharing a meal bring you closer to the people in your community? What foods are important to your family and friends?

Pre-Show Activities

BY CELIA WATSON AND NOLAN ELLSWORTH

1. Babette's Feast is set against the backdrop of the political revolts of the Paris Commune in late-1800s France (“Paris Commune” on pg. 19). In small groups, create an interactive timeline on the history of the time period. The timeline must include visual, oral, and physical elements (e.g. visual art, tableau, verbal summary). Once the timelines are created, the groups show them to the other students.

2. If you could prepare a feast for your family and friends, what would you prepare? Create a list of recipes for dishes that you would create. Challenge yourself to invent at least one dish to share with others.

3. What food traditions are important in your culture? Create a poster with information and photos of celebrations involving food. As a class, create a feast by all bringing in a food important to you.

COMMUNARDS CONSTRUCTING BARRICADES DURING THE PARIS COMMUNE.
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About Babette’s Feast

About the Author: Isak Dinesen, aka Karen Blixen

By Kayla Minton Kaufman

Isak Dinesen, aka Karen Blixen.

Though her publishers encouraged her otherwise, Karen Blixen chose to use the pen name “Isak Dinesen.” Dinesen being her family name and Isak in reference to the biblical Sarah’s son. Sarah doubted whether she could bear a child, but gave birth to Isaac (Isak in Danish) late in life. As Karen described, “she says afterwards that she will call him Isaac (Isak in Danish), as that means laughter, and she hopes and wishes that the whole world will laugh with her. I found that an appealing thought.” Like Susan with her child Isak, Blixen had a late-in-life and unexpected career, making the name choice very suitable. Additionally, at the time she was publishing, women were in the minority of writers. Even now, with women authors catching up with men, many publishers and audiences are more likely to respond positively to a male author name, including such renowned women like J.K. Rowling. Blixen likely employed this perception to her advantage.

Blixen was a Danish author who wrote in English and Danish. “Babette’s Feast,” among several of her works, was first published in the United States, in 1950 in the American Ladies’ Home Journal. Blixen had a fondness for her American audience, about whom she reflected, “I shall never forget that they took me in at once.” Upon returning home from Africa, she decided to try out life as a writer. She relied on familial support as she worked on Seven Gothic Tales, and when it was finally ready, she presented the book of short stories to an English editor: “he threw up his hands and cried ‘No!’ and I begged ‘Won’t you even look at it?’ and he said ‘A book of short stories by an unknown writer? No hope!’” Hurt but not discouraged, she took the manuscript next to an American editor, who agreed to publish it at once.

Though she wrote until her death in 1962, and only shortly before declared, “I will never stop writing,” Blixen saw herself as something more than a writer. In explanation, she wrote: “I am not a novelist, really not even a writer; I am a storyteller….To me, the explanation of life seems to be its melody, its pattern. And I feel in life such an infinite, truly inconceivable fantasy.”

Berlevag, Norway.

Her most popular novel is Out of Africa (1937), which reflected on her childhood in Kenya. Also popular were her fictional stories, Seven Gothic Tales (1934) and Winter’s Tales (1942). She was nominated several times for the Nobel Prize for Literature.
About the Play

by Kayla Minton Kaufman

At the edge of the world, in a small religious town named Berlevag, the story begins. The town had, for many years, been involved in a Christian sect that was very pious and simple, yet had devolved into a quarrelsome group. Philippa and Martine, the devout daughters of the Dean who founded the sect, did their best to keep the community at peace. Yet the faith and grace of the community would be restored when Babette, a stranger escaping a tragic past, arrived in their town.

In 1950, Karen Blixen, under the pen name of Isak Dinesen, wrote the short story titled “Babette’s Feast.” In 1987, Gabriel Axel brought the short story to the big screen in the feature film, Babette’s Feast. Affiliate Artist Abigail Killeen conceived and developed the idea of a theatrical adaptation of the short story, and Rose Courtney wrote the script that will be taken onto our stage. In this adaptation, a group of six players narrate the story as both eager storytellers and participants in the joyous transformation as townspeople of Berlevag. The collaborative group shift in and out of the roles of narrator and several other characters in the story. Together, on a rather simply set stage, the ensemble creates the world of the play, bringing the blessings and questions from the story to the audience.

The story meditates on the meaning of community connections, the giving and receiving of joy, artistic expression, and, most of all, grace: divine calmness, kindness, forgiveness, and mercy. What happens to the stranger who is welcomed into a close-knit town? What happens to that town through the appearance of that stranger? What can we give to others that is uniquely our own to give? How can that affect those around us?

The most notable fan of the film adaptation, Pope Francis, commented on Babette’s Feast in his Amoris Laetitia:

The most intense joys in life arise when we are able to elicit joy in others, as a foretaste of heaven. We can think of the lovely scene in the film Babette’s Feast, when the generous cook receives a grateful hug and praise: ‘Ah, how you will delight the angels!’ It is a joy and a great consolation to bring delight to others, to see them enjoying themselves. This joy, the fruit of fraternal love, is not that of the vain and self-centered, but of lovers who delight in the good of those whom they love, who give freely to them and thus bear good fruit (AL, 129).

Babette’s Feast celebrates the deep and divine interconnectedness among the world all that is sometimes only fully realized when a new experience descends that is overfilled with joy and grace.

Interview with the Playwright:

Rose Courtney

by Kayla Minton Kaufman

Kayla Minton Kaufman: What was your first encounter with the story of Babette’s Feast?

Rose Courtney: I saw the movie when it was released in 1987.

KMK: When did you begin your journey with writing Babette’s Feast?

RC: It began when Abbie Killeen asked me if I would be interested in collaborating on a stage production of the story. She had gotten the rights to the material, and she had a strong vision—a belief that it was ripe for adaptation.

KMK: For how long have you been working on this piece? What has been helpful about this long incubation process?

RC: It’s been a years-long process. It’s hard to say exactly how much time elapsed because there were gaps when children were born or we were occupied with other work. The long process has been helpful because it allowed the
material to refine through a series of readings and workshops and revisions. We benefited from the creativity of many talented, generous actors who took part in the development of the play. It also gave us time to understand what our real intentions for the piece were by noticing what stayed and what fell away. And when we synced up with director Karin Coonrod, the material was challenged to rise to yet another level - her artistry demanded it.

**KMK: What do you love about being a playwright?**

**RC:** I love human stories and I am compelled to tell them. I find myself taking mental notes and generally observing the people around me in a way that wants to be transformed and expressed. Because I spent time in theater from an early age, Drama is the language I am most fluent in, so I write plays. Originally they were a reflection of my own immediate reality, but more and more they want to encompass a broader reality—to reflect a larger world. Ultimately, the best part of playwriting for me is the collective, visceral effort to put a play onstage—and then witnessing it. The performing arts have that added joy of being like a feedback loop, with the creators, the performers, and the audience all connected.

**KMK: When did you first call yourself a playwright? What made you pursue this career?**

**RC:** During college, I spent a semester in an actor training program at the Eugene O’Neill Theater Center in Connecticut. We were required to take a playwriting class, and the play I wrote, called MET, was sent by my teacher to a company in New York called Circle Rep Lab. They ended up staging it, and I got my first experience of working with actors and a director in a process that was delicious on every level. It was unlike any environment I had ever been in. I remember being amazed by the curiosity and reverence with which everyone came at their work. And I knew immediately that I wanted to pursue it.

**KMK: What was your favorite part of this play to write?**

**RC:** It was a pleasure to invent scenes that were not yet in dramatic form or didn’t exist in the story, like Papin’s dressing room scene, Philippa’s singing lessons, and Loewenhielm’s meeting of his younger self in the mirror. The story, with its playful essence, fed my imagination, and I felt like I could trust the source material and trust myself. I enjoyed the challenge of finding lightness despite the weight of Dinesen’s legacy and the story’s renown. That said, it was the more technical, straight-up adaptation that taught me a lot about writing and about theater.

**KMK: What do you hope audiences take away from Babette’s story?**

**RC:** The end of the story is kind of cosmic, so I will put this in cosmic terms, as they relate to our times: I hope people take away the awareness that, although we live within the limitations of time and space, there is another dimension—hope. Or, as Dinesen puts it, “In this world, anything is possible.” We need to hear that now—to be convinced of it—so that we can take action.
Interview with Director: Karin Coonrod

BY KAYLA MINTON KAUFMAN

Kayla Minton Kaufman: What do you love about Babette’s Feast?

Karin Coonrod: I love the depth of the play, how the writers—both Isak Dinesen and Rose Courtney—are touched by what is beyond themselves, by what they do not know, how they allow themselves that mystery to unfold, and all through a comic tone. I love this!

KMK: What is your favorite line of the play?

KC: “The vain illusions of this earth had dissolved before their eyes like smoke, and they had seen the universe as it really is.”

KMK: Why do you think this play is important to be staged right now, in 2018?

KC: We thought we were ready to bring this play into the public eye in 2013, but it was not to be. Our play greets a hunger that is not satisfied by bread alone. With the political polarization, the immigration crisis, the recent catastrophic events, we are very excited to prepare our play for this moment in time.

KMK: What is most challenging about this play to you as a director?

KC: To prepare it in such a short rehearsal time.

KMK: What do you love about directing?

KC: Realizing powerful visions with a company of actors and a creative team. Taking no prisoners.

KMK: How did you get started directing professionally?

KC: It was a process from childhood....but eventually, after assisting Liviu Ciulei on The Bacchae at the Guthrie Theater, I formed a company in 1987 to re-invent the classics.

KMK: What piece of advice would you give to young artists?

KC: Don’t be afraid. Have confidence in not knowing.

KMK: What do you hope audiences will take away from this show?

KC: That anything is possible.

Love’s Labour’s Lost by William Shakespeare, directed by Karin Coonrod at the Public Theater, 2011.
Interview with the Conceiver and Developer: Abigail Kileen

by Kayla Minton Kaufman

Kayla Minton Kaufman: Where did the idea of adapting Babette’s Feast for the stage arise from? How long have you been working on Babette’s Feast, and what can you tell me about this journey as concealer and developer of the piece?

Abigail Kileen: In late 2006/early 2007 I learned the much-loved Danish film Babette’s Feast was based on a short story by Isak Dinesen (Karen Blixen). She had originally written it in English and first published it in America. I became interested, artistically, in putting the author’s original text in performance onstage. Since the theater is a collaborative art, I knew I couldn't do it by myself. After garnering rights from Isak Dinesen’s estate to adapt the story for performance, I reached out to a colleague, Rose Courtney, to gauge her interest in writing the script. We then worked together for a number of years—Rose would write scenes, and I would act as an editor. In 2010 we had a workshop production in New York, and we were surprised and delighted by the audience’s enthusiastic response. A number of people and theaters expressed interest in developing the piece further. Rose and I were most excited by Karin Coonrod’s wild imagination and theatrical background, so we invited her to be the project’s director through the next phase. Karin’s vision transformed and energized the piece; we traveled to Paris, Denmark, and Norway for research, and Karin and Rose then brought the script to its current incarnation. We also had the great good fortune, through a friend of mine, of connecting to the project a fundraiser named Mark Rodgers who introduced us to a couple, Jennifer Carolyn King and Timothy Fredel, who generously granted us funding to support the world premiere. My relationship with and admiration for Anita Stewart, Portland’s status as a refugee-resettlement city, and its northern geography made Portland Stage the ideal host— we are so grateful and excited to premiere the work here!

KMK: What do you love about the story of Babette’s Feast?

AK: I love that an ecstatic and healing experience—even a divine experience—is lavished abundantly on an isolated, simple people who (except for one surprise guest) don’t have the ability to fully understand—or, dare I say, taste—it. I also cherish the fact that the experience comes through the sacrifice of the refugee, the outsider, the stranger. In our play (and these are words directly from the short story), it is expressed as “being given an hour of the millennium.”

KMK: How does it feel to act in a theater piece of which you were a crucial developer?

AK: It’s thrilling to see it all come together after all these years of dreaming. The vision is being fleshed out through our team in ways no single person can create. The designers, the actors, the dramaturg, the director—and ultimately the audience—all come together, creating a multidimensional, ever changing, live experience. I am relishing the collaborative, creative process that is the theater!

KMK: What do you like most about your character, Martine?

AK: I love how hard Martine works to care for her sister and her community, and to carry on her father’s vision. I love that she and her sister take in Babette, a refugee. And I especially love the cosmic of the tale: that Martine’s prayers, offered throughout the play, are answered in a way far beyond what she could ask or ever imagine. Through the story, Martine is given this gift: she learns that goodness, delight, and love are at the core of the universe, and it transforms her.

KMK: What do you hope audiences will take away from the story?

AK: I hope for the thrill, the beauty, and the glory of Babette’s feast to fall on the audience as much as it’s falling on the characters. In the theater (and in the world) we are all at the table together.
Little brother, we are all grieving & galaxy & goodbye. Once, I climbed inside the old clock tower of my hometown & found a dead bird, bathed in broken light, like a little christ.

Little christ of our hearts, I know planets light-years away are under our tongues. We’ve tasted them. We’ve climbed the staircases saying, *There, there.*

Little brother, we are all praying. Every morning, I read out loud but not loud enough to alarm anyone. Once, my love said, *Please open the door. I can hear you talk. Open the door.*

Little christ of our hearts, tell anyone you’ve been talking to god & see what happens. Every day, I open the door. I do it by looking at my daughter on a swing—eyes closed & crinkled, teeth bare. I say, *Good morning good morning you little beating thing.*

Little brother, we are all humming. More & more, as I read, I sound like my father with his book of prayers, turning pages in his bed—a hymn for each day of the week, a gift from his mother, who taught me the ten of diamonds is a win, left me her loose prayer clothes. *Bismillah.*

Little christ of our hearts, forgive me, for I loved eating the birds with lemon, & the sound of their tiny bones. But I couldn’t stomach the eyes of the fried fish.

Little brother, we are always hungry. Here, this watermelon. Here, some salt for the tomatoes. Here, this song for the dead birds in time boxes, & the living. That day in the clock tower, I saw the city too, below—

the merchants who call, the blue awnings, the corn carts, the clotheslines, the heat, the gears that turn, & the remembering.
Meet the Cast:

Name: Michelle Hurst  
Character: Babette  
The first time I made a Thanksgiving dinner by myself. Prepping the turkey, washing collards, special stuffing, baking sweet potato pie, I did it all. My grandmother told me I did pretty good!

Name: Juliana Francis Kelly  
Character: Phillipa  
Is it cheating to share two? 1.) Eating amok - fish steamed in a banana leaf with coconut milk, lemongrass, and galangal at La Noria rooftop restaurant overlooking the Tonle Sap river in Siem Reap, Cambodia, and 2.) The saran wrapped, microwaved, Thanksgiving dinner served on a hot from the dishwasher hospital tray the day after my daughter was born.

Name: Abigail Kileen  
Character: Martine  
I remember the food brought to my home after the births of my children - meals made by friends when I was completely exhausted and strung out with the care of an infant. The births of both my children were difficult for me - coming home I was weak of body and spirit, emotionally and physically unsteady. Each delivery felt miraculous - around 5pm a fresh and delicious meal made with compassion was dropped off at my kitchen. I can still see and taste what was made for us all these years later: gooey lasagna, fresh salmon, huge salads, lemon bars, chocolate cake. I don't even recall if I thanked people for the gift, but I was strengthened and nourished and able to carry on thanks to those meals.

Name: Jo Mei  
Character: Player 2  
Almost every special occasion in my family is accompanied by food. It's hard for me to focus on any single memory but I know fish is included in nearly every special meal. A whole fish, with head and everything—because in Chinese culture the sound of the word fish rhymes with abundance or excess, hence it is very good luck.

Name: Elliot Nye  
Character: Player 5  
For my first two years of college, whenever someone in my apartment's birthday came around, at the stroke of midnight we would present them with a chocolate hostess cupcake adorned with a single candle. We would sing to them, then split the cupcake five ways. Then we would feast for a brief moment. It was a blissful ritual.

Dinner Table, by Isaac Rudansky,
What is your best memory of a special feast in your life?

Name: Steven Skybell  
Character: Player 3  
I always remember the Passover Seders from my childhood.

Name: Sturgis Warner  
Character: Player 1  
Years ago I spent a number of New Years Eves at a Chinatown restaurant in New York. About ten of us would sit around a table as a dozen different courses would be served to us. It was the perfect way to end a year and begin a new one.

Name: Sorab Wadia  
Character: Player 6  
The most special feasts in my life are Zoroastrian wedding feasts in my hometown of Bombay. We sit outdoors at long tables covered with white table clothes, under trees decorated with lights, and the food is not served on plates but large banana leaves. The meal is usually a six- to ten-course affair starting with pickles and chappatis, followed by egg, cheese, fish, chicken, mutton and rice dishes, all capped off with a special baked custard, and, one dessert not being enough, kulfi, which is India’s decadent answer to ice-cream.

Name: Jeorge Bennett Watson  
Character: Player 4  
A few years ago I made dinner for my two children, who do not normally live with me. It was tri-colored fusilli, grilled tuna steak, sautéed kale, pearl cous cous, and homemade sweet tea. I was so happy to finally have us all under the same roof, I was joyously and very loudly singing along with The Smiths, in the kitchen, while they watched Cartoon Network, in my living room. My daughter, much to my chagrin, came into the kitchen, and asked me to keep it down so they could hear their cartoons. I happily obliged.

Hipp, Hip, Hurrah!, by Peder Severin.
Babette's Feast is a play that reaches out to you from the pages of its script. Its rich descriptions of textures, colors, and lights in the play's little Norwegian town are nearly tangible, and spark many thoughts about what the world of the play would look like, if we could enter inside it. Thanks to the hard work of a team of designers, we have been granted the ability to do so here at Portland Stage.

So many elements go into the design of a show: its set, and the carpentry work required to make it; the careful crafting and selecting of props; the process of designing a soundscape; figuring out exactly which way the lights should be, and how brightly and with what colors they should shine. In Babette's Feast, one of the show's most compelling features is its fascinating array of costumes. We are presented with an excitingly and originally modern take on clothing from an era that occurred long ago: collar ruffs stand out at imposing angles around actors' necks, delicately hand-stitched. Full skirts complete with prints of Parisian paintings swirl in front of us. All of these pieces have been envisioned, designed, and constructed by a dedicated group of fiber artists.

To learn more about these artists, and the pieces that they created, I asked designer Oana Botez and costume shop manager Susan Thomas (with perspectives from season volunteer Cheslye Ventimiglia) to share their thoughts on the practices of costume design and construction, the challenges they faced, and what makes them tick as creators.

Clare McCormick: Can you briefly describe who you are and what your role in Babette’s Feast has been?
Oana Botez: I designed the costumes for the play!
Susan Thomas: So, basically, what it means to be a costume shop manager changes from shop to shop. Every shop is a little different. Here, what it means is that I have the basic manager jobs (making sure everything gets done on time, that we stay on budget, that the stock is maintained, supplies that we need are maintained, and all that basic stuff.) My duties also include anything involved with making the costumes. I’m the go-between for Portland Stage and the costume designers. My job is just keeping my thumb on the pulse of what's going on, and making sure everything's going in the right direction. I’m the sheepdog of the shop!

CM: How do costumes help tell a story?
OB: I come from a school of thought where clothes are language. It's like an anthropological study: in order to know about a certain society or time, and how people were in that time, you look at their clothes. This is how I teach my classes. This is how I work as a designer. Clothes are language. They tell you a story.
ST: Well, it depends on the story they’re telling, and how they decide they want to tell it. For some shows, like when we did A Christmas Carol or Marie Antoinette, it’s basically the only thing telling time: there aren’t any other major prop or set changes on stage, and the costumes are the only things that are changing. So the key thing about costumes is that they tell us who’s who, and they also tell time.

CM: Is there any article of clothing that you’ve made or owned that’s an important part of telling your own story?
OB: Yes! The most important piece of clothing that I have in my collection belonged to my great-grandmother, and it is one hundred years old this year. It’s a skirt that was made specifically for her, for the unification of Romania in 1918. It’s all handmade, and it’s pleated and embroidered – very beautiful.
ST: I made my wedding dress! Well, it wasn’t just my wedding dress; I made my wife’s as well. They were 1930s wedding gowns. Mine was taken from a book of antique patterns. [My wife’s] was based off a dress from the Met.

CM: What are some of the key differences between doing a show with period-specific costumes versus a show with contemporary costumes?
ST: Back into the “telling a story” thing – you can throw up any brown skirt from the 1800s and people will think, oh, yeah, she’s a Victorian...
woman. Whereas you throw up one pair of jeans and then you know exactly who that person is. You’re like, “Wow, that’s 1985, spring collection from the Gap.” You know! People know exactly what it is and they know the whole backstory to that one garment. It’s hard for a designer to do a modern show because there’s so much backstory to everything, whether they intended it or not.

CM: When I was in the costume shop, I got a chance to look at the bolt of fabric that has the paintings printed on it. I was wondering where those paintings and those images came from, and what the research process looked like for this show.

OB: The community that Babette enters traditionally was very wool-based, and their clothes used combinations of different weights of wool, with thick textures. She’s French, and comes in – and this community is all in grays, blues, and blacks. Usually wool absorbs light – it does not help spread light around, as it is very thick and heavy. For Babette, I wanted to make sure that she would bring Paris with her. We were looking at paintings from that time period that could be printed out on fabric, that she could come into the community with. She brings with her an image of Paris, and brings that sensuality and romanticism from some place that is almost like a different world to the people in this community.

CM: What were some unexpected challenges that you came across in this process?

ST: This whole process has been fascinating. Cheslye can speak to this too, because we’ve been working on this together. When did you get started?

Cheslye Ventimiglia: I started in November. While Susan was working on It’s a Wonderful Life, I was making patterns. We got the drawings and a storyboard, and then it was just interpreting what the designer wants. Once we got the actors’ measurements in, we were able to pad out the mannequins to what we thought was our best idea of their bodies’ shapes. And we have one actor who’s six foot eight! We first made the patterns with muslin, and Susan took pictures of these and sent them to the designer, to ask if that’s what she had in mind.

CM: What did you find to be an unexpected joy during this process?

OB: The whole piece is exciting, and I’m so happy I got to do it. It is really lovely to discover Susan Thomas, who is basically running the costume world right now. She’s seeing what I envision, taking the shapes, and putting them on the actors, and I’m very grateful for it.

ST: All of it! All of it was so fun.

CV: I think one of the joys is that you have the designs, then you get the fabric and open the boxes, and then you really realize what it’s going to be made of! For example, Babette’s cloak is made out of this alligator-y fabric, and the texture really makes it look like she’s just come in out of the rain. The fabric itself is working to give the impression that she’s a worn traveler. It’s really fun to see something like an abstract design come to life with such exciting fabric. It’s totally different in person than in pictures.
In the nineteenth century, a walk down the Boulevard des Italiens would lead to a highly popular café, attended by the bels esprits, the highest-minded folk, of France and the world. Inside the doors would appear a room with furniture of mahogany and walnut wood, with mirrors and a glittering sheen of gold leaf covering the walls. For the wealthy, private dining rooms could be provided for a more intimate affair, away from the always busy main room filled with chatter. Most important, of course, whether in private room or not, would be the menu, filled with the most unique delicacies that the French cooks could imagine, accompanied by a list of the best wines of the age. This palace of fine French cuisine was named the Café Anglais.

In a piece acknowledging “the demolition of noted restaurant where kings dined,” a 1913 article in the New York Times lamented, “Although the proprietor says that he will continue the restaurant and café under the same name in the Place Vendôme, it is generally felt that the historic eating house will never be the same, and that one more landmark of nineteenth-century Paris, especially of the Second Empire, is about to disappear.” Across the sea and around the world, the Café Anglais was cherished and admired. Only at the edge of the world in Berlevag, it seems, were the characters of Babette’s Feast unaware of the great Café Anglais and its chef, Babette Hersant.

Although Babette Hersant was a fictional invention of Isak Dinesen (for more on the author, see pg. 8), the Café Anglais was a true gem of nineteenth-century France. By the end of the century, it had become the most popular restaurant in all of Europe. Not only was it memorialized in Isak Dinesen’s “Babette’s Feast,” but it also was mentioned in works ranging from Gustave Flaubert’s Sentimental Education and Émile Zola’s Nana to Umberto Eco’s The Prague Cemetery and more. Considered a celebration of the artistry of food and an experience so sensual it was akin to a love affair, the Café Anglais lives on, not at the same address on the Boulevard des Italiens, but in the minds and imaginations of worldwide admirers.
A Bloody Fight for a Better Future: The Paris Commune

“La Commune ou la mort!” chanted the Parisians, eyes flashing with anger and steadfast determination for a better future. “The Commune or death!” Parisians from students, to intellectuals, to artists, to the working class, demanded better labor conditions, education, social equality, and separation of church and state. The bloodiest and most dramatic event of 19th century France began with a dramatic seizure of power to create the Commune, and ended with a brutally gory week. Babette, the enigma who arrives to the edge of the world in Norway from France, was fleeing this massacre after all of her family and friends had been murdered. She had fought for the Commune; alas, the Commune lost in the end.

What stoked the flame for this radical revolutionary government was a France in tumult: the Third Republic of France was at war with Prussia, a powerful European country during the 19th century. Prussia laid siege to Paris and for four months the hearty population of the city did its best to outlast the dominant outside force. Inside the walls of the siege, the people of Paris were weakened, suffered famine, and the lack of outside support led them to extremes for survival, including eating rat salami. Many died during the siege. Finally, the French signed a ceasefire and armistice, but left Paris with an unpopular government and many Parisians angry at what they considered to be a dishonorable peace.

The federal government, now located in Versailles, sensed the anger in Paris. When they tried to disarm Paris by removing cannons paid for by citizens of the city, the Parisians snapped. Violence spread through the city, and the government withdrew forces to remove the cannons. The chaos dissipated as the people were left alone, and a new French government was formed, called the Commune of Paris. Though different factions of Parisians had varying dreams for this new government, the overall objective was to bring liberty and equality to the city, which they had been starved of during war-torn years. Because of the differing opinions on how the city should run, the Commune was mostly ineffective.

Finally, the government from Versailles came to bring an end to the Commune. Street by street, the outside forces pushed the Commune resistance towards the center of the city. Doing all they could to fight back, the Commune resorted to killing hostages, including the Archbishop of Paris, and in the end murdered 64 hostages. The famed pétroleuses took their revenge too; these women set fire to many buildings in the city with petroleum. In retaliation, the outside governmental forces showed absolutely no mercy, murdering the rebels by the thousands and sparing no one. In the end, the Commune had no future, and those who chanted the words of the rebellion instead were put to death, or sought refuge elsewhere like Babette.
The Tale of the Huldre

by Kayla Minton Kaufman

“In the Loewenhielm family there existed a legend to the effect that long ago a gentleman of the name had married a Huldre, a female mountain spirit of Norway, who is so fair that the air around her shines and quivers. Since then, from time to time, members of the family had been second-sighted.”

Lorens Loewenhielm, a general who visits Berlevag, is convinced the fair Philippa is a mountain spirit, or a huldre In Norwegian mythology, the huldre is a woman of unimaginable beauty, with long flowing golden hair, a red bodice, and a black skirt, particularly alluring to young men, and only seen in the dark hours. She occasionally emerges from the forest to occasionally appear in the human world. The huldre was known for involving herself in human lives, bearing good or bad fortune, and leading humans towards—or away—from their destinies. In almost all appearances, the huldre looks to be a glorious example of a human being. Only one thing sets apart the huldre from the human form: a cow’s tail is hidden underneath the black skirt. The only way for the huldre to lose the cow tail is to marry into the human world, which will cause it to drop from her body and allow her to live a human life.

The huldre, or huldrå, as part of the family of the rå, was a keeper of a particular location. In the case of the huldre, she was a keeper of the mountains and forests. She remained connected to her rå counterparts, including the sjörå, keeper of freshwater; havsrå, keeper of saltwater; and bergsrå, keeper of the mountains. These keepers are very similar to mythological characters in other cultures. For example, the havsrå is not so different from the mermaid; like the huldre lures people into the forest for good or for bad, the havsrå or mermaid determines the fate of humans at sea.

In Norway, especially during the time period that the story of Babette’s Feast takes place, the huldre were not only a mythical creature, but were believed to indeed exist in the forests, rivers, and seas, just around the corner from communities of Norwegians themselves. Perhaps in the afterglow of a cool Norwegian day, by a fjord at the edge of the world, a huldre may still appear...

At the Edge of the World: Berlevag Fjord

by Kayla Minton Kaufman

In Norway there is a fjord...
A long narrow arm of the sea between tall mountains named Berlevag Fjord.

Thus begins the play, Babette’s Feast. Though much of the play is fiction, the town of Berlevag, Norway is very real, and is nestled between two fjords, named Tanafjord and Kongsfjord, and borders the Barents Sea. It is a very small fishing town, with its total population barely reaching 1,000. Residing in the Arctic Circle, the temperatures remain cool year-round.

Yet the beauty of the town is likely to warm the heart of visitors in spite of the frigid temperatures. The fjords are sublime natural structures: these inlets to the sea bordered by towering mountains or cliffs were formed by glaciers passing through mountains long ago. Thousands of seabirds call these fjords home, creating an idyllic location for birdwatching. Additionally, many other remarkable species thrive here, including harbor seals, snow grouse, and reindeer.

Beyond the beauty on the ground of Berlevag, there is much beauty in the sky, too. For a month in the summer, the town experiences the midnight sun, meaning the sun does not dip below the horizon during any of those days, keeping the small town in daylight. During the winter, for over a month, the town has polar night, meaning the sun does not ever rise above the horizon for the extended winter. However, different lights dance in the sky during that time: the sky above the town is often graced by aurora borealis, or the northern lights.

All this and more makes the town perfect for a quiet and simple religious population, where perhaps generals, opera singers, or chefs from afar may visit to see life at the edge of the world.
Religious Culture in Norway: Then and Now

by Katie Baskerville

Then: 19th Century Norway

_Babette’s Feast_ is set between 1830 and 1883, the defining era for the Norwegian national and religious identity. During the time of the play the King was the head of both the Church and of the national government. This was unique in Europe at the time because Roman Catholicism did not influence the governance of the nation as in countries like France. Religion and government in Norway, where _Babette’s Feast_ takes place, have been intertwined since the 18th century.

In the early 18th century, there was a forced conversion of all Scandinavian pagan groups to the Evangelical Lutheran Church, now known as the Church of Norway. At the beginning of the 19th Century, Norway and Sweden separated from Denmark and became a unified sovereign nation. This occurred with the ratification of the Norwegian Constitution of 1812. In the constitution of 1812, this religious isolationism expanded to banning Jewish and Jesuit peoples from entering the nation. Dag Thorikildsen, a professor of theology at the University of Oslo, believes that the reason for this was that, “Norway was a religious homogenous society, and religion was still considered ‘the glue’ that kept the society together and gave reasons for morality and loyalty.” Whether religiously homogenous or not, the restrictive religious laws were oppressive and signaled a cultural fear of religious difference.

The 1830s marked the beginning of an era of Norwegian nationalism. This period is also marked by drawing a connection between the new sovereign Norwegian nation and the heroism and strength of Viking and Medieval Age Norway. Norwegians viewed themselves as the true heirs of Norse culture, seeing themselves as superior to other Scandinavian nations. This connection with ancient Norwegian tradition connected Norse and Sami religious beliefs, such as beliefs in fairies, giants, and the huldre, with mainstream Norwegian culture. This was in direct contrast to the separatism that inspired forced conversion of pagan communities in the 18th century. These beliefs linger still today.

Gradually throughout the century, nationalism became stronger than religion in strengthening the bond between the people of Norway. As a result, religious legislation became gradually more accepting and liberal. One of the most notable pieces of legislation was enacted in 1845, which allowed religious dissenters to remain Norwegian and practice their non-Lutheran faith simultaneously. This pertained to all except Jesuits, who were banned from Norway until the 20th century. The monarch had absolute power over both Church and State for most of the 19th century, but a year after the play ends; a parliamentary system was introduced into Norway’s government. A parliamentary system restricts the role of the monarch because he is no longer the exclusive decision-maker for foreign and domestic policy.

The Constituent Assembly at Eidsvoll, May 1814.
The beginning of a new era of religious tolerance for Norway was marked by the Council for Religious and Life Stance Communities, which was founded in 1996 “to promote mutual understanding and respect between different religious and life stance communities through dialogue.” This Council was formed in response to increasing immigrant and secular populations in the nation, and started the movement toward the major changes that have occurred in the past two decades.

A 2005 study shows that only 36% of Norwegians identify themselves as religious, making Norway the least religious country in Western Europe. However, in 2012, 79.2% of the population stated that they belonged to the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Norway; this number decreased to 71.5% in 2016. While these numbers still seem relatively high in comparison to the amount of people who say that they are religious, this percentage has decreased rapidly since the 1960s when 96% of the population belonged to the Church of Norway. Additionally, a study from 1997 shows that the vast majority only participates in major rituals such as baptism, confirmation, wedding, and burial. The discrepancies between belonging to that religion and adhering to its teachings illustrate that, in Norway, belonging to the Church is less about faith specifically and more about tradition and culture.

It is becoming increasingly common for Norwegians to practice aspects of multiple religions and/or participate in cultural rituals without the fundamental belief in any associated deity. In May of 2012, the Constitution of Norway changed to state that Norway’s values are based on both Christian and humanist heritages, thus expanding the recognized cultural and legal basis of the nation to include human rights as well. “Humanist” in this context references Norway’s ancient history as a society of equals, and acknowledges that all Norwegian citizens have value and agency and should be able to worship (or not worship) freely. This new definition also helps to incorporate the experience of immigrants into Norwegian culture. Islam is the largest non-Christian religion practiced in Norway, where the population of Muslims is increasing rapidly (by 26% in the past five years) and is expected to double by 2030.

In 2016, the Church of Norway became its own legal entity separate from the Norwegian Government. It remains a “Folk Church” in the nation, which means that it receives funding from the government, although the organization as a whole is overseen independently. Its identity as a Folk Church is appropriate for Norway because the traditions of the Church of Norway are still celebrated widely, but in a more cultural sense than religious sense. This new concept also allows for the beliefs of increasing immigrant and secular populations to flourish and exist in conjunction with the historical religions in Norway. The past few decades have been an era of increasing separation between church and state in Norway in order to give more agency to Norwegians in their choices of how to experience and interact with religious traditions.

*Norwegian Constitution Day parade, May 2017.*
Babette’s Feast features the character Achille Papin, an important opera singer from Paris who performed around Europe. During the 19th century, opera was extremely popular and undergoing major changes stylistically. To match the growing sense of nationalism across Europe, each nation began to define its own operatic style. The French developed a grand opera style which featured stories told on a grandiose scale, with larger-than-life theatrical elements and the incorporation of ballet into opera performance; the Italians (such as Rossini and Bellini) continued writing lyrical scores that featured the bel canto (or beautiful singing) style; the Germans adopted large-scale dramatic style, with four-evening-long epics by composers such as Wagner; and the Russians, such as Tchaikovsky and Glinka, embraced fairy tales as the main subject of their operas. This increased nationalization was due, oddly enough, to the exponentially increasing cultural transfers of the era. The concept of cultural exchange often resulted in the alienation of foreign experiences. Rather than fully welcoming the newness in style and technique across cultures, many people used these different experiences as excuses for further division. Much like we see in Babette’s Feast, foreign nations and traditions were thought of as inherently inferior, and operatic nationalism played a large part in this stratification.

Opera became a cultural beacon in the 19th century, providing a unique platform for people to see a utopia where upper classes and lower classes came together in musical harmonies and national pride. These unifying experiences within the stories of the operas were in direct response to increasing differentiation among the cultures of European nations. Music and singing united individual nations through the belief that each nation had its own artistic voice. This was enhanced in part by the resurgence of traditional folk music at the beginning of the 19th century.

As the century progressed, nations began to competitively exchange their ideas of what opera should be. New national styles were performed across the continent, and a new “European” style emerged. Nations began to see the combination of styles as “qualitatively better” and moved forward at the end of the 19th century with a distinctly new sound. One remnant from this period of nationalism, however, is that librettists continued to write in their native languages, out of a sense of national pride, as opposed to a neutral, formal operatic language.
1. The term “artist” is used many times in Babette’s Feast. What do you think it means to be a “great artist”? Write your own definition of the word “artist,” then compare it with your classmates’ definitions. Look up the word in a dictionary and write down the definitions you find there. Of these many definitions, which best fits Babette?

2. How is color used in Babette’s Feast? Consider costumes, lights, and set design, as well as colors evoked through the text. After the performance, draw or paint a collage of colors that you remember from the production. How do the colors represent the moods and tone of the play?

3. Read the original short story of “Babette’s Feast” by Isak Dinesen. Make a list of the similarities and differences between the short story and Abigail Killeen and Rose Courtney’s adaptation. Then write a short essay summarizing the adaptation. What are some elements of Dinesen’s story that are brought out in the theatrical production? How does the narrative style of the production shape our experience of the story?

Northern Lights Coloring Activity
The Cultural Importance of Feasts and Food Around the World

In *Babette's Feast*, Babette prepares a lavish French meal that she serves to Martine, Philippa, and many guests. Food, a central part of our existence and way of life, carries significance based on national holidays, religion, and cultural background. Feasts often involve a gathering of family and friends in celebration of an event. Here we explore a sampling of several feasts or important foods that are central to peoples' lives around the globe.

**African-American**

Many African-American ceremonies are centered around food, and cooking and feasting is a common part of African-American culture. "Soul food" originates from African-Americans in Southern USA. Soul food features ingredients such as legumes, potatoes, beans, yellow vegetables, rice, barbecued or fried foods, gravy, and homemade pies or cakes. In addition to celebrating traditional American holidays, some African-Americans observe Kwanzaa, a holiday that is celebrated from December 26 through January 1. Karamu is a Kwanzaa feast celebrated on December 31 that features food, reflections, speakers, decorations, and dancing or music (or another cultural expression) in celebration of African heritage.

**Chinese**

On the Eve of Chinese New Year, also known as the Spring Festival, families come together for a "reunion dinner," which Gavin Van Hinsbergh says "is believed to be the most important meal of the year." Generations gather around circular tables to celebrate the Spring Festival. In Northern China, people often eat dumplings because they resemble boat-shaped ingots, the currency of Ancient China, and therefore symbolize a wish for wealth. Sometimes a coin is put in a dumpling, and whoever receives it will have good luck or wealth for the year ahead. Annie Wu notes that the fillings of dumplings carry symbolic meanings as well. For example, beef represents strong growth in the economy, and cabbage signifies a blessing for a long and prosperous life. In Southern China, people eat "year cake" (*niangao*), which translates to "increasing prosperity," or "soup balls," (*tangyuan*) which means togetherness and reunion of family. Hotpot and fish are also common foods at reunion dinners in the South. The word for "fish" (*yú*) sounds the same as "surplus"(*yú*), signifying a wish for an excess of wealth and luck in the New Year. This year, the celebration of Chinese New Year begins on February 16, 2018, beginning the Year of the Dog.
Judaism
The religion of Judaism celebrates several holidays throughout the year that involve food. Rosh Hashanah is a holiday celebrating the Jewish New Year, this year held from sunset on September 9 to sunset on September 11, 2018. The holiday is a time of rejoice and introspection. Rosh Hashanah involves a feast that begins with the recitation of the Kiddush, a Hebrew text, over wine or grape juice. A “new fruit,” fresh from the start of a new season, is eaten. Examples of new fruit include pomegranates, lychees, star fruits, or other fruits. Later, a round bread called challah is eaten, which symbolizes the eternal cycle of life. The challah is dipped in honey, signifying wishes for a sweet New Year. Another Jewish holiday is Passover, this year held from March 30-April 7, 2018, which commemorates the Israelites’ liberation from slavery in Egypt. For eight days, Jewish people refrain from eating any food with leavening elements, such as bread or baked goods; instead, they eat unleavened bread called matzoh that symbolizes the bread that Israelites ate in the desert because they had to flee and couldn’t wait for their bread to rise. On the first night of Passover, Jewish people gather for a Seder, a feast that involves a particular sequence of food to tell the story of the Exodus, the departure of Israelites from enslavement in Egypt.

Islam
Two major feast holidays celebrated in Islam each year are Eid al-Adha and Eid al-Fitr. Eid al-Adha, the larger of the two, is known as the “Feast of Sacrifice.” According to The New York Times, Eid al-Adha “commemorates the Koranic tale of the Prophet Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his son Ishmael as an act of obedience to God.” God gave Abraham a ram as an offering before Abraham performed the sacrifice. On this holiday Muslims slaughter an animal, signing Abraham’s sacrifice (Adha means “sacrifice” in Arabic). Either a camel, a type of cow or ram of a minimum age may be sacrificed. The meat is divided into three parts: one for one’s family; one to relatives, friends and neighbors; and the other to the needy. Eid al-Fitr, or “the festival of breaking the fast,” denotes the end of the holy month of Ramadan, during which Muslims “abstain from eating and drinking from sunrise to sunset”, according to Al Jazeera. A sweet fruit, preferably dates, are eaten before the Morning Prayer, as dates are considered to be purifying according to the Prophet Muhammad, the founder of Islam. The sweet dishes of Eid al-Fitr vary from country to country, but can range from foods such as maamoul, cookies filled with dates or nuts eaten in Syria and Lebanon, to Sheer khurma, sweet vermicelli with milk and dates eaten in Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan. Several countries also celebrate Eid al-Fitr with larger meat dishes.

Christianity
One Christian feast is Easter, which celebrates the resurrection of Jesus after he died on the cross and was buried. Easter occurs after the fasting of Lent, where Christians refrain from eating certain foods to symbolize Jesus’s 40 days and 40 nights in the desert where he was fasting. Easter celebrations typically involve feasting on lamb. The eating of lamb originates from the first Passover Seder in Judaism. Because Christianity stems from Judaism, many traditions remained. According to Peggy Trowbridge Filippone, the “sacrificial lamb was roasted and eaten, together with unleavened bread and bitter herbs in hopes that the angel of God would pass over their homes and bring no harm.” In Christianity, Jesus is seen as the Lamb of God and thus the Easter Lamb is a symbolic dish. In addition, during Eastertime, Christians in many countries enjoy hot cross buns, or another form of sweet bread or cake depending on the country.
**Georgian**

In the country of Georgia, large banquets known as *supras* have been a way for Georgians to reclaim and defend the national identity of their country amidst foreign influences, according to journalist Molly Corso. Since Georgia's independence in 1991, *supras* have become more informal as “the threat toward the national identity has decreased,” notes Giorgi Nizharadze, a professor at the Free University of Tbilisi, located in the country’s capital. However, *supras* are still common in village areas, where traditional dinner parties are held for weddings, birthdays, and funerals. *Supra*, stemming from the Georgian word for “tablecloth,” is a feast that involves numerous toasts led by a *tamada*, a toastmaster, spoken in stylized Georgian. Vasili Tabagari, a *tamada* with over forty years of toasting experience, remarks that *supras* “represent strong oral traditions [and] histories,” which “saved” Georgian culture from invasion over the centuries. The many dishes for *supras* can involve days of preparation, and include a variety of foods such as meat, salads, fish, and sweets.

**Jordanian**

Jordan’s hospitable culture places a great importance on feasting. Community meals are a frequent event in villages, where many family members gather to eat together. Upon entering a Jordanian household, one is often offered food within minutes. The serving of food at home to family, friends, and guests is a tradition that Jordanians take with pride, and occurs even in humble households. The national dish of Jordan, *mansaf*, is served whenever an occasion takes place, such as a wedding, or graduation, or engagement. *Mansaf* also serves as a token of respect, as it can be presented to resolve disputes between families or tribes. The families’ eating of *mansaf* together signifies the end of the conflict. According to the Jordan Tourism Board, the dish is made from Arabic rice, lamb or chicken, and a broth made from dry sour yogurt called *jameed*. Guests eat *mansaf* using their hands as part of the social gathering. *Mansaf* is a symbol for generosity, in that the scale of generosity is shown by the amount of lamb offered in the dish.

**Latin American**

*Día de Muertos*, or “Day of the Dead” in English, is a holiday that celebrates deceased family members. According to *National Geographic*, the holiday originated in Aztec, Toltec, and other Nahua cultures, who believed that death was a natural part of the continuum of life. The conversion of Mexico to Catholicism from the Spanish merged a month-long Aztec celebration with the Catholic holidays of All Saints’ Day (November 1) and All Souls’ Day (November 2). During the holiday, an altar or *ofrenda* is built in the home or cemetery, and families present offerings to welcome the spirits of their deceased loved ones. Examples of offerings to the deceased include water for the long journey, food, photos, candles, marigold flowers, and sometimes a family member’s favorite meal is placed at the altar. Certain food offerings include *pan de muerto* (bread of the dead), a *pan dulce* (sweet bread) decorated with dough skulls, and bones, which can be laid in a circle to symbolize the circle of life. Colorful sugar skulls may also be offered, in addition to beverages such as hot chocolate, *pulque* (fermented drink made from agave sap), and *atole* (thin corn flour porridge with cinnamon, sugar, and vanilla). *Día de Muertos* is also celebrated in Brazil, Guatemala, Bolivia, and across the Andes, Amazon, Guarani, and Mapuche areas of South America. Their celebrations all bear similarities to Mexico’s traditions but carry their own cultural aspects. López Hernández notes that on All Souls’ Day, “we wait eagerly on nuestros muertitos (our beloved departed): we prepare delicacies for them, we sing to them and feast for them because they are our roots and the guarantee of our heritage as peoples with a specific history and identity.”
Babette's Feast In The Classroom

Belgium - Moules frites (Mussels in white wine sauce with fries)

Canada - Tourtière (Meat pie filled with ground beef, pork, veal, game, or fish with spices and herbs)

Luxembourg - Judd mat Gaardebounen (Smoked collar of pork with broad beans)

Haiti - Lambi an sos Kreyol (Conch grilled in tomato-based creole sauce)

Monaco - Barbagiuan (Savory pastry with ricotta cheese and Swiss chard; National Dish)

Guinea - Sauce feuille (Sauce made with sweet potato leaves or spinach, meat, and tomatoes, served over rice)

Cameroon - Fufu and njama njama (Stew of huckleberry leaves and tomatoes, served with polenta)
Cuisines from Francophone (French-Speaking) Countries

By Celia Watson

Democratic Republic of the Congo - Moambe (stew made with African oil palm, meat, onions, tomatoes, and greens)

Madagascar - Foza sy hena-kisoa (stir-fried crab and pork with ginger and greens, served with rice)

Vanuatu - Lap lap (plantain or taro with meat or vegetables, with coconut cream and cooked in a banana leaf, national dish)
Refugee Narratives for Young Readers

The Good Braider
By Terry Farish
Written in free verse, the novel for young adults tells the story of a girl named Viola who travels from war-torn Sudan, to Cairo, and finally to a new home in Portland, Maine. Tom between her traditional Sudanese mother and her new American classmates, Viola’s haunting journey explores womanhood and culture through poetic imagery.

Out of Nowhere
By Maria Padian
In his small Maine town, high school jock Tom Bouchard’s life turns upside down when Saeed, a Somali immigrant, joins the soccer team. Like Lewiston and Portland, Tom’s fictional town is becoming a new home for many fleeing violence in Somalia. As Saeed wins big on the field, and the end of high school looms on the horizon, Tom must learn what it means to truly play on a team.

Inside Out and Back Again
By Thanhha Lai
Based on the author’s personal experience, this coming-of-age novel follows a young girl as she moves from Vietnam to Alabama during the Vietnam War. From the traditions of Saigon to the hardship of learning English and facing bullies, Thanhha Lai presents a child’s perspective on a key moment in American and Vietnamese history.

The Red Pencil
By Andrea Davis Pinkney
Illustrations by Shane W. Evans
In a series of powerful poems for young readers, twelve-year-old Amira must leave her beloved Sudanese village and adapt to life in a refugee camp. After losing everything, the simple gift of a red pencil gives her new hope.

Stormy Seas: Stories of Young Boat Refugees
By Mary Beth Leatherdale
Illustrated by Eleanor Shakespeare
This nonfiction book for middle schoolers follows the true stories of five different children. Ruth escapes the Nazis in Germany, Phu flees Vietnam, José travels to the U.S. from Cuba, Najeeba leaves Afghanistan, and Mohamed evacuates from his village on the Ivory Coast. These stories are accompanied by interviews, fact boxes, and timelines to help introduce students to the reality of refugee life.

Children of War: Voices of Iraqi Refugees
By Deborah Ellis
The author interviews many children who have resettled in Canada and Jordan, after fleeing the Iraq war. The children discuss school bombings, violence against family members, and feeling out of place in a new country.

The Arrival
By Shaun Tan
In this wordless graphic novel, Shaun Tan depicts a father’s journey from a monster-ridden homeland to a strange city full of new codes, contraptions, and customs. Told only in pictures, this book is accessible to students across many languages and reading levels.

"In Australia, people don’t stop to imagine what it's like for some of these refugees. They just see them as a problem once they're here, without thinking about the bigger picture. I don't expect the book to change anybody’s opinion about things, but if it at least makes them pause to think, I'll feel as if I've succeeded in something."

-Shaun Tan
Intro to French Colonialism

by Katie Baskerville

Colonialism is defined as “the policy or practice of acquiring full or partial political control over another country, occupying it with settlers, and exploiting it economically.” Beginning in the 17th century and continuing into the 20th century, the French government forcibly and violently took land and resources from indigenous populations across the globe. The impact of these centuries of French occupation can be seen in the language, cuisine, and culture of places like New Orleans, Haiti, Algeria, Senegal, and Vietnam, among dozens more. In Portland Stage’s production of Babette’s Feast, the role of Babette is played by a woman of African descent, a representation of the fact that the French language is a primary language in more than 25 African countries.

The impact of French colonialism in Africa has resulted in a hybrid culture for millions of people, including a rapidly increasing francophone African immigrant population in Portland, Maine.

French colonialism can be divided into two main eras, the “first colonial empire” and the “second colonial empire.” The first empire began in the 17th century with the colonization of North America, the Caribbean, and India, as well as the establishment of trade posts in Western Africa. Within this period, France was focused more on economic trade rather than cultural impact, but the occupation and enslavement of native populations, in addition to the presence of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, led to a forced combination of cultures and experiences.

One example of this impact in modern culture is the existence of the Haitian Creole language. In order to communicate across cultures and experiences within the French colony of Saint-Domingue on Hispaniola, a new language developed derived from French, but expanded to include elements from many languages to create a new shared culture between them. It is a French-based language currently spoken by more than 10 million people worldwide. The language adds elements of Portuguese, Spanish, English, Taíno (the language of Taíno people, native to the Caribbean), and many West African Languages (including Kwa languages, Central Tano Languages, and Bantu Languages). The increasing populations of enslaved people from primarily the Niger-Congo region of Africa on the island known as Hispaniola, now known as Haiti and The Dominican Republic, created an increased need for a shared language. Today, there is a debate as to whether French or Haitian Creole should be viewed as the primary language in Haiti. Opponents of French believe it to be the remnants of an oppressive and violent European influence on the culture, and not truly for the people of Haiti; opponents of Haitian Creole believe it to be a less formal language and as such should be reserved for informal settings.

In between the first and second colonial empires, the French government participated in several international military conflicts that resulted in the loss of many of their colonies and controlled territories. While the French influence remains still today in these locations, with Canada being our closest neighbor affected by this shift, France no longer has political control over most of these regions. While some of these colonized territories changed hands to other colonial powers, such as Grenada and Saint Lucia to England, some also gained their autonomy through revolutions, such as Haiti.

The second colonial empire is generally viewed to have begun around 1830, the same time in which Babette’s Feast begins, with the invasion of Algeria. This invasion was the beginning of a century of increased imperialism, a term defined as a policy of extending a country’s power and influence through diplomacy or military force, by European nations. France specifically started a campaign to shift their colonial perspective from enslaving conquered people to a so-called “assimilation” policy, which sought to make the people who were being colonized into French citizens. This process, referred to as a “civilizing mission,” required people to reject their own cultural experiences in order to adopt French culture and customs. The French did not respect the traditions, religions, and cultural experiences of the places that they colonized, and saw it as their responsibility to make them more European.

West Africans rejected French colonial influence in their nations, fighting back through a series
of organized protests. Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba was a leader of one such movement called the Muridiyya in Senegal. Before he became an anti-colonial political ideological leader, he was a leader within the Sufi Muslim community, also known as mystical Islam. Bamba did not wage a physical war against the French oppressors, but a spiritual one. He taught his followers that the “greater struggle” was to be fought through one’s own faith and relationship with God. By the end of the 19th century, the French became concerned about the Muridiyya’s influence, targeting and isolating Bamba through multiple exiles and house arrests in an attempt to stifle the non-French cultural growth in Senegal and other West African colonies. Bamba continued to triumph as thousands more joined his organization following his being targeted.

The second French colonial empire began to fall in the aftermath of World War II. The revolutions were mostly violent and resulted in several thousand deaths at the hands of the French in an attempt to suppress independence. 11 colonies remain throughout the world, and the citizens of these regions and territories are able to vote in all French elections and are considered full French citizens. The 11 French overseas territories today are: Guiana, French Polynesia, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Mayotte, New Caledonia, Réunion, Saint Barthélemy, Saint Martin, Saint Pierre and Miquelon, and Wallis and Futuna. Ultimately, the French colonial influence is still present within the culture of the former colonies even though they are no longer occupied politically, whether in language, religion, food, or other cultural elements. Though we celebrate the diversity of the 77 million French-speaking people in the world, it is important to remember the tragic history that brought us to this global experience.

Glossary

By Nolan Ellsworth, Celia Watson, & Kayla Minton Kaufman

Alchemist: A person who practices alchemy, a medieval form of chemistry. It was particularly concerned with attempts to convert metals into gold. These attempts were unsuccessful.

Asceticism: Severe self-discipline and avoidance of all forms of indulgence, typically for religious reasons.

Aurelian Scholl: A French author and journalist. He wrote largely for the theater, as well as a number of novels dealing with Parisian life. Babette lists Scholl, as well as several Parisian aristocrats and dukes, as among those people who are “all gone” from Paris. The famous names of Paris are dead or exiled.

Barricade: An improvised type of street barrier used to defend streets during 18th and 19th century warfare in Paris.

Bels esprits: A witty person; in French, literally, “fine mind.”

Catechization: The instruction in the principles of Christian religion by means of question and answer, typically by using a catechism (a summary of the principles of Christian religion in the form of questions and answers.

Communard: A member or supporter of the short-lived 1871 Paris Commune formed in the wake of the Franco-Prussian War and France’s defeat. Babette is a Communard.

Don Giovanni: (Met summary) An opera in two acts with music by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. It is based on the legends of Don Juan, a fictional womanizer. He seduces most women in the opera, notably Zerlina, a peasant girl on the eve of her wedding. The women work to bring him to justice, and though he escapes, he is dragged to hell in the end.

Don Giovanni at the Metropolitan Opera, 2016.
**Ecclesiastic:** A priest or member of the clergy.

**Fjord:** A long, narrow inlet of the sea between high cliffs. Fjords are common in Scandinavian countries like Norway.

**Franc:** The currency used in Switzerland and several other countries (including France, Belgium, and Luxembourg until the introduction of the euro).

**Gamboling:** Running or jumping about playfully.

**General Gallifet:** A French general, best known for having taken part in the repression of the 1871 Paris Commune. In Babette’s Feast, General Gallifet is responsible for killing Babette’s family.

**Huldre:** A huldre is a seductive forest creature found in Scandinavian folklore. The word huldre is only used of a female; a male huldre is called a “huldrekall” and also appears in Norwegian folklore. Whereas the female huldre is almost invariably described as incredibly, seductively beautiful, the males of the same race are often said to be hideous, with grotesquely long noses. These beings are closely related to other underground dwellers, usually called tusser

**Kroner:** The currency of Denmark and Norway.

**Jacques Lefèvre d’Étaples:** A French theologian and humanist. He was a precursor of the Protestant movement in France. Although he anticipated some ideas that were important to the Protestant Reformation, Lefèvre remained a Roman Catholic throughout his life, and sought to reform the church without separating from it. Several of his books were condemned as heretical, and he spent some time in exile.

**Myrtle berries:** Myrtle berries are also referred to as Common Myrtle, True Myrtle, Sweet Myrtle or Roman Myrtle. The etymology of the name has roots in both Greek mythology and Olympic history. Myrsine was a young girl transformed by the goddess Athena into a Myrtle shrub because she dared to beat a male competitor in the games. The Ancient Greeks made crowns of Myrtle leaves and fruits to adorn the winners’ heads during the Olympic Games.

**Papist:** A Roman Catholic; one who follows the teachings of the Pope.

**Paris Commune:** A revolutionary government in France that lasted from March to May of 1871 (see pg. 19).

**Pétroleuse:** A female supporter of the Paris Commune, accused of burning down much of Paris during the last days of the Commune in May 1871. In May, when Paris was being recaptured by loyalist Versaillais troops, rumors circulated that lower-class women were committing arson against private property and public buildings, using bottles full of petroleum that they threw into cellar windows, in a deliberate act of spite against the government. Many Parisian buildings were in fact set afire by the soldiers of the Commune prompting the press and Parisian public opinion to blame the pétroleuses.

**Plous:** Devoutly religious.

**Prima donna:** The chief female singer in an opera or opera company.

**Princesse Pauline:** An Italian noblewoman and an imperial French Princess. Her elder brother, Napoleon, was the first Emperor of the French.

**Recherché:** Rare, exotic, or obscure.
Seeking Refuge: From Babette's Feast to Maine

BY NOLAN ELLSWORTH

Babette Hersant is a refugee fleeing Paris in 1871, a time of civil war. She fights for the Commune of Paris (see pg. 19), a short-lived system of French government that strove for socialist ideals. During the last brutal bout of fighting known as La Semaine Sanglante, or “The Bloody Week,” thousands were lucky enough to escape and flee to other countries as refugees, but thousands more were killed in Paris. Some historians estimate that 30,000 people were killed in the fighting, 50,000 were later executed or imprisoned, and 7,000 were deported to a penal colony on the island of New Caledonia, located near the east coast of Australia. However, up to 4,000 refugees found asylum in Great Britain, while many others journeyed to Belgium, Italy, Spain, and the United States. Parisian resistance fighters in London “arrived in a state of desperate poverty, and endured a life of demoralizing misery until amnesty allowed them to return to France,” according to P. Martinez, author of A Police Spy and the Exiled Communards, 1871-1873. There is little evidence of Parisian refugees fleeing to Norway, as Babette does in the play. Norway has historically been known as a welcoming country for those fleeing violence and oppression. That perception is changing given recent Norwegian restrictions on incoming refugees from Syria.

Babette’s story, that of losing her loved ones and fleeing to a cold land far from home, is as relevant as ever today. The Maine cities of Portland and Lewiston, Maine have become havens for those escaping persecution in their home countries. Most of the refugees in Maine come from Iraq, Somalia, Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Refugees from Syria have also resettled in Maine in the past few years; in 2016 alone, 75 Syrian refugees entered Maine. Much like Babette, they were fleeing the violence of a civil war.

In Babette’s Feast, the refugee of the title faces distrust from some members of her new community because they do not understand her French culture, especially concerning French food. This type of misunderstanding can be a large problem for refugees in Maine because many native Mainers remain ignorant about the cultural norms of African and Middle Eastern countries. According to the case study African in Maine by Bau Graves and Juan Lado, “most Mainers could not locate Sudan or Somalia on a map, and…many Mainers assume that Africa is a country.” It can also be difficult for different groups of refugees to build community together, even if they come from the same country. For example, the Sudanese population of Portland comes from at least 19 of the 400 tribes that exist in the Sudan. As Graves and Lado put it, “From the perspective of any individual refugee, almost all of the other refugees may seem just as strange [as native Mainers] since they come from geographically distant tribes and ethnic groupings.” Grappling with these challenges, refugees continue to play an important role in the future of Maine. Perhaps one lesson of Babette’s story is that, whether we come from here or from away, we are all Mainers and must strive to live, learn, and eat together.
Community Connections:
Food and Culture in Maine

By: Clare McCormick

In Babette’s Feast, we encounter a woman whose story is reminiscent of many Mainers’ stories. Babette, a refugee fleeing political upheaval, arrives in a new land, seeking shelter and safety. When she is taken in by sisters Philippa and Martine and offered employment and a home, the three women begin a cultural exchange with each other as their friendship grows. Babette learns about the sisters’ Norwegian culture, the traditional foods they prepare, and the ways in which their community members come together in times of crisis; over time, the sisters learn about Babette’s Parisian culture in return. This mutual understanding and celebration of their respective cultures and histories enrich all of their lives in unexpected ways.

Portland, Maine is a home to people from all over the world. In the Portland Public Schools, over 60 languages other than English are spoken in students’ homes. Like Babette, many of these students and their families have personal histories of seeking refuge and shelter in a new country: since 2002, almost 3,800 refugees have come to the state of Maine, not including asylum seekers, or secondary refugees, who first arrived to a state other than Maine before resettling here.

Because of Portland’s diversity, our lives here are enriched in many ways. In 2013, Portland’s own Deering High School became the first high school in the state of Maine to offer Arabic language study as part of its curriculum. The Portland Public Library does much to build intercultural bridges, such as regularly hosting readings of children’s books in languages other than English and providing multicultural, educational music programming. And, of course, one of the most prominent ways we see other cultures displayed and celebrated in our city is through food: hosts of restaurants such as Sabieng Thai, Tao Yuan, Asmara, and TIQA offer us the chances to try foods from all over the world, prepared by chefs who have lived and studied in the countries their cuisine hails from.

Tandoor Bread & Restaurant, located on Forest Avenue, serves food from several different Middle Eastern cultures. Its owners, Kanat Saad and her husband, Audai Naser, arrived in Portland by way of Atlanta, Georgia. Originally from Iraq, Naser fled violence during the Gulf War, living and training as a baker in Syria before arriving in America in 2008. His foods have attracted a strong following, with many faithfully purchasing his baklava, shawarma, and spicy za’atar bread. With the help of local restaurant owners’ translation services, Naser has been able to navigate Portland’s business community as he acquires more English language skills. In return, Naser assists other New Mainers by offering them jobs in his bakery, and providing them with food to support their families.
Other local efforts to provide cultural exchange through food can be seen in organizations such as Immigrant Kitchens, an organization that seeks to collect and compile recipes from immigrant chefs in Portland. Through outreach and education programming over the past year, Immigrant Kitchens has visited Freeport High School, teaching students to cook authentic Sudanese food and raising money to support relief efforts for Darfur, a region in the western part of Sudan. Other efforts involved cooking and serving Dominican food, raising $1,000 for clean water initiatives in the Dominican Republic. Immigrant Kitchens also provided a cooking and culture lab for the University of Southern Maine, educating first-year students about food and culture in Eritrea, a country in the northeast region of Africa; the lab, led by an Eritrean chef, taught students a variety of recipes and a wealth of knowledge about current political and social structures in Eritrea.

Other organizations, like Portland’s Cultivating Community, do much to directly support immigrants and refugees in Maine. Cultivating Community, with the financial support of local subscribers, offers agricultural training to New Mainers who are seeking to either learn new skills, or return to previous farming lives from before their arrival to the United States. This training gives farmers opportunities to become financially independent and empowered. Cultivating Community teaches its students how to farm in the ecological context of Maine, in consideration of its landscape and different weather patterns, and provides instruction on establishing small- and large-scale business models, and communicating with patrons in English.

Towards the end of Babette’s Feast, General Lowenhielm offers us a prayer before sitting down to his meal: “May my food my body maintain, may my body my soul sustain, may my soul in deed and word, give thanks for all things.” In the spirit of community and hope and neighborly love, he wishes that all those gathered might depart from their meal with a renewed drive to do good in the world. Living in the city of Portland means partaking in meals, holidays, and other cultural exchanges with our neighbors, many of whom have traveled long distances to live here. As we patronize our neighbors’ restaurants, support their efforts to share their cultural experiences, and listen and learn, may we continue to do so with open hearts and a sense of gratefulness for the many ways in which they enrich our lives.
Language as Societal Barrier

By: Katie Baskerville

As cultural exchange exists between people of different nationalities, language is often the largest barrier to understanding one another. In Babette’s Feast, it is unclear what language is spoken between the Norwegian and French characters. Within the context of the play, it is likely that multiple characters are bilingual; this skill is often a luxury of educational resources. The characters seem divided initially more by impressions of cultural differences rather than language itself, but, in a broader context, these cultural differences are further stratified by the language barrier and could be seen as representational of a national identity, which in Norway in the 19th century was being strengthened.

There are a variety of ways to communicate that are learned throughout one’s life. As children develop, non-verbal communication is the first way in which they learn to interact with the world around them. Before they can speak or comprehend structured language, they rely on non-verbal communication to understand their guardians and communicate their needs. This sort of communication is integral to the learning of reading, writing, speaking, and listening, no matter the language of the community within which the child is growing up. As people age and develop, they forget these formative moments before they utilized structured language. This forgetfulness creates barriers between oneself and other cultures that utilize different language structures.

Similar to the early life stage of non-verbal communication, ancient nomadic humans used almost exclusively non-verbal or non-structured languages without written counterparts to cross cultural boundaries. The difference in how people communicate now versus in ancient times places higher value on written, structured language arts. This value system also creates a hierarchy of languages within individuals, favoring familiarity over unfamiliarity. The more exposure that someone has to a language, the less “foreign” it feels, and increased value is subconsciously placed on it. Because of this, language is often the most divisive factor between societies.

To the contrary, language is also often the central cultural resource in generating a shared cultural identity. Unfortunately, between members of a shared geography, conflicts over primary language can be extremely divisive within nations. Language, for instance, was a major factor in the decision of Norway, the country where Babette’s Feast is set, to separate from Denmark and become its own sovereign nation. When the shift was made, a new, specifically Norwegian language was created to distinguish between Danish and Norwegian cultures and create a new, academically accepted, linguistic identity for Norway.

Although structured language is important in the creation of a national identity, it is also the central resource in generating a shared cultural identity. If language barriers exist, there are alternative, universal means of communicating. The exchange of culture and language should be celebrated as a way to strengthen a community internationally and domestically, rather than criticized as the dissolution of previous, long-held traditions. Embracing change and learning from those who have different backgrounds will make local and global communities stronger.
Women's Autonomy in Religion

BY CLARE MCCORMICK

We meet the women of Babette's Feast in Norway in the 1800s, a time that is just on the cusp of great cultural change. However, at the time that Philippa and Martine would have been living, rights and protections for women in Norway were not yet as advanced as they are today. In the year 1840, the government classified women under the term “incapable,” meaning that the country of Norway considered all women unfit to hold government positions, or any other job without the permission of a male guardian, and they were not allowed to handle or control money of their own. The right to vote for their government representation in all local and national elections would not come until 1913, after many years and generations of women working for suffrage and equity.

And so, we meet the women of this play in a time where, at least on paper, they have little to no autonomy, or power, over themselves and their fates. And yet, Philippa, Martine, and Babette build enriched, rewarding lives for themselves, living and working in close community with their neighbors, and earning the respect of all that know them. Their fates seem to lie firmly in their own hands, and they are seen as authority figures by their peers, who come to them seeking life advice.

Part of the reason why Philippa and Martine in particular are so well-established and autonomous is that they hold positions as religious leaders in their community. Their deceased father, a pastor who practiced Pietism, trained them in his faith and they lead others in his example: praying, attending church services, and dedicating acts of charity to their god. Both live as single women, lacking the traditional benefits a married woman might obtain; however, as women of faith, they are awarded a social mobility and a level of societal influence that was unattainable for many women in their time.

The sisters were not alone in their use of faith as a social foundation: in religions and societies all over the world, we have seen examples of women who live religiously obtaining a life that offers them the chance to lead influential and uninterrupted lives. While many religions have traditions or practices that can be seen as limiting or oppressive of female-identifying members, many women feel that taking on roles in these faith establishments grants them a spiritual equality to male-identifying practitioners, and gives them opportunities they feel they might not have otherwise. It is often the case that established faiths provide avenues to further education, employment, and healthcare for women, and their families.

An example of religious tenets that bolster and empower women can be found in Buddhism. Men who become monastics in this religion are called bhikkus, and women who become monastics are referred to as bhikkunis. This role is significant in Buddhist culture, as according to scriptures, the first order of bhikkunis was created by Buddha at the direct request of his aunt and foster-mother, Mahapajapati Gotami, who went on to become the religion’s first bhikkuni. It is explicitly stated in Buddhist scripture that women are just as capable of reaching nirvana, or enlightenment, as men are.

Christianity, too, has a history of women using their faith to live their lives in defiance of what male-dominated leadership demanded of them. Wilgefortis, also known as Uncumber, was a noblewoman who is said to have lived sometime before the 14th century. Considered by folk-denominations of Catholicism to be the “patroness against men,” she offers an extreme example of womanhood lived faithfully in defiance of manhood. When she was a teenager, her father demanded she marry the King of Sicily. Uncumber refused, wishing to maintain her autonomy over her body and fate. She prayed to her god...
for deliverance, who answered her prayers by allowing her to grow a full mustache and beard, causing her to become repulsive to the King. In anger, her father crucified her, causing her death. Before she died, however, she promised to deliver other women in her situation to safety. To this day, some women in Britain traditionally leave hay at her altar when praying for deliverance from their husbands: this, they believe, will feed the horses that will carry him away.

Islamic feminism has risen to great prominence in the 21st century. With the advent of the Internet age, and the rise of global connectivity, many Islamic feminist groups have emerged, with the intention of giving platforms to Islamic women, advocating for change in religious policies that discriminate against women, and fighting for peace and justice in the face of sexism, Islamophobia (fear or distrust of Islam), and xenophobia (fear or distrust of people from countries different than your own). Organizations connecting young Muslim women, like sister-hood, founded by Norwegian film director and activist Deeyah Khan in 2007, and Sisters in Islam (SIS), founded in 1989, work to ensure the advancement of human rights, and specifically women’s rights, in Muslim communities around the world. Many Muslim-majority countries, like Pakistan, Azerbaijan, Senegal, and Bangladesh, have long histories of women holding leadership in capacities like Prime Minister, President, and Secretary of State.

**Hygge:**
Coziness, Comfort, and Community

*by Clare McCormick*

When you close your eyes and think about Norway, what images come to mind? Often, the things we think of first are the country’s landscapes. Pictures of Norway show us austere mountains, wide expanses of green, and wide-reaching seas, rivers, and fjords. While beautiful, the countryside can be harsh at times: the weather is rarely warm, and due to the country’s position in relation to the Arctic Circle, portions of the country are annually plunged into long periods of perpetual darkness or stretches of days where the sun never sets. At first, little about the geography in this country seems to suggest the ideas of coziness or comfort: however, it is not the place, but the people, that bring these concepts to life in Norwegian tradition.

In *Babette’s Feast*, the players tell us that Philippa and Martine live at the base of one such austere mountain in Norway, near a fjord, or “long, narrow arm of the sea.” Despite the shadow of the mountains, the sisters and their community members live in a village that seems to shine with warmth and welcome: we are told that their town is cheerful in appearance, looking like “a child’s toy town of little wooden pieces painted gray, yellow, pink and many other colors.” The two sisters live in one of the yellow houses, the color of the sunshine that often goes missing in Norway. The cluster of homes, and the people that live inside them, are close to one another.

This practice of community-building, togetherness, and careful design is a hallmark of Scandinavian culture. The term for this is “hygge” (pronounced “hue-gah”), and it has come to be a catch-all phrase, covering the concepts of positivity, comfort, support, joy, and so much more. The word is similar to the Danish term for “well-being,” and it is suspected to have descended from the Danish word “hug,” a term originating in 1560. There is also a link to Old Norse terminology: “hyggja” means “to comfort,” and “hugr” means mood. The modern interpretation of hygge could very well be described as “comfort mood”: it is the art of cultivating a loving and love-filled life.

It takes many forms. Hygge can be the color you paint your house, like Philippa and Martine’s bright yellow home. Hygge can be glogg, a warm, cinnamon-spiced holiday wine that Norwegians drink, or it can be risgrot, a cozy rice pudding dish that is beloved in Norway. Hygge can be sharing a book with a friend, or sitting by a fire, or eating dinner with people that you love. When you see a stranger turning into a friend, that’s hygge. When people get to know and love each other, regardless of background, that’s hygge. It is a place, a feeling, a person, a hug, a meal, a letter, and a gift. Hygge is the possibility, and probability, of peace.
Outreach & Advocacy

This section is dedicated to taking the issues we discuss in PlayNotes and offering an easy way for our readers to connect to those issues.

Are you or a loved one affected by one of the issues we discussed? Reach out to these resources for support. Want to make a difference in how these issues are handled in our community? Reach out to these resources to find advocacy and volunteer opportunities or donate towards their causes.

**Feeding the Needy in Portland**

**Saint Vincent de Paul Soup Kitchen**
“The volunteers of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul serve meals to Portland’s needy Monday through Friday, from 11:00am to 12:30pm. Clothing is available each Friday. All are welcome.”
Website: https://portlandcatholic.org/st-vincent-de-paul-soup-kitchen-1

**Preble Street Resource Center**
“Each and every day, more than 1,100 meals are served to homeless and low-income adults and youth at eight Preble Street Soup Kitchens, which operate at the Resource Center, the Teen Center, and at Florence House.”
Website: https://www.preblestreet.org/what-we-do/food-programs/soup-kitchens/

**Wayside Maine Food Programs**
“Wayside has been increasing access to nutritious food for those in need in Southern Maine since 1986. Wayside’s hunger relief efforts include: 13 free weekly community meals, five mobile food pantries, kids’ healthy snacks program, and community gardens.”
Website: http://www.waysidemaine.org/

**Refugees and Immigrants**

**Catholic Charities Maine Refugee and Immigration Services (RIS)**
“Maine’s only refugee resettlement program, Catholic Charities Maine Refugee and Immigration Services (RIS) is dedicated to helping those seeking a new life in America become independent, productive members of our community.”
Website: https://www.ccmaine.org/refugee-immigration-services

**Maine Immigrant and Refugee Services (MEIRS)**
“Maine Immigrant and Refugee Services educates, assists, and empowers immigrant and refugee youth and their families toward a goal of social and economic self-sufficiency and mental, emotional and physical wellbeing. MEIRS promotes a pathway toward citizenship and community engagement, creating opportunities for inclusion and meaningful participation for immigrants and refugees.”
Website: https://meirs.org/

**Maine Access Immigrant Network (MAIN)**
“Maine Access Immigrant Network bridges access to health and social services for immigrants and refugees in Portland Maine. Our organization works to build a stronger multicultural community in Portland, and to address refugee health literacy, health care enrollment, and coordination of health care benefits and non-clinical care.”
Website: http://main1.org/about-us/
Immigrant Legal Advocacy Project
“The Immigrant Legal Advocacy Project (ILAP) provides free and low-cost immigration information and legal assistance to low-income Maine residents. ILAP helps Maine’s immigrants keep their families together, gain protection from persecution and domestic violence, attain residency and work authorization, and become proud U.S. citizens.”
Website: http://www.ilapmaine.org/

New Mainers Resource Center
“The New Mainers Resource Center (NMRC) is a Portland Adult Education program serving immigrants, refugees, and employers in the Greater Portland area. Our mission is to support Maine’s economic development by facilitating the professional integration of immigrants and refugees, and by meeting employers’ demands for a skilled and culturally diverse workforce.”
Website: https://nmrcmaine.org/

Diversity and Multiculturalism in Maine

Portland Culture Exchange
“We are building our identity as a city of cultures come together. We’re sharing art, music, dance, language, and cooking to learn more about each other and create a future of Portland that incorporates all of our vast worldly wisdom.”
Website: https://www.facebook.com/pg/portlandculture

Theatre Ensemble of Color
“Theater Ensemble of Color strives to improve inclusion and strengthen culture within our communities through education, social activism, and the arts.”
Website: http://teoc-maine.weebly.com/

For Us, By Us
“Here in Maine, PoC (people of color) have been facing increased harassment and violence, on the streets and in our schools. It has become clear that PoC in southern Maine need resources and safe spaces to organize ourselves, heal ourselves, and to create.”
Website: https://fubufund.org/

Support Local Artists

Creative Portland
“Creative Portland is a nonprofit organization established by the City to support economic development efforts that capitalize on and grow Portland’s creative economy, create employment opportunities, and foster arts district development.”
Website: http://www.creativeportland.com/about-us

Mayo Street Arts
“Mayo Street Arts’ mission is to strengthen its neighborhood and community by providing a vibrant, safe, and inspiring center for the arts, and to engage neighborhood youths of diverse cultural communities in quality learning experiences in the visual, performing, and literary arts.”
Website: http://mayostreetarts.org/

Maine Arts Commission
“The Maine Arts Commission supports artists, art organizations, educators, policy makers, and community developers in advancing the arts in Maine.”
Website: https://mainearts.maine.gov
Recommended Resources

Reading
Books
Americanah by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie
Babette's Feast by Isak Dinesen
Children of War: Voices of Iraqi Refugees, by Deborah Ellis
Does My Head Look Big in This? by Randa Abdel-Fattah
Inside Out and Back Again, by Thanhha Lai
Feast for 10 by Cathryn Falwell
Out of Africa by Isak Dinesen
Out of Nowhere by Maria Padian
Stormy Seas: Stories of Young Boat Refugees by Mary Beth Leatherdale
The Arrival by Shaun Tan
The Good Braider by Terry Farish
The Joy Luck Club by Amy Tan
The Red Pencil by Andrea Davis Pinkney

Plays
Anon(y)mous by Naomi Izuka
Ragtime by Terrence McNally, Lynn Ahrens, and Stephen Flaherty
The Ufot Cycle by Mfoniso Udofia

Viewing
Films
A Little Princess, 1995
Babette's Feast, 1987
Eat Drink Man Woman, 1994
The Color of Friendship, 2000

TV
Aliens in America, 2007
Fresh Off the Boat, 2015-present
The Franco-Prussian War: 1870-1871, 2007

YouTube
"Meet-Eat" by CuriousWorks, 2014
"Strolling" by Cecile Emeke, 2016
"The Danger of a Single Story: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie" by TED, 2009

Listening
Podcasts
Another Round, 2015-present
A Taste of the Past, 2006-present
Revisionist History, 2015-present
Portland Stage Company  
Education and Outreach

Join Portland Stage as we discuss, debate, and explore the plays on our stage and in the classroom! Portland Stage is dedicated to bringing exciting theater, inspiring conversation, interactive experiences, and thought-provoking literature to a wide audience of youth and adult learners. Whether you take part in a discussion, subscribe to PlayNotes, take a class in our Theater for Kids space, or bring a group of students to see a performance, there is something here for everyone. How would you like to participate?

**Student Matinee Series**

The Portland Stage Student Matinee Program annually provides more than 7,000 middle and high school students from Maine and New Hampshire with discounted tickets for student matinees. Following Student Matinee performances, students participate in discussions with members of the cast and crew, actively and energetically exploring all elements of the production and the issues raised in the play.

**Play Me a Story**

Experience the Fun & Magic of Theater on Saturday Mornings at 10:30am with Play Me a Story! Ages 4-10 are welcome to enjoy a performance of children’s stories, then participate in an acting workshop with professional theater artists. Build literacy, encourage creativity and spark dramatic dreams! Walk-ins are welcome, but pre-registration is encouraged!

**After School Classes**

After school classes at Portland Stage produce a safe environment for young people to find a higher sense of play, stretch their imaginations, and gain valuable social skills such as listening, risk taking, ensemble building, public speaking, and leadership through storytelling. These classes are wildly fun, creative, spontaneous, and begin to build skills for the young actor or non-actor’s voice, body, and imagination. Visit our website for this year’s offerings!

**Vacation and Summer Camps**

Our theater camps are fun, challenging and enriching. We use stories of all kinds to fuel these active, educational and lively, process-based week-long school vacation and summer programs for youth. Theater for Kids works with professional actors, directors, artisans and composers. Students are invited to think, speak, and act, and even sing imaginatively, critically, and creatively in an environment of inclusivity and safe play.

**Classroom Workshop Program**

The Classroom Workshop Program partners Portland Stage with regional middle and high schools to enhance the experience of students who participate in the Early Show Program by complementing their visits with pre- and post-show workshops in their own classrooms. Workshops are led by professional Teaching Artists who engage students in the creative process through writing, acting, directing and discussion.

**The Intern Company**

The Portland Stage Intern Program is committed to training future generations of theater professionals. Applicants should be highly motivated individuals who have acquired basic training in the theater arts and are looking to explore their field further through meaningful hands-on experience. Portland Stage interns can expect to be challenged by a creative process that relies on both ingenuity and collaboration. Interns at Portland Stage work with leading designers, directors, administrators, and our professional production team throughout the season. They leave with a greater knowledge of the theatrical process and the satisfaction of being part of a dedicated theater company where exceptional quality is the end goal.
Portland Stage Company
2017-2018 Staff

Anita Stewart Executive & Artistic Director

Artistic/Production
Meg Anderson Props Master
Todd Brian Backus Literary Manager
Daniel Brodhead Scenic Carpenter
Hannah Cordes Education Manager
Megan Doane General Manager
Ted Gallant Technical Director
Myles C. Hatch Stage Manager
Emily Kenny Production Manager & Lighting & Sound Supervisor
Julianne Shea Education Administrator
Susan Thomas Costume Shop Manager
Shane Van Vliet Stage Manager

Ron Botting
Peter Brown
Daniel Burson
Maureen Butler
Ian Carlsen
Moira Driscoll
Abigail Killeen
Callie Kimball

Affiliate Artists
Daniel Noel
Michael Rafkin
Ed Reichert
Hans Indigo Spencer
Dustin Tucker
Bess Welden
Monica Wood
Sally Wood

Administration
Paul Ainsworth Business Manager
Lena Castro Social Media & Marketing Associate
Chris DeFilipp House Manager
Jessica Eller Box Office
Julia Fitzgerald Development Assistant
Beth Given Development Director
Alex Kimmel Company Manager
Martin Lodish Finance Director
Renee Myhaver Box Office
Eileen Phelan Marketing Director
Donald Smith Audience Services Manager
Adam Thibodeau House Manager

Intern Company
Katie Baskerville Directing & Dramaturgy
Katherine Borden General Administration
Devin L. Bruton Electrics
Eliza M. Burwell Stage Management
Nolan Ellsworth Education
Kristal Georgopoulos Stage Management
Cloey Hammond Costumes
Kayla Minton Kaufman Directing & Dramaturgy
Clare McCormick Directing & Dramaturgy
Trevor Stanchfield Scenic & Carpentry
Robin Piatt Stegman Costumes
Celia Watson Education