ABSTRACT

THE BODY UNDERNEATH: A METHOD OF COSTUME DESIGN

by Leslie Anne Wise Stamoolis

A survey of costume design texts currently available to designers revealed that the research-based, scholarly design methods that experienced designers use have not been theorized or written down. Therefore, this thesis seeks to begin to theorize one potential scholarly method of costume design – studying the body to be costumed to understand why it is then clothed as it is – using the tools of theatre semiotics, cultural, anthropological, and historiographical studies, and traditional elements of costume design. Through the apparatus of designing and building costumes for *The Conversion of Ka’abumanu* by Victoria Nalani Kneubuhl, the method is explored as a way to design an intercultural play: a script that makes the meeting of cultures its main plot, and whose cultures may not be readily known by, and different from, those of the audience. The thesis concludes with implications for further research and goals of the author for the continuation of work.
THE BODY UNDERNEATH: A METHOD OF COSTUME DESIGN

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Leslie Anne Wise Stamoolis
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Oxford, Ohio
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Advisor _________________________
Ann Elizabeth Armstrong

Reader __________________________
Roger Bechtel

Reader __________________________
Lin Conaway

Reader __________________________
Elizabeth Reitz Mullenix
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To my husband, for providing me with unfailing support, encouragement, and love

To my mom, for teaching me everyday about true womanhood

and

To my dad, for exemplifying faithful scholarship and perseverance, and reminding me always to be a good little Colt
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INTRODUCTION

The following paper is not a traditional costume design thesis because the play in question is not a traditional play. *The Conversion of Ka‘ahumanu* by Victoria Nalani Kneubuhl requires a costume designer to approach more than the usual array of design problems and also provides a designer with an array of design opportunities. In 1820, Hawai‘i is a land in flux; the western world has been invading the lives of the Hawaiians for forty-two years, with the aims of financial gain and imperialistic expansion. The influence of the newcomers eventually leads to the abolition of the Hawaiian religion by the king Liholiho in November 1819, leaving the people unstable. Ka‘ahumanu, the kuhina nu‘i, knows the fate of her people rests in her hands and in whatever choices she makes regarding the future of the culture. It is in this moment that the play begins to unfold – with the arrival of the first company of missionaries to Hawai‘i, bringing the first white women and very different goals than the whalers and tradesmen. Can the Hawaiian culture continue undisturbed? Will the influence of the western world destroy the past and plague the future irreparably?

Native Hawaiian women – including the queen regent, Ka‘ahumanu; a half white, half Hawaiian, Hannah Grimes; and a member of the outcast class passing as a commoner, Pali – as well as early nineteenth century Congregationalist missionary women – Sybil Bingham and Lucy Thurston – are real women of the past and also the characters of the play whose historical and cultural interaction came at the crest of a major tide of change in their worlds and in their individual lives. The moment represented by the play is a significant one, too, for the history of the United States and the colonial actions that stain the pages of the past, thereby making it a chance for education and awareness. The play’s treatment of women – five women only, no male characters at all – as subjects worthy of attention provides a chance to explore a feminist perspective of the past. The rich textures offered by each culture, as well as the new textures that emerge in their encounters with one another, create a play of profound importance and interest.

As an indicator of culture, clothing has been stressed as an important element of costume design theory, as well as historical silhouette or fashion; it is considered general knowledge, too, that clothes can “say” something about a particular person or group of people – that clothing speaks just as a person does. If a costume designer is designing a play whose origin, audience, actors, and production team share the same culture or time period, the very vague, general idea of “psychology of clothing” can be employed by the design as historical premises are understood by all involved. However, as soon as even one of these factors changes – as soon as either the audience members,
for example, or the play itself is of a different culture than the others’ – interculturalism is in effect, and all generalities and “universals” cease to be sufficient. If a theatre event that addresses multiple cultures is to be respectful and honoring of all cultures, as well as historically and culturally accurate to a degree, in order to guide the audience’s understanding both of the historical culture and of the dramatic events onstage, suddenly a designer is faced with a monumental responsibility. Since clothing and identity are so closely paired onstage – indeed, costume and character are read as synonymous – the task of visually representing the people of the historical culture in a way that will fulfill the goals above falls on the shoulders of the costume designer. In *The Conversion of Ka’ahumanu* the challenges do not even end there. The issue of interculturalism between the subjects of the play and the audience is significant on its own; however, there is also interculturalism at play between the two cultures represented by the characters onstage. The Hawaiians and the missionary women interact and respond to one another’s worlds throughout the play, drawing attention to their own as well as alerting the audience of the always-lurking issues of colonialism, acculturation, othering, and the hegemonic gaze.

I pause here to point out something I have so far mentioned without comment – the living, breathing actors onstage. The fact that clothing must reside on the body is not to be overlooked by a costume designer. Designers are fond of saying that our medium is fabrics; I think it would be wiser to say that our medium, and our canvas, is the actor’s body. After all, the body informs clothing choices in so many daily ways that people take for granted – cold? Add layers. Feel like relaxing? It’s knitted fabrics all the way. In much more significant ways, though, the body informs how it is dressed – in ways that reveal cultural norms, beliefs, and expectations. This is no small feature; as Bryan Turner states, “We can thus think of the body as an outer surface of interpretations and representations and an internal environment of structures and determinations” (38). The culture that creates the “internal environment” is thus manifested on the body as “interpretations and representations” of that culture. Therefore, I argue that every reason behind clothing can be traced back in some way to the body underneath.

I propose, then, a new way to think about costume design when faced with historical moments and interculturalism, in an effort to advance the role of costume design as a vital, intelligent, and educational theatrical element that can and should be used for the awareness and appreciation of cultures throughout time and around the world as represented in theatre. To begin this journey, I start in Chapter One by elaborating how and where such a project should start by discovering the shortcomings present in current costume design theory and what other disciplines
might be able to fill the gaps—namely, the work of theatre semiotics. An examination of what such theorists as Keir Elam, Susan Bennett, and Ferdinand De Toro have to offer as tools for design leads me to conclude that costume designers need to work in a system of language that considers issues of the audience. I develop a metaphor—the Language of the Body—purely as a means to an end, a way of communicating abstract beliefs a culture holds about the human body by articulating their beliefs into a Grammar, composed of Parts of Speech, which can then be “written” as a design text. Individual clothing choices constitute words, sentences, and statements made by the person wearing them; this I term Vocabulary. A summarizing look at how the Languages can be used to express interculturalism closes the first chapter.

In Chapter Two, I use the research I have compiled (recorded in chapters three and four; see below) to formulate the Language of the Body for each culture by spelling out its Grammar through the Parts of Speech. Having explored the views of the female body, I am sufficiently informed to be able to choose costumes for the five women—I can decide what Vocabulary, what words (i.e., what individual pieces of clothing or adornment)—Ka‘ahumanu, Hannah, Pali, Sybil, and Lucy choose to clothe themselves. Once the system is in place for each culture, then, I return to the tool of semiotics to aid the design process with the textual and character analysis necessary to understand the function and experiences of each woman in the play. I can now create signs and signifiers onstage in pattern, color, line, unity, contrast, that the audience can read as a “design text.” The Language of the Body for each culture, in conjunction with the traditional elements of design, allows me to create a culturally respectful and historically accurate (to a degree), and dramatically enlightening design.

In Chapters Three and Four I seek to demonstrate the research needed to reveal a culture’s view of the female body. For The Conversion of Ka‘ahumanu, I determined that the best way to understand each group of women’s views of their own bodies was to study the religion of each culture. The native Hawaiian religion permeated every aspect of daily life in some way, especially because of mana and the kapu system that it necessitated, so that even if a woman did not necessarily engage in ritual religious activity, the religion still affected her world. And the Christian religion as interpreted by the Congregational Church of New England through the doctrines of John Calvin was clearly very influential in the individual lives of the missionary women, since they chose to devote their entire life’s work to its cause. As one panning for gold, I sift for the female body in both culture’s religions using the fields of anthropological, historiographical, and religious studies. Studying them each individually necessitated writing a chapter to cover the findings of each religion.
on its own. Although the tool of juxtaposition in design is useful for guiding an audience’s reading of two cultures, I avoided combining the research and comparing the two religions too much in these exploratory actions, so as to eschew the temptation to set one up as the norm and the other as its deviant. Doing so would be counterproductive to the goals of the production. Juxtaposition is not, after all, a synonym for comparison.

A final word about my goals and hopes for this study and the resulting design. Besides the implications of my research for further study in costume design theory (as I will discuss in the conclusion), my aim is to represent both groups of women as fully and fairly as I can, treating each as a belief system complete unto itself and equally viable. Daphne Desser, professor of English at the University of Hawai‘i, points out the difficulties of studies involving native people that are written by white people – especially white people affiliated with the colonizing power that oppressed those native people. She suggests,

A common way for white teachers and scholars working in post-colonial contexts to respond to such challenges of identification is to see as an integral part of their work an advocacy for the rights of indigenous peoples. … In short, it is a call that suggests academic studies of disenfranchised others should not just be about them; such studies should also assist them (Desser 4).

Though Desser is speaking to a very specific issue of literacy in Hawai‘i, I embrace this summon to action in terms of respect of the culture and advocacy for its honest representation. It is my hope that my work will serve the native women of Hawai‘i by increasing knowledge and awareness of their culture through the performance of The Conversion of Ka‘ahumanu, while also seeking to delineate stereotype from historical truth. I wish to give Hawaiian women of the past a position as subject in this work and faithfully study the belief system that informed the lives of the Hawaiian women at the turn of the nineteenth century. As for the missionary women, the Christian religion is certainly one that has been granted center stage for the vast majority of modern history. Only relatively recently has scholarly thought afforded attention to the women within it, and in that sense I wish this study to emphasize their position as it was situated in 1820, in the hopes of learning more about the women of the past to inform the future belief system about the female body in Christianity.
CHAPTER 1: METHODOLOGY

Representing history and culture in the present moment, in a time and a space onstage before a contemporary audience with its own unique culture is a challenge that costume designers have faced for years and will continue to confront. Because text-based theatre performances rely on a script that was written in or about a particular past moment, that script carries with it its historical and cultural ideologies – both those that the playwright held and inscribed into the text and those that past performance has imprinted on the play’s existence. Therefore, no performance of a play script can escape the lasting impressions that culture and time have left upon it – nor will that performance be able to avoid the new inscriptions from its audience. For practitioners of theatre, then, anytime a script is performed, we are working in a present moment to give its past a new life. For the costume designer, a myriad of information and expectations are before her: from the text, with its specific or vague descriptions found in dialogue; from historical costume books, with their declamatory canonizing of “the” fashions of the day; from the actors’ and the director’s interpretations and limitations; and especially from the audience, who enter a theatre with preconceived ideas of the time period and culture they are about to encounter. How does a designer begin to approach such a task? Who or what ought to be satisfied and how? The pitfalls and the pressures are endless – should a designer cater to audience expectation? follow the script’s admonitions above all else? recreate exactly the historical or cultural clothing?

*The Conversion of Ka‘ahumanu* by Victoria Nalani Kneubuhl treats both history and culture as important elements of the story, requiring the designer to face these challenges. In addition, the script demands attention to a few unique challenges of historical and cultural representation. They are as follows:

1. The play addresses not just one historical culture in 1820, but two distinct ones – that of native and post-contact Hawaiians, and that of the missionaries of the Congregational Church. The designer must determine how to represent both historical cultures.

2. These two cultures may not be readily known to most audiences – in particular and of interest here, to an audience of college students and community members in southwestern Ohio in 2007. The designer must determine how to communicate the cultural codes and norms of both historical cultures to an unfamiliar audience.

3. The play deals with the sensitive issue of colonization and cultural assimilation in its treatment of the two distinct and unfamiliar cultures. The designer must determine how to represent the encountering, clashing, and merging of both historical cultures.
These challenges are not often met in the general theatrical works of the western theatre. That is, although treating on two different cultures is not uncommon of the plays in the western literary canon, *The Conversion of Ka‘ahumanu* is unique because the two cultures meeting is the main focus of the plot. Throughout the paper, then, when I use the term “intercultural” I mean a play whose focus is on cultural differences and the very act of the cultures meeting and – very importantly – the cultures of interest may not be readily known to the audience. Since so many theatre design texts focus on the western canon and its typical styles – especially realistic plays that take place entirely within one culture – such special problems as those of Kneubuhl’s play are not addressed by traditional methods of costume design. Though better methods exist, they are largely unwritten and untheorized. How should a costume designer approach these problems? Is there a more effective and more culturally sensitive method of design to represent different historical cultures onstage to an unfamiliar audience? And is it available as a written theory?

In the following pages I will survey several costume design textbooks to examine whether or not their instruction provides the guidance needed to solve the problems put forth by *The Conversion of Ka‘ahumanu*. Next, I will explore the possibility of the work of semiotics as a tool for costume designers, a way to learn cultural codes and an approach to creating – not recreating – the culture onstage through a system of theatrical codes. I will then propose a method to learn the cultures in the play to be costumed; rather than searching for visual representations of an historical or cultural way of dressing, I suggest that the study of the culture’s perception of the human body is the best way to be able to articulate why a culture dresses as they do/did, and therefore to make more informed and dramatically illuminating design choices. And finally, I will consider audience reception of an unfamiliar historical culture and how their views must be taken into account when creating a cultural code so that successful communication takes place between the action onstage and the audience experiencing it.

**Survey of Costume Design Texts: the Gap in the Literature**

Traditional methods of costume design that are constructed to address the demands of realistic plays do not address how to handle the special issues presented by a play like *The Conversion of Ka‘ahumanu*. Although costume design textbooks are inherently embedded in the field of fashion and dress history – a rich discipline with abundant information about clothing that is approached from several angles, including cultural studies – most authors of design texts do not stress how a designer might do this work herself, rather than relying on secondary sources. A brief overview here
of several costume design texts demonstrates the gap in the literature that leaves a designer with few tools to tackle an historical play with the challenges particular to *The Conversion of Ka‘ahumanu*.

The first problem with costume design textbooks is the assumption that the text’s authors, the designer, and the audience all share the same culture. In *Costume Design* by Barbara and Cletus Anderson (1984), the word “culture” does not appear anywhere in the chapters devoted to research, script analysis, and concept development. The authors touch briefly on the question of how clothing derives meaning:

Since costumes are based on the clothing people wear, designers must think about what is worn by whom, why they wear it, and what others think about it. They must develop a feeling for why people dress the way they do today and know how to translate that back to other eras. They must recognize all the information costumes can convey and know how to deal with a script to realize which will best fill out all the characterizations present in it (2-3).

Clearly, though, no notice is taken of the fact that different cultures have different ideas and motivations about dress, or of the fact that a designer might be faced with costuming a play that depicts a culture about which she – and the audience – know very little. “Developing a feeling” for the reason behind clothing choices is weak – rather, a designer needs a concrete and dependable way to learn these inclinations about the cultures of the play’s characters.

In Rosemary Ingham and Liz Covey’s text *The Costume Designer’s Handbook* (1992), the same assumption of shared knowledge is made:

Theatrical costumes create an *impression* of period. The designer who sees a period accurately knows which elements of the silhouette and which details are most evocative of that period to a contemporary audience’s eyes and, therefore, which need to be emphasized in the costumes. Whenever the audience perceives a correct impression through character silhouette in the opening moments of a production, that play is off to a good start (51).

Phrases like “accurately,” “evocative…to a contemporary audience,” and “perceives a correct impression” all assume that the culture is known by the audience and they would be able to evaluate these images. The word “period” is the most important here; the authors are not factoring in different cultures, but rather the same culture as it has progressed through time – the dominant western culture. Douglas Russell’s *Stage Costume Design* (1985) is also guilty of this assumption; it is manifested mostly in the examples he uses to illustrate points, such as “a business suit, riding habit, tuxedo, sport shirt, slacks, or swimsuit” – certainly very western garments.

A second problem of costume design texts is focusing narrowly on character choices rather than grasping more broadly how those very choices derive meaning from a larger cultural significance. While all textbooks stress the role costume plays in revealing character, those
characters cannot be divorced from the influence of the culture in which they reside in the world of the play. Russell, again, is guilty of using examples – and therefore, setting forth a method – that presupposes the existence and dominance of western culture in the play, and neglects to recognize anything else could be needed. He suggests, “The two most obvious poles of expression in a society are conformity and rebellion, and clothes speak more clearly about them than any other social custom” (10). Russell fails to understand that “poles of expression” or “social custom” are actually norms, which vary from one culture to another and of which none can be stated as universal. While his “obvious poles” might apply to more than just western cultures, his examples are strictly western: “the person who may look ridiculous because he or she is preoccupied with work and completely unconscious of dress…the person who is genuinely careless in dress, who does not look well groomed by society’s standards because of slovenly personal habits…” (ibid). These standards do not exist on their own; such norms exist only within their cultural framework.

The Andersons in Costume Design similarly declare, “Some knowledge of the psychology of clothing gives designers a background that will help them begin actual work on a play so they can explore the dramatic ideas and find ways that costumes will help develop the characters and present the ideas of the script” (10, emphases mine). The italicized phrases within this lofty statement identify the needs in design that are here being assumed; first, that the designer either already has “knowledge” or knows how to obtain “knowledge” of the characters, the world of the play, and the reason those characters wear clothes – the “psychology.” Second, the “psychology of clothing” is stated as an absolute – the article the suggests there is only one psychology possible, instead of its being dependent on a culture. And lastly, quite a leap is made from the psychology of clothing to the declaration “costumes will help develop the characters” and “present the ideas of the script.” Once again, the authors have stated several goals without providing a means of research suggestions or design instruction to achieve them.

A third problem of costume design textbooks is the assumption that western philosophies can be applied to any place on earth, a concept that has been dispelled in many other disciplines at the risk of othering cultures – that is, the potential to further stereotypes or perpetuate myths that allow an audience to dismiss a culture as lesser than her or his own – and that ought to be dispelled in costume design theory. For example, the Andersons suggest, “Human nature, with its desire for change and its boredom with current styles, can give impetus to these ever-changing modes [fashion]” (28). The importance of culture to such a statement cannot be stressed enough – after all, fashion can only exist (and only began to exist) when all other needs of human existence have been
met; hence the birth of western fashion in the 13th century, only once the European world had survived famine, widespread wars and crusades, and had developed the technologies for faster development of clothing. “Desire for change and...boredom with current styles” is only descriptive of those cultures whose needs are met so readily and sufficiently that they have been taught the luxury of boredom with an item of clothing.

Rebecca Cunningham’s *The Magic Garment* (1989), to its credit, mentions the existence of cultures other than western and the possibility that a designer may have to acquire knowledge about them. However, she makes the common error of suggesting the following ways to learn these cultures:

Research into special groups like Amish communities, early American settlements, Native American tribes, various ethnic groups, and Oriental cultures should follow the same approach [that is, script analysis and pictorial research]. Secondary sources will give some answers and may indicate other questions and places to look. Some possibilities are *National Geographic* and *Smithsonian* magazines, restoration villages such as Williamsburg, Virginia, museums such as the Museum of the American Indian, and the embassies or consulates of foreign countries in Washington, DC, or at the United Nations in New York City (59).

These suggested sources are nearly all western-based and are therefore irrevocably ideologically slanted. Still, such sources are sometimes the best option for a designer – but then the textbook author should warn against the slant being present. Questions like these could lead to the museum tendency – that is, the tendency to establish one individual case in a culture as the norm by placing it “under glass,” labeling it (granting it authority), and touting it as “the” example from that culture. A designer must know how to approach such problems to avoid othering or, preferably, authors should recommend other sources that originate within the culture of study.

Even the best-intentioned source can suffer from a bias, as seen in Rose Netzorg Kerr’s illustrations of clothing throughout history. Kerr studied the costume collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in the early twentieth century and created sixty costume plates, dating from Egypt to 1860. She published the plates, as well as several more to cover 1850 to 1950, as *100 Years of Costume in America*, which earned her a Pulitzer Prize nomination in 1952. A brief section called ‘The Orient’, featuring just eleven plates, claims to represent all of the east; illustrations of an Assyrian king, a Hebrew maiden, an Arabian girl, a generic “sheik of the desert”, an Indian temple dancing girl and a Chinese princess are a few examples. Worst of all, the drawings of the eastern women feature pouty lips, wideset eyes, slender and shapely figures, and alluring expressions – an example of the exoticizing of people (often women) of other cultures. Sources just like these, no matter how well-intentioned, are the reason that cultural stereotypes are created and perpetuated. Perhaps some
of her pictorial research is accurate, and even representative of some of the norms within that culture – however, the framing of the norm on a page titled “a Chinese princess” eliminates the suggestion that other norms might coexist with it in the culture and sets it up as the absolute, the definitive – thereby becoming the stereotype.

Though the problems abound, some texts do point out important factors of design that relate to the more complex representation of culture. As mentioned above, Cunningham’s book acknowledges the existence of non-western cultures: “Understanding the period and culture is extremely important and too often overlooked by the novice designer” (50). She is even so thorough as to propose a list of questions for such a task:

What social mores of the time or place affected dress and manners? What were the views on courtship and marriage and the roles of men and women? What were the erogenous zones (areas of the body considered sexually provocative)? What colors were used and why? What materials and dyes were available? What kinds of work were performed? What leisure activities were enjoyed? Permitted? Were special garments worn for work or play? What differences were established between age groups, married and unmarried, rich and poor? What was the political system under which the characters lived? What religious beliefs were held? How did these beliefs affect dress and manners? What assumptions were made about people based on their dress? How did they view themselves in relationship to the world? The answers to these and other questions give the designer a context in which to consider the design choices (50).

The fact that Cunningham recognizes the need to answer these questions is progress; indeed, the list is more than a good start for researching a culture. The questions are not easy, nor do they presuppose a western ideology, and – most interestingly – visual sources will not provide all the answers. I will return to the idea of such a list of inquiry, using Cunningham’s beginning thoughts.

The Andersons’ text acknowledges the fact that costumes are not as simple as researching the historical period and recreating an impression of the look onstage, as so many texts declare. In a section of their book titled ‘The Psychology of Clothing,’ the Andersons state, “Since anything the actor wears is a costume that will communicate information to the audience, the designer should consider all these variables in order to select the correct message” (30). But what is meant by the very vague term “message”? And by what standard does a designer judge what is the “correct” message – the playwright’s intended meaning? the audience’s expectation? It would seem the Andersons are employing popular vocabulary of 1984 – the language of semiotics is here being used without clarification or demonstrating an understanding of its complexities. Doing so is misleading and, most of all, insufficient in its brevity.
Clearly, questions of how to costume a show featuring cultures unfamiliar to the designer and audience cannot be adequately answered by the old standby costume design textbooks. The expanding field of fashion and clothing studies suffers from similar problems, even though much of its work is applicable to theatre and useful for review.¹ To what disciplines of scholarship and study can a designer turn to understand how best to analyze these special problems, and further, how to represent these abstract ideas in visual images onstage? Beverly Jane Thomas in her book *A Practical Approach to Costume Design and Construction* wryly states, “…the costume designer must be part historian, anthropologist, artist, engineer, draftsman, psychologist, economist, and still retain a sense of perspective and humor” (xi). Truly, she is not far off. I suggest that the special problems of a play like *The Conversion of Ka‘ahumanu* can be best addressed through the fields of theatre semiotics and cultural studies, including anthropological, historiographical, and cultural disciplines.

**Cultural Meaning and Semiotics as Tool: the Potential of a Dead Field**

Based on the obvious shortcomings of traditional costume design theory, a costume designer must turn elsewhere to approach the design of *The Conversion of Ka‘ahumanu*. First, a designer must learn about the world of the play to be costumed – the culture’s workings and especially its views of the human body. In the case of *The Conversion of Ka‘ahumanu*, interculturalism is at play. Here, the term ‘intercultural’ means that at least one culture is represented onstage that is unfamiliar in some way to the intended audience (the cultures represented by the audience might be one or more, and the audience’s cultures may or may not overlap with those onstage). Therefore, in the case of an intercultural play, new world(s) must be learned – in *The Conversion of Ka‘ahumanu*, those worlds are Hawai‘i as it existed before contact, as well as in the forty years after, and the world of the members of the Congregational Church, a Protestant sect in New England. To do so reveals not just the basics of their worlds as they existed historically, but also their cultural values. Such values are subsequently encoded in clothing choices of that culture – a vital truth for any designer who is attempting to costume that culture onstage. While this research will guide a designer in the “why” of a culture’s dress, it is then the field of semiotics that guides her as to the “how” of a culture’s dress – how it derives its meaning within that culture. Once a designer has studied the “why” and the “how” of dress and meaning, she can then, from an informed position, begin the “how to” of her costume design – for once she understands the abstract ideas behind the dress of that culture, she can turn the abstract into visual images.

¹ See, for example, Christopher Breward, Fred Davis, Alison Lurie, Ruth Rubinstein, and Rob Schorman.
Still the picture is not complete. Although taking these steps can make the designer an informed participant in the theatrical event, the audience must not be left behind. Besides a brief program note, perhaps, it is very unlikely that the audience will have access to the designer’s research that would allow them to understand the cultural codes chosen to be recreated onstage by the designer. How can the designer educate the audience about the nature of the cultural codes? What must she do to make the codes “readable” to an audience unfamiliar with their origin or meaning within the culture? To attempt an approach to these weighty questions, I will here flesh out what the proposed areas of study and research can offer to approach the special problems of an historical intercultural play.

First, the use of cultural studies in conjunction with the study of semiotic theory helps the designer to understand that cultures and their clothing codes are fluid – there is no one theory or psychology of clothing that applies to all cultures, but rather the culture informs its own theory or psychology of clothing which then takes on meaning in the context of that culture.

While semiotics has been applied in recent years to clothing psychology texts, as discussed briefly below, as a scholarly field in and of itself it has been declared dead. Ferdinand De Toro explains, “By the late 1980s the discipline had been exhausted…It seemed after a while that producing diagrams and arrows had been unnecessarily obtrusive and did not get us anywhere” (1-2). Nevertheless, its application in slightly dated but no less valuable theatre texts has proven its usefulness as a means to an end – not a way to dissect a theatrical event on paper, but rather a tool used to better understand how meaning is made by practitioners and communicated onstage to the audience. As Elaine Aston and George Savona posit in their text *Theatre as Sign-System*, “Fundamentally, we view theatre semiotics not as a theoretical position, but as a methodology: as a way of working, of approaching theatre in order to open up new practices and possibilities of ‘seeing’” (1).

In brief, semiotics was first a way to study how people assign and interpret meaning in language; the fundamental question was not the “what” of earlier concern, but rather “how” – how language, and later other sign systems, means. Several scholars began to toy with such ideas in the mid-nineteenth century, Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce generally being those

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2 The nature of the educational theatre, like that of Miami University, affords the opportunity through tools such as design program notes. See Appendix II.
3 I do not here seek to reiterate the whole of the theories and applications of semiotics over the years, nor to engage in structuralist/poststructuralist argument over its usage. Using semiotics as a tool, as a means to an end, is of significance to me.
credited with its inception (Berger 17). The field gained a solid footing under the interpretation of Umberto Eco, who first synthesized the many differing ideas of semiotics into one cohesive theory in 1976. Like the others, he began with the study of language through the semiotic lens, suggesting that even the physical shapes we use to represent language carry meaning. He wrote,

A design for a general semiotics should consider: (a) a theory of codes and (b) a theory of sign production – the latter taking into account a large range of phenomena such as the common use of languages, the evolution of codes, aesthetic communication, different types of interactional communicative behavior, the use of signs in order to mention things or states of the world and so on (3).

A basic equation of semiotics emerged: signifier + signified = sign. Very quickly scholars realized the equation must include far more information to be accurate in its representation of the dynamics of communication. As Keir Elam adds from the theatrical context,

Theatrical signification is not reducible to a set of one-to-one relationships between single sign-vehicles and their individual meanings. If it were possible to break down the performance text into atomic units of meaning, the task of analysing [sic] theatrical semiosis would be scarcely more than a parade of items to which the audience has merely to assign fixed values (28).

Semioticians recognized the need to consider the culture before formulating a “theory of codes,” as the factors that Eco states should be taken into account are extremely culture-dependent. Of culture, Eco said, “…the whole of culture is signification and communication and…humanity and society exist only when communicative and significative relationships are established” (22), therefore culture is of utmost importance in considering a sign-system.

Aston and Savona add, “Everything which is presented to the spectator within the theatrical frame is a sign… Reading signs is the way in which we set about making sense of the world” (99). Of course, the issue of “reading signs,” as well as Elam’s suggestion that an audience would be able to “assign fixed values” begs the question of whether or not the audience is accurately able to do this in the case of an intercultural theatre experience. Even though Aston and Savona later acknowledge that “theatre establishes its network of codified sign-systems by virtue of the cultural codes which govern behaviour, speech, dress, make-up, etc., in society at large” (111), the issue then becomes how an audience learns the cultural codes that informed the “codified sign-systems” onstage. This question of audience education/reception will be addressed further below.

The Body Underneath: Not Merely a Blank Canvas

Before delving into the issue of the audience reception, I must first consider how a designer goes about learning the culture she is to costume in such a way that she can employ the tools of
semiotics – how she can understand the “why” of a culture, not just the “what,” so that her design choices make sense dramatically for the benefit of the actors and can be read onstage for the benefit of the audience.

Studying clothing necessitates studying the body, in order to understand the cultural logic of the choices made by individuals in that culture. This is recognized by many scholars of fashion theory and other related disciplines. As Shari Benstock and Suzanna Ferriss note in On Fashion, “A central concern is not only the clothes that cover our bodies but the bodies we recover under our clothes” (3). Other scholars similarly and importantly note that it is virtually impossible to separate issues of the body from issues of dress. Anne Hollander, from her unique view of clothing through art history, makes this interesting contribution:

It is tempting to believe that people always feel physically the same and that they look different only because the cut of their garments changes – to subscribe to the notion of a universal, undressed mankind that is universally naturally behaved when naked. But art proves that nakedness is not universally experienced and perceived any more than clothes are. At any time, the undressed self has more kinship with its own usual dressed aspect than it has with any undressed human selves in other times and places, who have learned a different visual sense of the clothed body. It can be shown that the rendering of the nude in art usually derives from the current form in which the clothed figure is conceived. This correlation in turn demonstrates that both the perception and the self-perception of nudity are dependent on a sense of clothing – and of clothing understood through the medium of a visual convention (xii).

This insightful and fascinating discovery supports the importance of the relationship between body and clothes – a relationship that a designer must thoroughly understand. How does a designer articulate this relationship to understand the “why”? After all, in order to make design choices the “why” – the reason for the character’s clothing choices – is much more important than the “what” – the clothes themselves. Perhaps the appropriate apparatus can be found, again, in semiotic theory.

Semiotics began with language – with written and spoken texts – and as its scope expanded, so did the meaning of the word “text” to engage virtually limitless phenomena. The expansion of the term in theatre means looking beyond the script in physical, printed reality and also encompassing the performance of that script, which exists in space and time. In Marco de Marinis’ The Semiotics of Performance, he muses over the term:

From a semiotic standpoint, the term /text/ designates not only coherent and complete series of linguistic statements, whether oral or written, but also every unit of discourse, whether verbal, nonverbal, or mixed, that results from the coexistence of several codes (and other facts, too, as we shall see) and possesses the constitutive prerequisites of completeness and coherence. According to this understanding of textuality, an image, or group of images, is, or can be, a text (47).
Ferdinand de Toro suggests why this broadening of the definition has special implications for theatre: “…not only is the theatre object a dramatic text, it is also a performance text, with both a literary and a performance dimension. Theatre is composed not only of linguistic components but also of paralinguistic ones” (3) – that is, the elements of theatre that are not language-based, such as set, makeup, actors’ performances, sound, lights, and of course, costumes. The implications of this can be both a positive and a negative force of design; the audience’s perceptions of aural, visual, visceral, and any other sensory experience mean there are multiple levels on which a production can affect them. Designers can either choose to harness these tools, or understand that the paralinguistic elements are working whether being employed deliberately or not.

For the costume designer, there may be aspects of the dramatic text that specifically apply to her work – there are often, of course, stage directions or bits of dialogue that reference the clothing of the characters; design textbooks are quick to dwell on the necessity to take such text seriously. However, with the careful analysis of the cultures to be costumed in the play, there are other texts (given the flexible definition of this term) that the designer can discover and use for her purposes: the Language of the body, the Grammar as broken into Parts of Speech, and the Vocabulary – individual word choices by each person – of clothing. The relationship between language and grammar, in their most literal meanings, is comparable to the relationship between the body and clothing, if, for example, language is the completed puzzle; grammar, the acceptable way to fit the pieces together; and vocabulary, the puzzle pieces themselves. The Language is based upon the cohesive system of beliefs about the human body in physical, emotional, and intellectual terms that informs/dictates the treatment of the body both by a culture and an individual, subdivided into Parts of Speech that categorize the cohesive system into six individual aspects that directly affect outer appearance. Grammar, then, is the way the Parts of Speech are arranged in ways whose meanings are determined by the culture – here Russell’s “poles of expression,” conformity and rebellion, are a useful example of a continuum of expectations within a culture’s clothing codes. An individual then places herself or himself along this continuum by Vocabulary usage – choices of clothing.

This theory is meant to be kept loose, workable, and above all purely a means to an end – a way to employ the text-based theories of semiotics both in practice and as a means for communication about a designer’s work. Using this Language model could constitute the “second text” for costumes, in place of the written dramatic text: de Toro’s dual textuality of theatre could
be, in terms of costumes, 1) the Language of the body, the Grammar system, and the Vocabulary of individual clothing choice which precedes and complements the 2) the performance text of the costumes in space and time before an audience.

**Language and its Grammar: The Six Parts of Speech**

The Parts of Speech of the Grammar explore an aspect of the body that in some way reflects an outward appearance – a visual manifestation of the abstract ideas. (For example, a belief in the need to clean the body would result in the appearance of cleanliness.) Because of this focus on the physical appearance of the body, this list is not meant to be exhaustive in examining everything possible about the body. It is, rather, an overview of what most influences a person’s outer appearance – which is, as the end result, of paramount importance to a designer. Cunningham’s previously referenced list of questions informs this list; however, instead of asking a broad question like, “What religious beliefs were held?” I have skipped that step and moved past to the more specific implications of the topic for the body. These Parts of Speech should be researched, addressed, and answered to construct the Language of the body for the culture to be interpreted through costume.

*The Parts of Speech*

1. **Functions of the body.** What is the use value of the body? Is the body for culturally dictated “practical” purposes or otherwise? What sort of labor is done with the body? What functions are considered acceptable, appropriate, laudable, profitable, pointless?

2. **Sexuality and reproduction.** What views are held on sexuality? Is it encouraged or discouraged? How do views of sexuality vary for men or for women? How is reproduction regulated, if at all? What is considered responsible, acceptable, proper, inappropriate, deviant?

3. **Adornment and ornamentation.** What sort of decoration is used, if any? Where or how is it worn or used? Are beliefs connected to ornamentations? What is considered desirable, odd, beautiful? What is the standard for beauty, if any?

4. **Reveal/conceal.** Are certain body parts never or always shown or covered? What is the reasoning behind what is covered or revealed? What is considered proper, disgraceful, attractive, wrong?

5. **Discipline/restraint.** What is the ideal physical behavior? What is permissible, forbidden, applauded, shunned? What is considered necessary for purity, acceptance, health?

6. **Maintenance.** Is cleansing done often, rarely, never, always? What is considered appropriate for special occasions and daily use? What is consumed? How is fitness or exercise viewed? How is illness explained, treated, cured, approached?
These Parts of Speech explored in relation to a culture will constitute the Language of that body – at least the basics for beginning to understand the “why” behind the Vocabulary, or clothing choices, of that culture. The nature of the questions suggests the kinds of sources and fields of study that a designer must research – strictly historical clothing sources only answer the “what.” The “why” can be found through disciplines that examine human beings on deeper levels of understanding: anthropological studies, historiography, religious studies, and general cultural research will all serve to reveal the Language of the body in ways that photographs or historical renderings cannot. Visual sources merely show the results – the Vocabulary, or the “what.” The Language, the “why,” must come first in order that a designer may understand the progression.

Because semiotics originally dealt in languages and texts, being able to articulate a Language of the body for a culture makes semiotics all the more readily applicable as a design tool. Therefore, a designer is able to think of her designs as a kind of writing – a textual work using the sign creation and manipulation. This writing can be termed the “performance code.” De Toro cites De Marinis’ definition of a performance code as “that convention which, in the performance, makes it possible to link determined contents to determined elements of one or more expressive systems” (quoted in De Toro 53). For example, then, the costume code – the text the designer writes through her use of the traditional elements of design, renderings, and execution of physical costumes – is the convention by which those costumes come to signify something onstage and in that particular performance. De Toro acknowledges that performance codes actually occur in everyday life, but that in theatre, “there is an adoption-adaptation of codes such as linguistic, proxemic, etc., that are actually cultural codes because they belong to a given culture” (ibid). It is true that the Language developed by the designer for use onstage is in fact based in reality; however, the codes of that culture will not be recreated onstage exactly as they are in reality. They will be “adopted and adapted” as needed for the theatrical performance. The performance code, then, is a text – a design – that is written using the Language of the body and the Vocabulary of the clothing of the culture(s) onstage.

The Audience: Reading and Reception

Once a text is written it must be read and, of course, in theatre the readers are the audience. The audience is about to encounter the Language, Grammar, and Vocabulary the costume designer has used to write her text – and, as is the focus here, the audience is likely to be unfamiliar with the cultures onstage. How is an audience taught the Language in the performance? What assumptions does an audience bring about the Language? And what is the balance between historical/cultural
accuracy of the Language and ensuring the readability of the Language? Must one be sacrificed for the other?

In her important text *Theatre Audiences*, Susan Bennett includes in the second edition a chapter devoted to interculturalism in theatrical events, a phrase she defines as “performances which have a cultural identity that does not coincide with that of their intended audience” (ix). Increasingly common in theatre today, interculturalism requires a special approach both by artists and spectators, especially because of its complex nature and the Western tendency to “other” or, as Bennett explores, to transition from mere interest to fascination and even to obsession with the “exotic.”

Bennett reiterates these challenges by quoting Erika Fischer-Lichte:

> Does it [interculturalism] guarantee and confirm cultural identity, or does it metamorphose and even dissolve identity? Is it a question of the attempt to propagate awareness of a foreign culture, or is it rather cultural exploitation? Does theatrical interculturalism today support and provoke intercultural communication and mutual understanding, or does it deny fundamental differences between cultures and make any communication impossible, if one is deceived into believing in a shared community, which actually does not exist? (quoted in Bennett, 170)

The questions Fischer-Lichte poses illustrate the very serious implications of interculturalism in theatre – the dangers of othering, the problems with representation, and more. In the case of a play that illustrates two cultures onstage at once, something that Bennett does not mention, the challenges are doubled because of the opportunity to bias the audience towards one culture or another.

To begin to approach these difficulties, Elam makes an interesting point about unfamiliar territory for an audience, stating that a “generous conception of the communicative process – and one generally accepted today – holds it sufficient that the receiver be acquainted with the sender’s code and so be able to decode the message” (30). If simply being acquainted – just having a general understanding of the Language of the bodies onstage – is sufficient for an audience to grasp the concepts, an enormous amount of pressure has been lifted from the designer. As long as the Language is understandable in some way – that is, the audience has some way of grounding the design text in what is familiar to them – the audience will be able to “decode the message.” However, what goals can be achieved through a simple decodification? It seems this would result in an audience being able to follow the story, but this is not the only goal. De Toro suggests an alternative, saying that stage codes “have[ve] to be well learned by the spectators during the decodification….For example, a Western spectator unfamiliar with the codes of Japanese No or Kabuki theatre will not be able to de-codify the staged code” and therefore the audience must learn
the historical/cultural codes (55, my emphasis). Instead of grounding the Language in the familiar, De Toro states the audience must be taught the codes onstage.

Perhaps Elam and De Toro each reveal a valid point: an appeal to the familiar as well as use of historical and cultural accuracy is needed to create a design that can do more than simply tell the story. One or the other on its own could result in design disaster: completely based in historical and cultural fact, the Language may not be readable, but based entirely in collective memory it is likely to employ stereotypes and further biased and imperialistic attitudes. The best approach is to construct the text with both influences of audience collective memory and historical/cultural accuracy in mind. Susan Bennett agrees: “I remain convinced that we must understand both the cultural material specificities of the performance [what I term historical/cultural accuracy] and the horizons of expectations [collective memory] brought to bear by the audience, individually and collectively…” (168).

Collective memory, or the sum of the audience’s knowledge, is a concept of the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs; “Visual images from the past and present…are a part of core culture, like time and space, and give shape to a child’s orientation to social realities” (Rubinstein 5). Collective memory beginning at the level of a child is quite similar to the notion of learning a language; Rubinstein continues, “As Halbwachs explained, learning begins early in life in a most informal way, but full understanding requires both biological maturity and social experience” (ibid). Collective memory is not always accurate, of course, and that must be taken into consideration; for example, the collective memory of the audience for The Conversion of Ka’ahumanu is very severely limited and perhaps based in stereotypes like those created through the commodification of hula, so-called “Hawaiian shirts,” and Elvis Presley; as well as a Thanksgiving-flavored, Puritanical idea of early nineteenth century Christian missionaries, complete with the white cap and collar. The misunderstandings or lack of knowledge about the cultures onstage must be remedied by the learning of the Language, which falls to the historical/cultural accuracy.

The benefit of using collective memory is not so much to inform the design text, but rather to anticipate the audience reception and plan accordingly. Bennett points out, “Even the most rigorous and ‘best’ experiments with interculturalism unavoidably make concessions to prevailing horizons of expectations for the economically empowered audience and to the ambivalences that constitute the interculturalism” (171). This is very true – for example, would the audience be shocked by a bare-chested woman, or take it in stride? If the culture calls for nudity that the audience would find inappropriate, then the designer may determine that such a concession should
be made. In such a situation, the collective memory of the audience might read the historically/culturally accurate nudity as scandalous (based on their own views of ‘decency’) and therefore misinterpret the meaning of the nudity. To avoid the exoticization of the unfamiliar culture, the designer can use such an analysis of the audience to inform the way she chooses to represent that culture’s Reveal/Conceal Part of Speech; both provide guidance in choosing the vocabulary appropriate for such a costume need, whether it be a sheer fabric or the actual exposure. This also suggests why the Parts of Speech encompass the six areas I have chosen, for these are not just the aspects of the human body that result in visible evidence – they are also those that are most likely to vary from one culture to another and therefore an unfamiliar audience is likely to respond to them the most.

The Nature of the Gaze and the Dangers/Opportunities of Juxtaposition

In The Conversion of Ka‘ahumanu, Kneubuhl has provided designers a most helpful opportunity – that of the juxtaposition of two cultures onstage, which she has done in the very nature of the play. If not handled carefully, placing two cultures next to each other can result in othering by setting up one as the norm and the other as its deviant. Kneubuhl avoids this through order of scenes and even through a moment of gaze inversion, which will be discussed below. However, the audience’s gaze must be considered – is the majority of the audience likely to relate more to one culture or another? If so, then the gaze will work to empathize and favor that culture, and dehumanize the second culture; this is the danger of which a designer must be aware. With juxtaposition instead of norm/deviant, a designer can deal with, for example, the reveal/conceal part of speech through the visual differences between cultures. Perhaps a bare chest will not function as desired on an actress; will bare arms and shoulders suffice, as it relates to another culture onstage? If so, then the historical/cultural accuracy bows to the collective memory and juxtaposition factors. This idea of juxtaposition comes directly from Saussure:

…Concepts (ideas used to explain phenomena) can only be understood differentially. Concepts only have meaning, Saussure argued, by differing from other concepts. That is, meaning doesn’t stem from some kind of an essence of ‘content’ a concept has but from the relationships that exist between that concept and other concepts (Berger 18).

De Marinis quotes Minonne as he contemplates the difficulty of comparing cultures:

Minonne concludes: ‘…The contents of a cultural system can be conveyed through expressions of different systems of communication when there is an element of homogeneity among them, or to use a term that cryptologists will now have no difficulty in deciphering, parallel convergence (123).
“Different systems of communication,” or the different languages present onstage, do in fact always have some homogeneity between them, because a designer uses the same Parts of Speech for each language. Since the research needed to address the Parts of Speech seeks the same information from all cultures, the Parts of Speech can then be juxtaposed visually onstage, thereby allowing them to differ from another and so gain meaning.

As a final word about the difficulties of interculturalism, the damaging effects of especially the white Eurocentric gaze (that of the colonizers of Hawai‘i, and one still in effect today) is addressed by Bennett through a cautionary tale. Using as an example a piece by Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gomez-Peña, she states, “It is as if – irrespective of the venue, form, and content of the work – what will extend to its reception is the affirmation of the power of the one who sees and the necessary subjection of those who make themselves, willingly or otherwise, there to be seen” (190-191, my emphasis).

Though the potential for such affirmation may reside in the audience, theatre artists ought to recognize the danger and do all they can to dispel the harmful and counterproductive effects of the gaze. Framing cultures by placing them onstage and allowing the audience to look at them can create an atmosphere of judgment – for better or for worse, audiences will in fact form opinions. In the case of an intercultural performance, the results of this tendency can be far-reaching and very damaging. It is different from an audience member deciding that the character onstage, the one who is from the same culture and background as her, is a bad person; when the audience member and the subject onstage are from two different cultures, the one gazing assumes superiority and incorrect stereotypes could be perpetuated. Instead of the culture being a subject of interest, attention, and respect, it becomes a museum piece just like Fusco and Gomez-Peña simply by its nature as subject. If theatre artists do not wish to perpetuate stereotypes about the cultures being represented, all efforts should be made to dispel this gaze.

Kneubuhl’s representation of two cultures onstage is actually a good first step towards keeping the gaze in check – it means that two cultures are “there to be seen,” and are both subject to the audience’s gaze. The value of having two cultures is the chance to have those “there to be seen” to do some seeing of their own, as in The Conversion of Ka‘ahumanu, which contains a scene that has the Hawaiian women inspect the bodies and clothing of the missionary women. Kneubuhl includes the stage directions, “Lucy and Sybil freeze. Hannah and Pali enter. They walk around the women as if examining objects. Lucy and Sybil remain frozen” (Kneubuhl 14). This follows Lucy and Sybil’s account of their first look at the native Hawaiians – their own gaze, which includes expressing shock at the nudity of both men and women, the size of the women (“Mountainous!”)
and a description of their clothing as “something which resembles a Roman toga” along with the
pronouncement that it is “thoroughly immodest” (ibid). It is now once Sybil and Lucy have
announced their judgment of the Hawaiian culture’s norms that they are frozen – immobilized,
unable to move or to avoid being gazed at by others. The Hawaiians are now given a chance to
speak their thoughts, and they similarly declare their surprise and distaste for the appearance of the
missionary women, citing “sickly pink skin,” “legs…like sticks,” and “they have no smiles” (ibid). If
the audience has been observing the Hawaiian women thus far in the play with that ‘white
Eurocentric gaze,’ this is the moment that it is turned on its ear as they now see the Hawaiians turn
their gaze on the white women – and therefore, to some extent based on our audience’s culture, on
the audience members themselves.

The danger of othering is always present in an intercultural theatrical event, by the very
nature of its subject matter. However, the costume designer can do her part to avoid this by taking
the opportunity to explore and represent each culture faithfully, allowing audience, collective
memory, historical/cultural accuracy, and the traditional elements of design like line, color, and
silhouette to guide her. The effort of scholarly research may result in a more intelligent, more
honoring, and more dramatically enlightening design than has yet been taught by costume design
method. To determine its potential, I turn now to my design process and the use of such scholarly
research, which is summarized in the chapters following.
CHAPTER 2: THE DESIGN PROCESS, IMPLEMENTATION, AND EVALUATION

In February of 2006, I began this thesis project by reading for the first time the script of *The Conversion of Ka‘ahumanu*. As a designer, I was immediately excited by the opportunities to explore the meeting of two such interesting historical cultures; and as a woman, I felt stirred by the tales of the women in the play and knew that I wanted to be a part of telling this story. The unique chances the play affords a designer relate to the nature of the play as intercultural: while many plays treat on two different cultures – a scenario that is ripe for conflict and therefore conducive to playwrighting – Kneubuhl’s play makes the meeting of the two cultures the main thrust of the play’s action. Nearly all the dialogue and subplots of the script (e.g. Hannah’s conversion and reversion; the revelation of Pali as a kauā; Sybil’s expression of repressed feelings) are direct results of the meeting of the missionaries and the Hawaiians. Especially since the cultures have radically different ideas about dress and the place in society of the female body, the costume designer must illustrate these plot points and character journeys through the clothing each woman wears at any given point in her development. It became clear to me that I must intimately understand the function and experiences of each woman in the play.

Over the next several months as I began to research both cultures represented by the women of the play, initial ideas for the costume design began to take shape in my mind. But it was when the first production meeting was held in October 2006 and all the designers came together with the director to discuss the play that several pillars of design became clear to all of us. Among them, the set designer and I agreed that we both wanted to convey an environment of richness – to show the distinction between the cultures’ lifestyles through color, line, and texture. At the director’s suggestion, we also both began to explore ways the distinctions could be broken down or broken through, illustrating the third space – both ideologically, where no one culture can be superior over another, as well as textually, in Kneubuhl’s use of direct address and storytelling. I then established the following goals for my costume design:

- To provide the actresses with a realistic sense of their characters’ attire
- To create an atmosphere of texture, richness, and complication for the audience that is visually stimulating and emotionally engaging
- To provide tangible ways to illustrate boundaries and to show those boundaries being broken
- To be honest and forthright about each group’s understanding of their own bodies, and the bodies of one another, by truthfully creating accurate clothing
I turned next to the elements of design to begin implementing these ideas, and found that using color, line, and texture (as the set designer and I decided together) could help me to create harmony and dissonance through groupings onstage, illustrate relationships being forged between the five women, and point up distinctions between the cultures as well as show when the boundaries are crossed. While I approached the fulfillment of most of the goals through the cultural research of the female body (as summarized in the following chapters) which informed mostly line and texture, some of the goals, or aspects of them, were best fulfilled through emotional, artistic means – in other words, as an artist I made choices based on instinct, or even on preference, to achieve a desired response which informed mostly color. For example, early on I decided to use a very cool palette for the missionaries and a very warm palette for the Hawaiians. Besides reflecting their climates, such a use of color temperature reinforces the two groupings already made through line and silhouette – necessarily created by the cultural dress each group employs. It also provides a second layer to use when boundaries are crossed; instead of just donning a garment from or influenced by the other culture, the women’s costumes reflect an altered color temperature too. In addition to temperature I based the palettes on research as well as instinct. For example, from the first reading of the play I envisioned Sybil in blues and Lucy in pinks; at no time did another color occur to me for either of them. Trusting Rosemary Ingham’s admonition that “Imagination seldom approaches problems in a sequential manner,” (13) I honored this early instinct of mine and used it as a starting point for creating relationships between the women, as will be described in greater detail below using Lucy’s and Pali’s journeys and relationship.

Line (and, in costume, silhouette) and texture are found not just in each culture’s choice of clothes, but also in their architectures and environments. The earthiness of the Hawaiian culture – their close proximity to the land and their use of natural resources – is reflected in their clothing fabric, kapa, as well as the organic way it was draped; the missionaries’ culture – very orderly and clean, as seen in their Congregationalist church buildings – is similar to their preferred dress, with tall vertical lines, structure, and little frill. The images below illustrate a typical Congregational church building in New Milford, Connecticut – this one was built in 1833; and a sketch of an inland scene in native Hawai‘i:

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1 Church photo credit: www.acenct.org/schedule.html; Hawai‘i sketch credit: Forbes. Bingham portrait credit: Zwiep; female Hawaiians sketch credit: Barrére et al.
Of course, visual sources like architecture and landscape of the culture are vital to a costume designer since visual elements of a culture often overlap – the designer is, after all, working towards a visual end. And often, a designer begins with images of clothing from the historical culture to be costumed. For *The Conversion of Kaʻahumanu*, though, this old standby is vastly problematic. To illustrate the point, below are some images I found for both the Hawaiians of 1820 and the real Congregationalist missionaries.
The painted portrait of Sybil Bingham depicts her from barely the waist up, is vaguely drawn, and offers little information about the line or silhouette of the dress itself. And because the Congregationalists were a tiny part of American culture of the time period, fashion history is insufficient because it tells us little about individual groups that deviated from the norm. As for the sketch of Hawaiian natives, it seems clear that a westerner’s view of the Hawaiian female body was subjective and skewed. While the depiction might give an idea of the fabric’s drape and shape, a designer must be extremely wary of such a slanted source as a trustworthy account.

It is precisely because of these visual limitations that as I researched the cultures and began to develop my design I determined that a more thorough and insightful method of costume design than is currently available in textbooks ought to be theorized. As noted earlier, while practitioners of design already employ such scholarly efforts, the recording of their methods has yet to be done. The following chapter, then, is an effort to begin to develop a written theory of how a designer can learn the culture to be costumed through more than just pictures of clothing. Clothing has reasoning behind it, reasoning that can be revealed by the body underneath; so from here I shall proceed to summarize the beliefs about the female body of each culture as found through study of their religions. My research and conclusions for each culture’s view of the female body as discovered by studying their religions are contained in the following two chapters; here I provide a distillation of each culture’s beliefs by fleshing out the Parts of Speech that compose the Grammar.
of each culture’s Language of the body. Next, I articulate the Vocabulary available to each culture – the clothing that existed for their use – and by examining each character in some detail, I determine the particular Vocabulary choices for each woman. It is my hope that this exercise will show how cultural research of each group’s religion reveals the beliefs about the body and allows a designer to make informed, insightful design choices.

The Hawaiians’ Grammar: the Parts of Speech

1. Functions of the body: The female Hawaiian body is an ornament, a means of beauty and a location of seduction. Also, importantly, it is a vessel of mana for the ali’i, stressing its value and physical connection to the gods. The body’s practical uses include childbirth and kapa making, but in terms of the religion, the primary use is sexual attraction and satisfaction. The act of sex is highly valued and praised, so activity that leads to it like grooming, accessorizing, tattooing, and even the kapa production is considered very profitable. Other uses are for recreation, sport, and leisure, like water sports, games, and relaxation; childrearing is considered the duty of the whole community, so women participated in this just as men did. Exercise or other activity whose sole purpose is to be strenuous is considered pointless.

2. Sexuality and reproduction. This Part of Speech is the most important to the Hawaiian female body. As referenced above, sex is a vital part of a woman’s body’s activities because it is through sexuality that she enters the worship and sacrifice system. Because of this, sexual practice is highly regarded and encouraged, with multiple partners and little restraint. Reproduction is not restricted by cultural norms in any way; childbirth is favored, and if a woman does not wish to raise her child, she may find someone who will.

3. Adornment and ornamentation. Decoration is a vital part of the female Hawaiian body’s rituals. Tattoos, jewelry, makeup of various materials and uses, grooming of the hair and skin, and other accessories are commonly employed. Even the kapa cloth itself is more of an adornment than a garment, as it is draped and wrapped in various ways to accentuate the body’s shapes. Some of the ornamentation, like the tattoos or the jewelry, has a connection to the religious system, either through a connotative or a representative meaning; for example, a tattoo might be the symbol of a certain aumakua or god, or even suggest a connection to a certain person, especially the ali’i whose land they worked. And of course, the marks of a kauā are a kind of adornment worn by some, though certainly not worn for the same reasons as jewelry or tattoos.

4. Reveal/conceal. No body parts are restricted from view at any time in daily activity. Each individual decides what part of the body she or he might wish to cover or to show. For this reason,
nothing is considered “wrong” or “appropriate” at all times – different body parts might be considered more attractive or stimulating than others, or acceptability might vary given the occasion. Hula, as a highly developed art form, had many instructions as to appropriate attire for each kind of hula.

5. Discipline/restraint. The allowable and praiseworthy physical behavior for women is as has been noted above – sexuality, pleasure, kapa making, and childbirth and –rearing. However, women are prohibited from many activities in ancient Hawai‘i. The cultivation and preparation of food like taro and sweet potatoes is strictly forbidden to women and reserved only for men; women cannot even enter the area where cooking takes place. In order to be pure and clean before the gods, women must abide by the kapu laws, which in addition to the growing of food on land restricts them from fishing and from participating in sacrifices in the heiau. Once the kapu system is destroyed, women have access to all food and fishing, and the heiau are no longer used (in theory) so women are no longer restricted there either.

6. Maintenance. Before the kapu system falls, a great amount of foods are off limits for consumption by women, including pork and bananas, but after its demise, nothing is forbidden. Illnesses are viewed as a manifestation of a god’s or gods’ displeasure and are therefore treated in various ways, involving kahunas and very specific, methodical sacrifices.

The Missionaries’ Grammar: Parts of Speech

1. Functions of the body. The Congregational Church considers the female body to be a tool, as is the male body. Beauty or sexual attractiveness is minimized in importance. The purposes of the body include any necessary physical exertion that accomplishes the work considered to be in the woman’s sphere – cooking, cleaning, making and mending clothes, bearing and raising children, and the like. In the Calvinistic viewpoint, any woman who works hard and long hours toward these ends is one who is worshipping God, although in reality, as seen, feelings of the worthlessness of “women’s work” abounded. Laziness, weakness, recreation, and leisure are seen as signs of lack of devotion to the religion and its tenets.

2. Sexuality and reproduction. Sex in any manner is strictly forbidden outside marriage. Women are expected to remain chaste until marriage and once married, sex is viewed as the means to reproduce and nothing more. Childbirth is in fact encouraged, as it is seen as a fulfillment of the Bible’s instructions to married people. Deviant sexual behavior includes anything outside of heterosexual, monogamous (married) sexual activity, including sex for pleasure or in a manner that physically could not result in conception.
3. **Adornment and ornamentation.** Decoration is very minimal and generally frowned upon. The only ornamentation usually worn is a wedding ring, to symbolize the union between wife and husband, and some people may not wear even those. Hairstyles are purely utilitarian, meant to keep the hair out of the way of work, and absolutely no makeup is worn. Any kind of frill, trim, or adornment that does not have a practical use is considered frivolous.

4. **Reveal/conceal.** Very little of the body is considered appropriate for viewing. Arms, legs, feet, and the upper chest and much of the neck are always covered. Exposure of any of these parts is deemed highly inappropriate and deviant, as it would indicate giving focus to one’s physical, earthly self for sexual or other “inappropriate” reasons.

5. **Discipline/restraint.** The ideal physical behavior is that of a healthy and hard-working laborer; every waking hour is regimented to a certain activity and considered wasted if not put to a particular use. Leisurely occupations are quite rare; social interaction is valued only if in the context of a “useful” activity, such as a prayer group. Such discipline is considered necessary to the religion, based on the ideas of predestination and vocation. Any woman who strays from the established expectations of her behavior – i.e., the woman’s proper sphere – is highly suspect.

6. **Maintenance.** Cleanliness is quite valued, not just of the body but also of the home – a woman’s task – and is done very often. Food is consumed only if it is considered healthy, and never in excess. The daily work required is enough physical exercise to stay fit, so time is not devoted only to fitness. Illnesses are always considered a result of God’s will, either for punishment or for a lesson, and treated with prayer as much as with conventional medicine.

**The Hawaiians and the Missionaries: The Vocabularies**

Now that the Parts of Speech have been established, the Vocabulary can be articulated in broad strokes to represent the basic choices – the word bank – available to each culture as articulated by the Language of the body.

For the Hawaiian woman, the Vocabulary involves:

- a kikepa – the basic garment around the whole body in some way
- a pa’u – a draped garment around only the lower half of the body
*these terms are very general – any use of kapa to cover the body in some way is the basic word in the Vocabulary
- jewelry, tattoos, makeup, and hairstyles
- other accessories (e.g., the ahu’ula cloak of the ali’i)

For the missionary woman, the Vocabulary involves:

- a dress
The Vocabulary listed here is a starting point for the women of each group. In the Hawaiian culture, their Language of the body informed the establishment of these items; in the Congregationalist culture, though, their Language of the body informed an adaptation of the Vocabulary from the larger societal Language of the day – i.e., low necklines and cap sleeves popular in 1820 were altered to adhere to the Congregationalist Language. However, although using similar Vocabularies, each individual person in a culture then makes choices dependent on her own personality and preferences that reflect her adherence to or deviance from the overall Language of the body of her culture. As the costume designer, then, it is my job to determine what those personal choices might be; therefore, an analysis of the five characters of The Conversion of Ka‘ahumanu is the next step towards writing the design text.

**Personal Vocabulary Choices**

As noted earlier, the women of the play must be treated as dramatic characters regardless of their existence in history. The following, then, treats only on the information and the needs that are present in the play to find each character on the “continuum of expectations” of the Vocabulary of her culture.

**Ka‘ahumanu**

As kuhina nui and member of the ali‘i class, Ka‘ahumanu is the most powerful woman in the history of Hawai‘i. Being among the first to break the old restrictions against women gives her a unique dynamic, and her Vocabulary reflects this in an interesting way.

As ali‘i Ka‘ahumanu wears a kikepa, certain jewelry like shark’s teeth that indicate royalty, a lei of ilima flowers, which were reserved for ali‘i, and an ahu‘ula cloak for formal occasions. Her hair is groomed, and her body is large, which indicates her lifestyle is especially privileged. Upon her decision to study the Christian religion, she begins to wear a mu‘umu‘u, the missionaries' adaptation of their own dresses to fit the larger Hawaiian woman. The Vocabulary choice indicates a change in the belief about her own Language, as she begins to believe the Christian religion’s teachings about the body. In a way this is a new Vocabulary choice, a new word, that is created in the Hawaiian Language of the body, rather than taking a word from the missionary Language, because the

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2 I have found no research to indicate if the Congregational Church women wore corsets. Based on the understanding of the way they used their bodies, in my design I decided not to use corsets.
mu’umu’u is not *exactly* like a western dress, and she does not wear it as they do. Rather, as Ka’ahumanu adopts the language of the missionaries, she creates her own grammar within it, and still includes her own language in her choices. She does not wear shoes, and keeps wearing certain items like her shark’s teeth necklace and the ilima lei. These choices reflect an acknowledgement of the new understanding she holds of her own body, while still adhering to the past, as she states in the closing of the play: “I do not look to the past with contempt, but seek to preserve the ways that were good, uniting them with what is good of this new world, that comes to us, *now*” (Kneubuhl 75).

**Sybil**

As the older and wiser missionary of the two in the play, Sybil reflects her beliefs about her own body in tangible ways through her Vocabulary choices. She wears, as the other missionary women would, a dress, a chemise, pantaloons, stockings, shoes, and when needed, an apron, a bonnet, and a shawl. Her body is sufficiently covered to reflect her understanding of its purposes. The dress has a very high collar, ensuring her complete coverage, and her sleeves are long enough to cover her arms all the way to the wrists. As Sybil becomes more comfortable in Hawai’i, her guard is let down gradually not just in her relationships with the Hawaiians, but also in terms of her own body. She begins to relax her strict self-discipline and take a more lighthearted approach to life. As she does so, her collar is loosened at the throat and her sleeves are rolled back. Perhaps she removes her shoes and stockings under the oppressive sun. It is only when Sybil feels that her devotion to God and God’s will is threatened by this relaxation that she returns to her previous Vocabulary; after her lomilomi experience, she desperately thrusts the restraint she feels onto Hannah: “You must choose, Hannah! Between a sensual pleasure of the flesh and what you know to be your Christian duty to God!” (Kneubuhl 60).

**Hannah**

As the hapa haole of the story, Hannah is biologically part of both cultures shown onstage. She has never seen women of her father’s race, though, and so her Language of choice is that of the Hawaiians, and her Vocabulary choices lie almost entirely in the Language. She wears a kikepa, grooms herself as other Hawaiian women, and wears jewelry – some of her jewelry, though, is of western origin, given to her by the sailors and Americans she associates with – this is the one Vocabulary choice she makes outside her Language. Because she is hapa haole, Hannah feels frequently out of place. She is very attracted to the lifestyle of the mission and the women there, and feels drawn to the religion. She steeps herself in the new lifestyle, down to the last detail – taking on the missionaries’ Language of dress and adopting the Grammar, and making use of their
Vocabulary. Once at the mission, she wears a dress, chemise, pantaloons, stockings, and shoes, just as the missionary women do. She leaves behind all her jewelry – however, her silky hair will not cooperate. Instead of being put in a tidy bun or chignon like the missionaries, it is left down and tied back as best as she can manage. When faced with the decision that reflects the ultimate shift in ideology – whether or not she will act on the sexuality of her nature and her upbringing, or adhere to the new laws of Christianity – Hannah chooses to return to her Hawaiian culture. “Come away from them, don’t join them in their thought that everything which gives pleasure is bad. Come back to the way things were before” (Kenubuhl 225). She is mistaken, though, in thinking that once she changes back to her old clothes, her old Vocabulary from her previous Language, she can ignore the impact the western contact has caused.

An Extended Example of Textual Analysis to Uncover Design Inspiration: Lucy and Pali

The Vocabulary Lucy chooses is to the letter as is expected of her. She wears a dress, a chemise, pantaloons, stockings, shoes, and an apron, shawl, and bonnet as required. In the play, Lucy is never comfortable in Hawai’i – her racism overcomes her desire to be compassionate and a “good” missionary, so she never changes her Vocabulary at all as Sybil does. Interactions with the Hawaiian women only serve to further cement her belief in the rightness of her own Language.

As a Hawaiian, Pali’s Vocabulary choices reside entirely within the Hawaiian Language; however, as a kauā, she uses the Vocabulary in a different way. She, too, wears a kikepa, jewelry, tattoos, and grooms herself as other Hawaiian women, but a significant choice is the lack of the markings that all kauā must wear. Because her father has given her to another woman to be raised, Pali is free from the abuses of belonging to the kauā class and is not made to wear the markings.

Both Lucy and Pali are confronted with challenges that require them to face these conflicts. Pali is discovered to be a kauā and shunned by Hannah and Ka’ahumanu practically without question and finds herself quite suddenly an outcast from her former life. Dramatically speaking, her Vocabulary reflects this onstage with a black eye and a wounded right arm. Faced with this exile, Pali has nowhere to go but to the missionaries – even though she has long seen through Lucy’s thin veneer of polite detachment; Act I closes with Pali’s declaration, “I still say that haole woman hates us!” (Kneubuhl 39). The next time we see Pali, she recalls in a moving monologue an incident in her past when she found and rescued a baby that had been left in the forest by its mother: “I had given a new life. And now, that is what the mikanele have given to me: a new life from one that was unwanted, thrown away and treated like so much rubbish” (Kneubuhl 64). The fact that Sybil and Lucy allow Pali to stay at the mission when not one of her former friends – not even her ali‘i,
Ka‘ahumanu – will touch her now deeply impacts Pali’s feelings towards the missionaries and informs her actions a few scenes later.

When Lucy is diagnosed with breast cancer and told that she must undergo a mastectomy without anesthesia, her beliefs about her body are deeply challenged because she thinks of her body as a tool for God’s work and such a “failure” of her physical body could reflect a failure of her own faith. Losing a breast is not just a matter of vanity, though it may also be that (even if just subconsciously). Believing as she does in the importance of being a mother, losing a breast will impact her ability to nourish her children, one of her primary functions. The act of the mastectomy and its aftermath is also challenging to her sense of her body’s restrictions; after all, for the surgery, and even beforehand for the diagnosis, she must expose her breast to a man who is not her husband, and afterwards she must expose herself to others to help her clean the wound and change the bandages as it heals. In the play, we observe Sybil trying to do just that for Lucy and failing, as Sybil becomes nauseated and is fearful of Lucy’s condition happening to her.

The convergence of Pali’s and Lucy’s most challenging experiences – the revealing of Pali’s father’s identity and Lucy’s breast cancer and surgery – results in perhaps the most poignant personal moment of the play. As Lucy, her dress pulled down to her sternum, covers herself in shame when Sybil is unable to change the bandages, Pali enters, wearing her kikepa now as a longer skirt and a borrowed chemise and offers to help Lucy, saying “I wish to do this for you, Mrs. Thurston” (Kneubuhl 71). At first Lucy declines, telling her she might feel sick. When Pali persists, Lucy sits in silence – a silence that can be read as Lucy struggling with lingering racist thoughts and perhaps also shame over these feelings. Pali is determined: “You will tell me what to do, and I will do it” (ibid). As Lucy begins to give Pali instructions, she interrupts herself and takes Pali’s hand – something she would never have done before – to say, “I will remember this kindness all my days” (Kneubuhl 72). It is Pali’s gratefulness to the missionaries for taking her in when her culture shunned her and Lucy’s state of need and – finally – her relinquishing of her racist thoughts that create this new harmony between characters and a boundary being broken. I will discuss below the design choices in color and silhouette that were inspired by this event.

**Audience Reception and Analysis**

Now that the Languages have been determined, the Grammars articulated, and the character analyses completed with each woman’s Vocabulary choices, the design text as based in historical and cultural research and assessment is ready to be written. However, the all-important aspect of
audience reception must now be considered before proceeding— their perceptions and “horizon of expectations” will affect the choices made from this point on.

In Analyzing Performance, Patrice Pavis offers his famous audience questionnaire in its “final” form, as well as those of Anne Ubersfeld and André Helbo, stating, “In order to try to be systematic and comprehensive—as much as one can—various questionnaires can be offered to spectators” (34). Pavis critiques the shortcomings of those written by Ubersfeld and Helbo, concluding that Ubersfeld’s is too simplistic and poorly worded, as well as particularly western-oriented. Helbo’s, Pavis decides, is more comprehensive, but “privilege[s] space, while neglecting temporality and rhythm” (37) as well as simplifying the role of actors and asking too much of the audience in terms of breaking down the workings of drama. Of his own questionnaire, Pavis has little to say—he presents it and moves on. However, his too contains shortcomings, especially in the area with which I am concerned, costumes.

Pavis’ questionnaire is broken into fourteen sections (Ubersfeld, four; Helbo, five) so Pavis must be covering much more ground in greater detail than the others. For example, one section on scenography is broken into four subsets, and one of those contains five further subpoints. However, section five, called “Costumes, makeup, masks” has only one line written beneath it: “function, system, relationship to the body” (38). How can this possibly hope to cover all the ways an audience reads and responds to the costumes onstage?

Though too brief, the three items he lists are in fact a good starting point; similar to my use of Rebecca Cunningham’s list of questions for approaching a culture, I use Pavis’ work to inform my suggestions for expanding his outline. Without a clearer indication of what the three items mean, they are virtually useless for gaining an understanding of the audience’s reception. “Function” might refer to the purpose of the costumes; perhaps “system” refers to the groupings of people created by the costumes; and “relationship to the body” could mean any number of things—this item, especially, is in need of elaboration. All three represent important aspects of costume, but none is specific enough for evaluation. To his credit, other sections in the questionnaire cover certain points that relate to costume, such as under the section “Actors’ performances” or even under “Reading the plot through mise-en-scene”; the danger, though, is that an audience will fail to realize that costumes, too, can factor into the performances of the actors, the reading of the plot, and even the scenography.

Based in the excellent work of Pavis, I will here attempt to construct a more thorough questionnaire to flesh out the shortcomings in his section over costumes. It is my goal that what I
propose could be inserted into his existing questionnaire, replacing his section five, to understand better how an audience views the costumes both on their own and within the overall performance. This is especially necessary to an intercultural theatrical event, as the audience is bound to read unfamiliar cultures differently than a culture that is familiar to them due to its norms and their own expectations. Pavis’ questionnaire truly would be answerable only if an audience is fully familiar with the culture(s) onstage.

__Stamoolis’ Questionnaire__

Costumes

a. Describe the appearance of the actors.
   1. Do you recognize the clothing of everyone onstage?
   2. What differences and similarities do you notice in their clothes?
   3. Are there distinct groups?

b. Explain the text and the plot through the costumes.
   1. Can you understand the plot just by seeing the costumes?
   2. Who changes costumes – when and do you know why?
   3. How is the text illuminated by the costumes?

c. Describe the cultures represented onstage in terms of their clothing.
   1. Can you determine who is who within each culture?
   2. How do the cultures compare to one another?
   3. What characteristics seem important to each culture?
   4. Can you articulate the personalities of each person based on their costume, within the context of their culture?
   5. Do you understand each culture’s views of the body? How?

By presenting this questionnaire to the audience after the performance, a designer can learn how the audience reads the costumes onstage. However, while Pavis’ model is designed to be taken by the audience after a performance, I am interested in determining how an audience is likely to respond to different cultures onstage. Therefore, I also propose the following questionnaire for a designer to administer to herself, in order to articulate the expected audience’s collective memory and anticipate their reactions.

__Stamoolis’ Designer Questionnaire__

a. Script particulars
   1. How many cultures are represented onstage?
   2. What is the time period? How far removed are the culture(s) and the time period from the performance’s culture(s) and time period?

b. Anticipated audience makeup based on history of the theatre
   1. What is the average age of the audience members?
   2. What economic background do the majority of members come from?
   3. What occupations are represented by the members?
4. What is the general theatrical experience of the members?
5. What knowledge is the audience likely to have of the culture(s) onstage?

c. Special situations
   1. What actions onstage is the audience likely to consider inappropriate?
   2. What aspects of the culture(s) onstage is the audience likely to find humorous, unacceptable, normal, or odd?

To demonstrate the usefulness of this preliminary questionnaire, to help a designer understand how much distance must be bridged between that of the culture(s) onstage and the culture(s) of the audience, I will answer the questions below for the costuming of *The Conversion of Ka’ahumanu*:

a. Script particulars
   1. Two cultures are represented onstage – that of the Hawaiians and the Congregational Church missionaries.
   2. The time is 1820. The audience is 187 years and thousands of miles removed from the performance’s cultures and time period; ideologically, the audience is just as far, because little is known of ancient Hawaiian culture, and the strictness of the Congregational Church is contained to very few Christian denominations these days.

b. Anticipated audience makeup based on history of the theatre
   1. Much of MU’s audiences are college students, aged 18-22+. Community members vary in age. In this case, conference attendees bring the average up – a general guess at an average is around 28.
   2. The economic background is generally middle- to upper-middle class.
   3. The majority of the audience members are students; the rest are varied.
   4. Most of the students are not very familiar with theatre.
   5. The Hawaiian culture is not taught in schools and its popular representations are highly flawed and slanted. The audience probably has a good understanding of Christianity, though maybe not this denomination, and little to no legitimate knowledge of Hawaiian religion and culture.

c. Special situations
   1. The audience might consider nudity of body parts considered “private” by the dominant western culture to be inappropriate.
   2. The audience is likely to find the missionaries’ austere views on sex to be humorous or odd. The Hawaiians’ beliefs about treatment for the sick, the kauā class, and the old kapu laws might be regarded as odd or even foolish based on the dominant western ideology.

Having considered both how the audience ought to think about costumes after an intercultural theatre performance by revising Pavis’ questionnaire, and how an audience is likely to respond to unfamiliar cultures onstage by creating a designer’s questionnaire, I am ready to begin writing the design text with the Languages, Grammars, and Vocabulary determined for the cultures and characters in the play. Semiotic systems and overall artistic choices can now be developed for each culture through the visual elements available to a costume designer.

**The Missionaries’ Designs**
Lucy and Sybil must first of all be covered, throat to toe. To accomplish this, all the historical Vocabulary is used – shoes, stockings, pantaloons, and a fully covering dress. Beyond this basic Part of Speech, the beliefs of the missionaries as well as the individual characteristics of both women are signified using various means of signs.

Patterns and textures are a useful way to suggest the ideology of the Congregationalists. Sybil’s dress features a very orderly, predictable, and disciplined pattern. Lucy’s is composed of vertical stripes, indicating the preferred architecture of the Congregationalists, which symbolized their constant attention to “things above.” Their high collars also signify their belief in covering their bodies thoroughly; further, Lucy’s straight, closefitting neck continues the vertical lines of her dress, while Sybil’s ruffled collar is an adaptation of the historically accurate ruff the missionaries chose to wear. Both dresses are made of a homespun-like dressmaker’s cotton, further suggesting their focus on simplicity and lack of adornment, as well as honoring the kind of fabric available to them at the time. Lucy’s costumes feature finer texture than Sybil’s, as Lucy was younger; her clothes would have come from her father’s home more recently than Sybil’s. An embroidered apron, finely knit shawl, and delicate bonnet speak to this background. Sybil, however, features rougher textures – her shawl, bonnet, and apron are of less expensive fabrics. Also, Lucy’s outer garment, a pelisse, is made of a sheer, fine fabric, while Sybil’s spencer is a sturdier, though slightly lustrous material. Besides signifying their backgrounds, the outer garments carry additional signifiers about character. Sybil’s spencer suggests her rational, sensible nature; its openness in the front signifies her willingness to learn about and befriend the Hawaiians. Lucy’s longer, closed pelisse signifies her wariness and fear of their new home and situation – but its sheerness signifies her inability to hide these emotions, either from others or herself.

Color is an excellent chance to create signifiers onstage, and it is used for Sybil and Lucy to draw connections between their initial characters and the journeys each takes throughout the play, as well as connections between them and other women in the play. Sybil’s costume is composed of blues, greys, blacks, and whites, signifying her seriousness, devotion to her work and to her religion, and her discipline both with herself and others. Lucy’s costume is composed of pinks, creams, taupes, and browns, signifying her youthfulness, naïveté, and her immaturity. (These are, of course,

3 Chemises have been eliminated because they would not be seen, and would make the actresses too warm. 4 Portraits of Sybil Bingham and Maria Loomis, another missionary of the first company, reveal that the Congregationalist women were still wearing detachable linen ruffs, a fashion over a hundred years old at the time! Audience analysis suggested that audiences would find the ruffs humorous, so the ruffled collar on Sybil’s dress was adapted as a concession.
general western connotations.) As Sybil begins to relax into her new life in Hawai‘i, she unbuttons her collar and rolls back her sleeves, and rarely uses her shawl. During the lomilomi scene, Sybil reaches her most relaxed state – significantly, both physically and (therefore?) mentally – and reminisces about her previous fiancé, Levi Parsons, dreamily saying, “Yes, he was [handsome]. Like summer” (Kneubuhl 59). The line inspired the colors that are revealed by Sybil’s relaxed clothing – her chemise is revealed beneath her collar as a brighter blue than her dress, and her sleeves show a cheerful green, signifying the colors of summer. Lucy, however, stays buttoned up tightly the whole play, and is rarely seen without her shawl, signifying her unwillingness to open herself to the Hawaiian people. It is only when she is diagnosed with breast cancer that she is forced to let go of her childishness and face the present bravely. When she must take down her dress so Sybil can change the bandages, she is at her most exposed, both literally and figuratively. And when it is Pali, not Sybil, who helps her change her bandages, Lucy’s maturation in this experience is signified by the color of her bandages – they are a deep, saturated berry, a more seasoned version of the pinks in her dress.

**The Hawaiians’ Designs**

Most important to the Hawaiians’ designs was finding a way to signify their exposure, their nakedness, without actually revealing any body part that would make the audience or the actors uncomfortable. This was achieved through the tool of juxtaposition between both cultures onstage. The extreme coverage of the missionaries meant that any exposure of legs, feet, arms, neck, or the upper chest would signify to the audience as “minimum” coverage.

Pattern and texture also became an important method for signifying the Hawaiian worldview and again, juxtaposition was used. The patterned barkcloth, featuring petroglyphs in a larger, albeit ordered print, is a thicker, rougher texture than the usual western cotton. Texture was further created through the way each kikepa is wrapped. Ka‘ahumanu’s kikepa is the most complicated of the three Hawaiian women; the longer length of fabric needed to make the more complex wrap signifies her superiority over the other two women. The kikepa enclosing one arm while leaving the other free signifies Ka‘ahumanu’s difficult position as the kuhina nu‘i; her responsibilities to her people in the changing climate of Hawai‘i pulls her in different directions and leaves her feeling unbalanced and instable. Texture is further created through Ka‘ahumanu’s ahu‘ula cloak, made of feathers from the tiny mamo bird, which was reserved only for ali‘i clothing. This regalia is meant to intimidate the new visitors, and signifies her high position as kuhina nu‘i by its grandeur, its
placement in the play during the scene when she first greets the missionaries, and the fact that the other Hawaiians do not wear it.

Hannah’s kikepa is wrapped in a simpler style than Ka’ahumanu’s, with less fabric, in a fluid, smooth shape. The two sides of the kikepa meeting behind her neck signify her duality as a hapa haole, while the shortness and low back further emphasize her sexuality and the importance of seduction to her character (in terms of western perception, effective because of the audience’s dominant western makeup), as much of her choices in the play regarding religion coincide with her relationships with Jones and Davis. Pali’s kikepa is wrapped the most simply of all – it reveals both shoulders and her entire upper chest, and features the simplest print of all as well. Its straightforward wrapping signifies that although Pali is kauā, and has been hiding it her whole life, she is an honest person because once it is revealed she does not deny it.

The jewelry and tattoos each woman wears carry a great deal of significance for their characters. Ka’ahumanu’s jewelry is the most elaborate, including a large shell earring, a necklace of shark’s teeth, an anklet of kukui nuts, and a lei made of flowers often given to ali‘i, the ilima. Her tattoos are symbols of Lono, to signify the role that Hawaiian religion played in receiving the westerners in 1778 with such enthusiasm; Ka’ahumanu wearing Lono signifies this irony and tragedy. Hannah’s jewelry is a mix of both Hawaiian and western jewelry, signifying again her dual identity, and suggesting her connection to western men who may have given her the jeweled rings and bracelets. Her tattoos are those of double canoes to emphasize her dramaturgical connection to water. Pali’s jewelry and tattoos are far simpler than Ka’ahumanu’s or Hannah’s, a necklace made of hemp and shells and a bracelet carved from wood. The lack of glitz or shine signifies her lower position. Her tattoos are enigmatic petroglyphs – symbols of which archeologists have not determined the meaning, to signify her secret class status.

All three of the Hawaiians change their clothes at some point during the play. Hannah does so to the greatest extreme. The total adoption of the missionary’s style of dress, from the shoes and stockings to the high-necked dress, signifies her attempt to assimilate into the western Christian culture. She has cast off entirely her Hawaiian garb, and therefore (in her mind) her Hawaiian culture and beliefs. Her return, then, to her kikepa signifies this belief further; she has also left behind her western jewelry in favor of lush, green leis for her head and feet, signifying her wish to ignore the new western influence and emphasizing her connection to the earth as a Hawaiian woman. Pali’s change at the end of the play retains her kikepa, wearing it now as a skirt, and adding

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5 The director requested that the metaphor of Hannah and water be included in the design.
a chemise given to her by the missionaries. The coverage this new ensemble provides signifies Pali’s wish to please the missionaries by dressing more modestly, but also signifies her comfort with her own culture because she does not feel the need to change her clothes entirely the way Hannah did. The overall effect is the visual representation of the hybridization of the two cultures.

Kaʻahumanu’s change is nearly as drastic as Hannah’s, especially because she is wearing her new garment at the play’s conclusion. The muʻumuʻu is similar to the missionaries’ empire-waisted dresses, but fuller in cut and more simply constructed, and signifies not only Kaʻahumanu’s decision to adopt at least some of the new religion, but also the view of the Hawaiians’ bodies held by the missionaries, since they made it for her. 6 Kaʻahumanu retains her ilima lei and jewelry, but her tattoos are now hidden.

Color plays an important part in the Hawaiians’ designs as well, again, used to draw connections and signify change. (Because a western audience will read the colors with their western understanding of color connotation, I chose to connect the Hawaiians to the missionaries as the play requires rather than use the Hawaiian system of color connotation.) The warm colors of the Hawaiians’ palette are used to create connections to the cooler colors of the missionaries’ palette. Pali, for example, wears vibrant oranges and whites—more intense versions of the pinks and taupes worn by Lucy. Pali’s chemise at the end of the play is also pink, suggesting that it may have come from Lucy’s wardrobe. Their intimate moment of understanding when Pali changes Lucy’s bandages is highlighted by these signifying connections.

Hannah’s bright blues and greens connect her to Sybil’s darker, more somber versions of the hues they share. Their connection as pupil and student, and their encounter as women who share similar sexual desires (though repressed by Sybil and, for a time, by Hannah too) is signified by the watery tones. Hannah’s temporarily repressed sexuality is thus signified by her adoption of a similarly somber blue and other tones of blacks and greys—her effort to be like her teacher, Sybil. Knowing that Sybil likely made the dress for Hannah, or gave it to her from her own wardrobe, signifies Sybil’s wish for Hannah to become like her, further emphasizing her heartbreak at Hannah’s leaving the mission.

The deep crimson of Kaʻahumanu’s kikepa and the bright scarlet and yellow of her ahu'ula cloak are colors that signify Hawaiian royalty; the fact that only Kaʻahumanu wears these hues

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6 No historical photos exist of these very early muʻumuʻus; the more popular and recognizable muʻumuʻu of Liliuokalani’s day, the late 1890s, is far too tailored to be as they were at first. My design for Kaʻahumanu’s muʻumuʻu is my own interpretation of what the first one may have looked like.
should suggest to the audience their special nature. The mu'umu'u, then, is a deeper gold, a more aged yellow, signifying Ka'ahumanu's connection to the glory of Hawai'i's ilima tradition, while also pointing out its changing status in the larger world. The pattern of the fabric is much simpler, more ordered, than that of the barkcloth – it is more like that of the missionaries’ dresses. The colors in the pattern are a bit of pink and a bit of deep grey – one each from Lucy’s and Sybil’s palette to signify their impact on Ka’ahumanu’s life, both as an individual and as the most important person in Hawai’i, who must decide her people’s fate.

**Evaluation of Design Work**

The choice to study the body in terms of each group’s religion proved fruitful in determining the best way to represent both cultures as truthfully as possible onstage. Only once I understood why Hawaiians dressed with draped fabric, jewelry, and tattoos, and why Congregational missionaries dressed in fully covering, restrictive clothing, could I take the dramatic authority to decide what Ka’ahumanu, Hannah, Pali, Sybil, and Lucy as represented in the play would choose to wear.

Though in retrospect I am quite pleased with my design work, I am somewhat dissatisfied with some technicalities of the execution and would do it differently if I could do it again. The patterns chosen for the missionaries’ dresses were not the best option for the design – the sleeves and collars did not fit into the bodice as smoothly as they should have, creating odd puckering and shaping in the back. Sybil’s chemise did not read as it should have, due to this pattern problem; the collar was not constructed high enough on the throat to stand open as it was rendered. Also, the fabric I selected for Lucy’s pelisse was far too bright and had too much luster; being polyester, we were stuck with the color after purchasing it. I also had a similar fabric problem with the kapa. An online store based in Honolulu was by far the best option for us, but the petroglyphs were printed in a very orderly, manufactured fashion – I wish we could have either made our own, or found a resource that sought to recreate the kapa as it may have been made in native Hawai’i.

Though I liked the choice of the petroglyphs for each character’s tattoos, they were not applied as I instructed for each performance, making them look more like Sharpies on skin (the chosen method) and less like real tattoos; similarly, I was unhappy with the hairstyles of both Sybil and Lucy. These are minor crew problems, though, and the audience did not seem to read either as a problem. The ahu’ula cloak, though fairly good for our budget and resources, was a bit fluffier than I had planned. Still, the audience seemed to read it as intended nevertheless. And lastly, the director indicated that she would have liked Pali’s and Hannah’s kikepas to be a bit longer; she worried that they might be construed as a bit too alluring or exoticizing.
Due to time constraints, some details of the design were omitted – Lucy’s shawl trim was supposed to mimic the triangles on Pali’s fabric, but the shawl we used did not do so. Also, Lucy’s dress was to be lined in a deep mahogany to further accentuate her maturation (as the bandages did), but time prohibited that detail from happening. Some of the jewelry in the renderings was omitted or changed to adapt to what we had – for example, I had hoped to give Pali a necklace featuring a flower-shaped shell, as Ka’ahumanu calls her “my pua,” or flower, but settled instead for a hemp necklace woven with small conch shells.

In conclusion, the approach to costume design that I have sought to theorize resulted in a satisfying design both to myself, to the director, and to the actors. If the goals I set forth were fulfilled, then the audience was able to read and interpret two unfamiliar cultures thanks to the semiotic systems and the artistic impressions established onstage. These systems were grounded firmly in cultural research and were therefore honoring to both the Hawaiians and the missionaries, meeting my goal to be “honest and forthright about each group’s understanding of their own bodies.” This could not have been done without the actors and the infusing of each culture on the actors’ bodies. By clothing each actor’s body with the Language of her character’s culture, the body onstage seems to take on the culture’s codes in terms of the audience’s reading. For example, Lucy’s extreme coverage is the reason that her exposure of her left shoulder, arm, and upper chest is so poignant and effective. By comparison, the audience has seen the same parts of Pali’s body the whole show, so it is not the revealing of the body parts themselves, but rather the revealing of the actor’s and therefore the character’s body parts. Put another way, Courtney Maistros as Lucy has been covered fully the entire show, and Tanisha Charles as Pali has been exposed in the same areas. The juxtaposition of their bodies, and the writing of each culture’s codes on their bodies, provided the audience the means to read and understand each culture’s view of the female body.

Because dress and the body are so closely connected to each other and to the culture in which they exist, as I have explored, the goal of providing the actors with “a realistic sense of their characters’ attire” was fulfilled by giving the missionaries regimented clothing designed to guide the actors in their choices of movements, restricting their arms, torsos, and legs appropriately and making them feel warm under the lights (similar to how they must have felt under the Hawaiian sun); likewise, the Hawaiians’ kikepas were designed to remind the actors of their characters’ bodies’ purposes and allow them to move freely. The costumes were also meant to reflect the journeys each woman undertakes in the play, once again indicating to the actor her character’s changing beliefs or viewpoints, and meeting the goal of creating “tangible ways to illustrate boundaries and to show
those boundaries being broken.” And lastly, my final goal, “to create an atmosphere of texture, richness, and complication for the audience that is visually stimulating and emotionally engaging” cannot be evaluated here; though I sought to include the factors that would accomplish this, such a visceral response is an individual, personalized element and difficult to evaluate. The set designer and I both thought, though, that we had achieved this goal together.

The most important result of the proposed approach to costuming an historical intercultural play is this: if I had conducted only visual historical research – focusing only on the outcome of clothing, and not on what causes those clothing choices in a culture – I would have been forced to rely on westerners’ interpretations of native Hawaiians through sketches, or, worse, on the western twenty-first century assumptions of native Hawaiians which amounts to a cellophane hula skirt and coconut bra gyrating on a dashboard – stereotypes that derived from the sort of western-tainted sources depicted above. For the missionaries, I would have been forced to rely on portraits from the waist up of only some of the Congregationalists from that first company or, worse, mainstream fashionable styles of the 1820s, which would not reflect the missionaries at all. My only recourse and, as it so happens, the best option anyway was to study the cultures’ views of the body. I learned the “why” of each culture’s view of the female body and was then able to establish a Language, Grammar, and Vocabulary before I dealt with the “how” of design. Doing so is not only a more effective and reliable way to learn the historical and cultural facts. It is also the most freeing method in terms of dramatic design choices. Using only visual research forces a designer to recreate the clothing instead of designing the costumes. After all, The Conversion of Ka‘ahumanu does not seek after historical reenactment. Making a costume appear just as it does in a sketch or portrait limits the designer in her ability to create semiotic systems of meaning and visually stimulating images onstage. Rather, understanding the culture allows her to step inside it and make choices about the clothes from the same point of view that the culture in question made their clothing choices – while adding dramatic interest, a color palette, pattern, and other elements of visual interest and effect. The designer who does so is empowered to make better costume choices, improving the experience of the audience and the quality of the overall theatrical event.
The richly textured world of ancient Hawai‘i nearly slipped away, due to the staggering effects of colonization perpetrated on the land and her people by various countries. Still, thanks to the efforts of many Kanaka Maoli and others who care about the culture, scholarship and scraps of the past are emerging more and more in recent decades to recreate the history of the sovereign nation.

Native Hawaiian women until very recently have been silent in history more than native men. The reason for this is partly due to the lack of feminist scholarship covering areas of ancient cultures; mostly, however, it is because the majority of study about ancient Hawai‘i is about its religion – indeed, the culture and religion can hardly be separated from one another. Hawaiian culture historian Elizabeth Buck agrees:

Religion governed the political and economic elements of the social totality, with all aspects of human relationships and practices religiously constituted and infused with sacred meaning. Religion determined the status of groups and individuals, and religion was the basis for the allocation, appropriation, and distribution of land and goods. In short, religion constituted the ‘lived relations’ of Hawaiians (33).

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1 A prayer to the goddess Hina (Gutmanis 9)
2 native Hawaiians
3 Valerio Valeri, Elizabeth Buck and Joyce Linnekin have published monographs on aspects of Hawaiian history and are put to use here.
This necessitates, though, a lack of attention paid to women because within the religious system, women were relatively peripheral. The sources available, then, are varied from informally written accounts of grandchildren of kahunas, written in the first part of the 20th century, recounting the oral traditions they inherited; to attempts made at compiling history and “facts.” Respected expert on the original cultures of Indonesia and Hawai’i, scholar Valerio Valeri points out: “Three main groups of sources can be distinguished: the accounts of European voyagers who, from the time of Cook (1778), visited the Hawaiian archipelago; the writings of missionaries (from 1820); and the traditions or eyewitness accounts recorded by the Hawaiians in their own language. The last group began to be produced only in the 1830s” (Valeri xviii).

Valeri’s efforts – his goal of “giving a coherent interpretation of Hawaiian religious ideas (the first one, to my [Valeri’s] knowledge)” – are more than sufficient for my means, except for the usual problem: his focus on the religious system only and not also everyday life leaves much information about women to the unknown. Unfortunately, the other types of sources are either incomplete, inaccurate, hopelessly biased, or have simply disappeared. An understanding of the Hawaiian women’s culture is severely limited by this lack of sources. Still, by studying a wide range of these types of sources and reading between the lines, as feminist scholarship has taught us is often the best way to find the needle in the haystack, an image of women begins to emerge.

Another issue that faces a person trying to learn about Hawai’i is the problem of language – or rather, the problem of the interpretation, written version, and Americanized definitions of the Hawaiian language. Differing opinions exist as to the appropriate way to use the Hawaiian language (Valeri, Kuykendall, Mookini in Gutmanis, Melville, Chinen). First of all, we know that the language as it is spoken today is not the same as its ancient counterpart, for the pre-contact Hawai’i was an oral culture only. “Although the Hawaiians had not reduced their language to writing, they had an extensive literature accumulated in memory, added to from generation to generation, and handed down by word of mouth” (Kuykendall 10). The word choice by Kuykendall here is interesting: to “reduce” a language by writing it down. This is, unfortunately, what happened to Hawaiian. Faced with the problem of finding a way to communicate with the Hawaiians, the missionaries realized teaching them English would be very time-consuming and laborious and determined that they must use the native tongue (Kuykendall 104). So they set about to learn it, and made interesting

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4 Thankfully, work of more scholarly merit has begun to emerge, like Valeri’s text (which has been called “illuminating, useful, and [an] important work in the field” when reviewed by Strauss), but they still must rely on the earlier flawed accounts. Even Ralph Kuykendall’s exhaustive history of the islands, considered authoritative and appearing in just about every writer’s bibliography, was written in the 1930s and contains various ideological views of that time period.
discoveries: “...by actual experiment it was found that the Hawaiian ear distinguished no difference between the sounds of the letters l, r, and d” (ibid). It took the missionaries until 1826 to create uniformity throughout the kingdom, resulting in a “definitive adoption” of certain sounds over others.⁵

My goal here is to discover the roles of women in native and post-contact Hawai‘i, and to explore their bodies within those roles as required for the understanding of the characters in The Conversion of Ka‘ahumanu. What did a Hawaiian woman think of her own physical body? How did she use it? What goals could she set and achieve through her body? And, therefore, how did she dress her body? “Hawaiian religion is essentially anthropomorphic” (Valeri xi); so how did her body engage her in or exclude her from the religion? To answer these questions and find the Language of the Body and construct the Grammar with the Parts of Speech, I will consider mana in Hawaiian life and its accompanying religious beliefs, which directly affected the female body. Next I will explore the implications for women of mana as manifested in the kapu system as it relates to gender roles and expectations and the creation of a class system. And finally, I will address the historical figure of Ka‘ahumanu and her duties as kuhina nu‘i, as well as the western world’s influence on the religion and roles of Hawaiian women.

The Power of Mana: Kapu, Gender, and Class

“In the Hawaiian domestic economy, the raising and preparation of food was the man’s work; he was fisherman, farmer, and cook” (Kuykendall 6). Several sources verify this aspect of Hawaiian life; it is, in fact, quite well known that “not only fishing but also the cultivation and cooking of the principal food plants are traditionally exclusively male duties” (Valeri 121). In the history Native Planters in Old Hawai‘i, by E.S. Craighill Handy and Elizabeth Green Handy, the men’s activities are described as follows:

Fishing, the making of fishing gear and canoes, the care and housing of canoes and fishing gear, fighting, and the making of weapons were essentially men’s activities. …Every aspect

⁵ Leinani Melville claims that the missionaries actually “concocted a new language” when striving to make the language uniform; the letters l, k, and w were chosen to represent both themselves and sounds that in some places were known as r, t, and v. Other practices for the “correct” or at least the best rendering of Hawaiian words include the use of pronunciation symbols and dashes or hyphens to break down long words. However, they are usually avoided by native writers, perhaps because the hyphens seem to suggest that a word longer than what English speakers are used to is unusual, and therefore it insults the Hawaiian trait of lengthy words and names.

For this paper I have chosen to use pronunciation marks when given in the original text, and to use the more often employed l, k, and w, rather than the r, t, and v. I will use r, t, and v only if they are utilized in a quoted text. Also, in light of the urge to “join us in the political act of resisting the conventions through which non-Western languages and people are exoticized and subtly marginalized” by Hawaiian feminist writers (Chinen et al xii), I will not italicize Hawaiian words that appear in English text. I believe that breaking the words down into syllables, italicizing or putting the words in quotations, is an act of othering and I resist these conventions.
of taro economy and culture was man’s work; the making and tending of fields and irrigated terraces and irrigation ditches, planting, cultivating and harvesting taro, steaming it in a ground oven, peeling it, and pounding the steamed corms to make poi for the womenfolk as well as for men and boys (301).

Handy’s lengthy listing of the processes involved in the cultivation and the raising of the food plants causes an outside observer to wonder, couldn’t a woman have helped the man in some aspect…perhaps help him harvest, or help him pound out the poi? The sharing of the workload in most aspects of Hawaiian life breaks down in something as seemingly simple as food preparation – certainly, at least, something that required daily effort. Why?

The ban of women’s involvement with food preparation extended also to women eating with men. The two genders were separated during meals – men ate in one place, and women and children, including young boys who were not yet of age, ate in a separate eating house called the hale ‘aina (Handy 302). The Hawaiian word for such a practice – a rule condemning certain actions, like men and women eating together – is kapu, which could be translated as “marked” and suggests there is a “need to pay attention” (Valeri 90). The system of kapus was an essential part of the Hawaiian religion and permeated all aspects of life. In one sense, the kapu system could be seen as rules or regulations for daily life, which separated out classes in society and made certain that those at the top were given their due respect. However, fundamentally within the religion, the kapu system distinguished between that which was sacred and associated with the male principles (light, life, divine, etc.) and that which was common and associated with the female principles (darkness, death, etc.). Buck states, “Persons or things were kapu…because they were tied…to the sacred powers of the gods and the transmission of that power through god/human/material relationships” (34) which, according to the creation story, refers to the physical body. By placing a kapu on something, someone, or somewhere, the masculine principles were being protected and/or the feminine principles were being supplemented with actions required by the kapu, be it a sacrifice or simply avoidance of contact (Kuykendall 8-9). Kapus could be permanent and understood to apply at all times, but they could also be instigated by the ali‘i or the priests for special reasons that might be temporary for a matter of days, or a matter of months; for example, during certain months of the year, war was prohibited – thus a kapu was placed on all acts of aggression or war during that time, but not during the rest of the year (Paige & Gilliatt 6).

The “sacred power” mentioned in the quote above refers to mana, and the concept of mana is the reason the kapu system was needed. An ideology found in many Polynesian cultures, mana has been described variously as “process, performance, power, abstract force, and effect, or as all
these things” (Buck 33). The vast and deep importance of mana to all people and all living things must be understood to begin to understand the kapu system; put succinctly:

Mana, the life force that came from the gods, infused all of nature – plants and animals, sky and water, places and people – but the greatest concentration of mana was in the highest ali‘i, the most divine and most powerful chiefs, who received it through their sacred genealogical links to the gods (Buck 33-34).

The ali‘i and the other castes of ancient Hawai‘i will be explained below; mana, however, was directly responsible for and linked to the idea of sacredness, which also informed rank. Treated as a physical substance that could be gained or lost, mana was protected by the kapu system in terms of its potency – those who had the most mana, like the ali‘i, must be protected from those who have less (which would be anyone below them) because those with less mana will cause the ali‘i to lose some of their mana. Kapus were designed to prevent this from happening, thus, “the genealogy, genitals, clothing, actions, even the spit, of the highest ali‘i were sacred and therefore protected by kapu” (Buck 34). This is of utmost importance when considering the Parts of Speech for just ali‘i – such sacredness infusing the whole body greatly reflects the opinion of the body as well as its uses.

Because of the wide variety of language choices, names and origins of gods, and even aspects of the Hawaiian religion among all the islands, it is impossible for any scholar to compile an exhaustive list of specific kapus; as mentioned above, some were permanent (like those protecting ali‘i) and others were seasonal or intermittent. However, based on the importance and the workings of mana as understood today, which directly necessitated the hierarchical class system, some conclusions about kapus that relate to dress, my end objective of this study, can be drawn. For example, the clothing of Ka‘ahumanu could not be touched by Hannah or Pali, as members of a lower class; this would affect her mana. However, Ka‘ahumanu could touch the clothing and possessions of Hannah and Pali, and in fact they would want her to, because of the opportunity to gain mana. The clothing kapus are doubly significant for women as opposed to men, because of the very intimate relationship women held with the making of cloth – called kapa – which was one of their sole occupations. The implications of this relationship will be discussed below.

Kuykendall points out penalties for the violation of a kapu were very severe, and even if a kapu was broken without the knowledge of a person, she or he was still punished for the crime. Further, he states, “the kapu system was most hampering, if not actually oppressive, in its effect upon the common people and upon women of all classes” (Kuykendall 9). So why the strict treatment of women? What had they done wrong?
In fact, women did nothing wrong to “deserve” the harsh restrictions the kapu system imposed especially on them. The treatment was less a punishment than seen as simply necessary, based on the beliefs about gods and mana, the origin of the world, as well as how the human body was a part of religion. The female body carried a degree of impurity and therefore was not suitable for much that the gods required. Valeri explains, “purity is first and foremost a positive quality: it is the mark of a close instantiation of the divine and therefore of full development, of integrity. Impurity, in contrast, is lesser purity – a lesser instantiation of the divine model” (92). The importance of purity and impurity in the religious system will become clear through the following discussion; for the purpose of understanding the place of females in the religious system, I will here include a brief description of the hierarchy of the Hawaiian gods.

Four is the basis of the Hawaiian numeric system, and the numbers then proceed by tens: thus, four, forty, four hundred, four thousand, forty thousand, and four hundred thousand. This is probably why their gods are arranged in groups of four (Valeri 13). The “tetrad” of major gods, as Valeri calls it, consists of Kāne, Kū, Lono, and Kanaloa; this listing is affirmed by Kuykendall (7) and Buck (40).6

The issue of the god Hina, the highest strictly female deity, is treated differently by various authors and historians. Valeri acknowledges some accounts of actually depicting the Kū of the tetrad as residing on a sort of upper eschelon with Hina as a “divinized couple” of the “duality of the sexes” standing apart from Kū’s individual involvement in the tetrad. “At least in certain representations, th[e] ‘Kū-and-Hina godhead’…encompasses all the deities: ‘Kū is said to preside over all male spirits (gods), Hina over the females,’” (Valeri 12). Kū is also present, then, in the tetrad, but in a different essence: “This illustrates a fundamental principle. It is impossible to define Hawaiian gods in and for themselves; it can be done only with respect to the context in which they are situated at a given moment” (Valeri 13).

Despite Valeri’s stress of male and female, the Hawaiians did not emphasize the duality of gender as the western world tends to do – Valeri here uses the terms to illustrate purity and impurity, though not in terms of duality but rather as a continuum. Furthermore, the female-ness or

6 However, elsewhere the four gods are stated to be Kāne, Kū, Lono, and Hina, (Paige and Gilliatt 2-3); in this arrangement, Kanaloa is grouped together with Kāne and Hina is elevated from the next rung (Gutmanis 5). There is also sometimes mentioned a higher god, a “Supreme Being, who overtopped all other gods” (Kuykendall 7) known as ‘Io-'Io. His name is too sacred to speak casually and is only uttered in silent prayer (Gutmanis 3); some sources report that only one kahuna on each island could speak the sacred name once during a generation (Valeri, Kuykendall). However, others downplay the importance or even existence of ‘Io-'Io (Gutmanis 3).
lesser purity of gods and the female-ness or lesser purity of human women did not carry the same
sort of weight; the body and blood affected the purity of humans:

Although our information is often scanty on this point, it appears that Hawaiians classify a
variety of states as ‘pure’ and ‘impure.’ Basically, purity denotes a state of integrity, that is, of
close realization of a normative type. Impurity denotes, of course, the opposite state. …
The equivalence of lack of integrity and impurity and, by implication, of integrity and purity
is clearest in the evaluation of bodily phenomena. The most impure bodily process is
menstruation. The term used for menstrual blood, pe’a, is synonymous with impurity in
general. Along with menstrual blood, all shed blood is impure to different degrees. (Valeri
84-85)

Mana, of course, was tied into purity as well; those who had mana were more pure, and
those who had less or no mana were closer to the impurity side of the continuum. Purity and
impurity was at issue for one simple, but vastly important reason: those who were impure were not
permitted to engage with the gods (the purest of all due to their mana). The fact that bloodshed
makes one impure – among other things, of course – means that women are always already impure
at least once a month. Therefore, when viewed from this perspective, it only makes sense that
women cannot take place in activities that require direct “contact” with the gods. Their impurity
prevents them from doing so; kapus were then put in place to keep impure women from associating
with the pure gods for the sake of the women and of the gods. Their gender, though responsible for
the reason they were often impure, was not in and of itself the reason they were impure.

Interestingly, though, gods could also be impure. In Valeri’s study of ritual in the Hawaiian
religion, he determines that a ritual is done not just to purify the humans involved, but also the gods
involved:

Given that impurity is a state of incompleteness while purity is a state of completeness, we
must deduce that at the beginning of the sacrificial process sacrifier, group, offering and god
are all impure, though in different degrees. In other words, we must suppose that sacrifice
makes complete and therefore pure (or purer) not only its human actors, but also its divine
ones, while transgression, or any other state of lack that motivates sacrifice, implicitly makes
the god less pure (86).

So the involvement of an impure female could actually keep the god from being purified, as
opposed to the involvement of a male whose more pure state will allow the god also to become
pure.

The impurity of the gods was possible due to a very unique aspect of Hawaiian theology
dealing with physical selves and bodies. Unlike other deities in religious systems who are made of
some sort of different substance than their subjects, Hawaiians had an intimate bodily relationship
with their gods. Valeri focuses on the embodiment of the Hawaiian gods and the implications of the beliefs, so it is to his work that I will primarily refer in this discussion, beginning with stories of creation – since, as in many religions, the creation account determines in some way how the rest of history will proceed.

Accounts of the cosmogony of Hawai‘i vary, as do all myths of the ancient religion; however, the chant considered to be the most important telling of the origin of the cosmos is called the Kumulipo. Valeri’s exploration of the chant reveals insights into the relationship between god, man, and woman that are very enlightening for my study.

In the beginning the heavens warm the earth by rubbing against it. This is the Hawaiian equivalent of the marriage of heaven and earth. The warmed earth produces a substance called walewale (…walewale keiki means ‘discharge following childbirth’). This generative substance is the ‘source’ or ‘origin’ of Pō [one of two major periods; night]. In turn Pō engenders two forms that exhibit the first and fundamental biological difference, sex. The male form is called Kumulipo (beginning in deep obscurity, origin of life); the female form is called Pō’ele (black, darkness) (Valeri 4).

Pō is the first period and described as meaning “the god enters, man cannot enter’ (Valeri 4). What does this mean? Pō is the source of the first gendered couple, Kumulipo and Pō’ele, who gave birth to the first of all life, coral. In this way the world is created jointly first from the heaven and the sky, and then from male and female together who, having descended from the divine entity Pō, begin to create the divine world.

After the first pairing, Pō begins to pair other manifestations of itself, male and female entities who each engender the “next” form of life. Several generations of gods later, Pōkinikini and Pōhe’enalumamao emerge as the couple who created humans (6). These two are, as their names suggest, manifestations yet again of Pō, but their creation of humans instigates the period of Ao, light. This manifestation of Pō creates two humans – La’ila’i, a woman; Ki’i, a man; as well as two of the “principal personal gods,” Kāne and Kanaloa (ibid). Humans and gods issue from the same source – Valeri addresses this interesting notion:

It indicates that the existence of men and that of the personal gods are correlated. This notion is reinforced by a curious detail. The god Kāne bears the name of his worshiper, the human male (kāne); the man is called Ki’i (“image”), the generic name attributed to the anthropomorphic images of the gods used in worship. The complementarity of gods and man could not be better represented, nor could the relationship of equivalence that exists between man as species (the first man) and the major personal gods (6).

7 Probably, Valeri says, the author of the chant thought the islands themselves were built entirely of coral (5).
So the manifestation of Pō throughout the creation of nature, alongside the recurring theme of the first section of the Kumulipo chant, “the divine enters, man cannot enter,” means that humans are excluded entirely from nature (Valeri 7). However, as we have seen, humans now have the power to create the divine through the creation of images, transforming the gods. Humanity has found an entry point into the divinity of nature. Still, in yet another complication of the relationship between humans and gods, it was the conscious act of the divine to bring about such a transformation. “From now on [the divine] will be constituted by personal, anthropomorphic images such as Kāne and Kanaloa,” writes Valeri, and continues, “Moreover…these personal gods regroup the natural species on the basis of human, ‘moral’ logic that takes the place of or modifies the ‘natural’ classificatory logic that the Kumulipo identifies with the state of the divine until man appears on the scene” (7).

It is because of this regrouping that sacrifice, ritual, worship, and the kapu system came about – the divinity of nature excludes humans, but the humanity of the gods now that they have become anthropomorphic images is the entry point for humans to enter the divine, and they do so through the organization of this system.

With this understanding, it is clear why kapus were set in place, and how purity and impurity can affect humans and gods alike, requiring retribution for each entity – their close, anthropological connection through their lineage, through nature, and through their involvement in one another’s existence means they can experience the same flaws and merits. Such a lineage created the aliʻi and the aumakua, the realm of ancestral gods, personal deities somewhat like older siblings who intercede for and protect those still living. It also illustrates the flow of mana as contingent upon purity, from one level of being and rank to the next.

This issue, rank, does factor into the religion fairly significantly. For my purposes, it is enough to acknowledge that rank, which is directly linked to the amount of mana one has, affects the level of purity or impurity, just as bloodshed does:

…Thus, certain goddesses have a relatively ‘masculine’ character in that they are relatively purer than actual women, while certain gods (especially sorcery gods or god aspects [i.e., the forty]) have a relatively ‘feminine’ character in that they are impure. But on the other hand, certain women find themselves relatively purer than men because they happen to be the only representative of the highest social rank (Valeri 112-113).

The highest rank below the kahuna – priests of whose sacred duties and training nearly nothing is known today – was the aliʻi, the royal class. The aliʻi were thought to be the nearest descendants to the aumakua, and therefore had the most mana; so they were most revered in the islands. Strict
rules of genealogical order and customs governed the marriages and sexual relations of aliʻi, such that specific names existed for aliʻi of secondary unions and lesser ranks (Handy 321). Konohiki were relatives of a currently ruling aliʻi, who served in authorial positions on the aliʻi’s land, enforcing kapu and mediating tasks like fishing (ibid).

The maka'ainana, which translates literally as “on-the-land [folk],” were the common people; though of the same genealogy as the aliʻi, the maka'ainana had no claim to noble rank (Handy 323). They worked as fishers, planters, and craftspeople, as tenants on land held by aliʻi: “As long as they were loyal to the aliʻi on whose land they dwelt, their land holdings, homesites, and fishing rights were secure. However, they were not serfs. Theirs was the right, if they pleased, to leave their home district or island and settle elsewhere under another chief” (ibid).

And lowest of all in the caste system was the kauā, Pali’s fate that her father tries to hide. Called a “landless class of people” – clearly a serious situation, given Hawaiians’ opinion of land – the word means “outcast” (Handy 324). It is speculated that the kauā were the descendants of native people already living in the Hawaiian islands when the modern Hawaiians, from Tahiti, came and settled there. They were not permitted to work any land, and were kept in an infertile reservation on the Big Island (ibid). All kauā were made to wear marks on their faces – on their foreheads or perhaps under their eyes, signifying their state so that all knew who and what they were – yet another way the physical body manifested the religious beliefs of Hawaiians. Further, when a human sacrifice was required by a kahuna, a kauā was summoned to fulfill the purpose. Children born of aliʻi and kauā parents were strangled. However, if a kauā was in great need, she or he may go to the chief with head covered with kapa and eyes downward (ibid).

This system of rank further emphasizes that purity has nothing, or very little, to do with gender and everything to do with relative position to the gods and the resulting manifestations of mana, which is how rank was organized.

The Hawaiian Woman: her Duties and Attributes

The insight into the Hawaiian religion makes possible the discovering of the parts of speech of the Hawaiian women’s Language of the body. Hina being the prototype for goddesses “implies that she represents the attributes of women and their natural counterparts. Among these typically feminine attributes can be found everything that is associated with the begetting of children, beginning with seduction…and ending with childbirth” (Valeri 18). We know from other historical accounts that for women, childbirth and care was truly the main thrust of their existence. According to Kuykendall, it is the primary concern of women and is followed by the preparation of cloth and
clothing – and that is just about the extent of women’s labors (6-7). Samwell, early historian of the Hawaiian people, has these comments about women’s daily activities: “As to their employments they seem to lead a very easy life, beating the cloth is the most laborious [referring to the process of creating kapa]…the rest of their business is confined to nursing their children and other domestic cares, the young women spend most of their time in singing and dancing of which they are very fond” (quoted in Valeri 123). With this kind of lifestyle, the goddesses evoking attributes of femininity, motherhood, and leisurely passage of time is easily applicable.

Childbirth was a very important, sacred, and respected work of the woman. In the Hawaiian culture, a child belonged not just to her or his parents, but also to the gods, the ancestors, and the community at large, all of whom had a part in raising the child (Gutmanis 49). Naturally, the process of giving birth is considered impure, since it involves shedding much blood, but nevertheless it was also a sacred process, needing only to be purified by the proper sacrifices and rituals both during pregnancy and birth and after delivery (Gutmanis 49-56).

As I have stated, the act of engaging with the gods depended not on the human gender, but on the relative purity or impurity of the person. As women tend to be less pure due to things that happen to them naturally, like their menstrual periods, men are often more pure. Valeri quotes Kepelino: “Women…were not allowed to offer sacrifice in the hand, only men. They were called by a name which denotes unclean and presumptuous – kahinu [in reality (Valeri inserts) the Hawaiian text was kuhinu, which means the same]. Only if the woman herself was a prophet, or kahuna, was it permitted” (quoted in Valeri 111). Some women, says David Malo, known Hawaiian historian, “had no deity and just worshipped nothing” (quoted in Valeri 113). In such a case, we see how women felt oppressed by the kapus and, eventually, it was two women who spearheaded the effort to influence Liholiho to abolish them; they were required to follow the kapus, but for many who did not routinely worship the gods whose kapus they followed, it must have felt worthless.

We encounter a problem, though. For a place like Hawai‘i, whose religion permeates and influences every aspect of their culture, how could women simply live deplete of some kind of sacrifice to or worship of the gods with whom they shared a physical heritage? What’s more, the

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8 “Singing and dancing” here may refer both to casual pastime and to the formal art of hula.
9 For ordinary women, though, and most of the female deities of the religion, there did in fact exist what Valeri calls only a “privileged relationship,” achieved through priestesses, prophetesses, or even mediums. He adds, “Their mediating role thus takes on a typically feminine form: they are possessed, penetrated by the deity who speaks through them” (112). This was less frequent, though, than the typical system of men interacting with the gods through sacrifice.
equality of men and women within society contrasts quite sharply with the inequality within the sacrificial system; Valeri asks:

> All hierarchical positions are determined by their degree of proximity to a divine reference point, which is the same for both men and women. But the relationship with this defining divine is obtained by two different means: the sacrificial means, in which men dominate, and the genealogical means, which is equally accessible to men and women and is therefore unmarked (113).

While the “degree of proximity to a divine reference point” is, indeed, the same for men and women alike, when it comes to worship through anthropological means women have the upper hand by far in their ability to bear and give birth to children. Except for conception, childbirth is an entirely female enterprise, as sacrifice is primarily a male enterprise. The metaphors of birth prevalent in Hawaiian lore and mele\(^{10}\) all point towards the great importance childbirth held; for example, multiple prayers still exist that bless conception, the period of pregnancy, birth, breast milk, prayers against sickness, a prayer for males who have reached the age when they leave the women’s house and join the men – age four or five, usually – at which point he was dedicated to Lono (Gutmanis 53). Female children, of course, remained with the women and learned their ways. Within the various creation stories, too, are references to the islands being birthed; this powerful imagery was most definitely part of the reason birth was so revered. Hawaiians pictured the islands emerging from the ocean, being birthed from the depths; other accounts, such as the Kumulipo account described above, suggest a sexual encounter between the earth and the sky that resulted in the islands. Clearly, sexual reproduction is seen as a most sacred event and the frequent result from intercourse, a child, was also sacred. There is no evidence to suggest to us that a sexual encounter without conception was not sacred; the first couples who brought forth coral, winged creatures, etc., were not sacred because they issued life – they were already sacred, and their act was therefore sacred in and of itself.

Therefore women regain, through childbirth, the power that exclusion from the sacrificial system would have denied them and equilibrium is reached. As Valeri puts it,

> In the end, it appears that women’s exclusion from the sacrificial reproduction is symmetrical to men’s exclusion from childbearing. It expresses the idea that the two activities are complementary and, in a way, equivalent. The ultimate reconciliation of genealogy and sacrifice lies precisely in the metonymic relation between the sexes. …Consequently it is possible to represent childbearing as woman’s sacrifice and sacrifice as man’s childbearing (114).

\(^{10}\) Chants
Women then please and honor the gods by having sex and, sometimes, bearing children. The implications of this sacrificial element of women’s lives are enormous. As we have seen in the “feminine attributes” embodied by the goddesses, beauty, eroticism, and seduction are important female qualities – why? The answer is now clear: women sought to attract men to become pregnant in order to give birth and thereby offer a sacrifice. It is significant to note, though, that the goal was not simply to have sex as often as possible and produce as many children as her body could bear; rather, birth was a matter of choice as well as a divine act, and kahuna might even “prescribe practical methods of contraception and abortion” so a woman could control her own offspring (Gutmanis 49). Contraception, then, implies that sex was not purely to get pregnant, but also for enjoyment. In light of the idea of sexual gratification, as well as childbearing as worship, the Hawaiian woman’s body suddenly takes on remarkable importance as simultaneously a site of pleasure and worship.

The Art of Kapa Making

Women’s daily activities, we can now see, revolved around her efforts to entice and attract sexual partners. As such, her part in grooming and adorning herself began with the preparation of cloth, called kapa. The cloth was used for beds, for wrapping up objects into sacks, or for mats for sitting; it was also, of course, used for clothing. Typical western ideas of the reason for clothing, such as protection and modesty, do not apply to Hawaiians. Firstly, the warm climate required very little clothing, and second, modesty as westerners understand the concept was fairly absent. Being free from the restrictions of western ideas, nudity, partial or full, was the norm in pre-contact Hawai‘i. Women’s breasts were seen quite often, and it was not rare to see a woman completely naked – for example, when giving birth, during which time kahunas, family, and possibly many others were present, as we know from the practice of who is involved in cutting the umbilical cord (Gutmanis 52). Therefore, sexual attractiveness must not have been found only in nakedness. They had to find another means of creating sexual attraction to fulfill their “occupation,” that is, to worship (Valeri 123).

Handy and Handy suggest that the making of kapa, as well as the weaving of fibers, was perhaps the most time-consuming of all of women’s work (304), and for very good reason. “The size of Hawaiian bark-cloth garments and furnishings, in conjunction with the fact that great numbers of them went into the people’s regular tribute to the chiefs, may be taken as an indicator of the duration and significance of women’s daily work” (Linnekin 43). The malo, the typical male wrapped skirt, was “a piece of cloth, six or eight inches wide, and about nine feet in length”
(Whitman, quoted in Linnekin 43) and other cloth needs, like a sleeping kapa, could be twelve to twenty feet long and eight to fifteen feet wide! When the kapa must be made in the following way, such production of fabric is no small feat:

In [the preparation of clothing] the fundamental operation was the making of kapa (or bark cloth, as it is sometimes called). The raw material of kapa was the inner bark of the paper mulberry, which had to be peeled off, soaked in water, scraped to remove the pulp, and then beaten out into thin, narrow strips; several strips would be overlapped and beaten together along the edges to make wider pieces, and one layer might be put on top of another to make a thicker sheet. The beating was done with wooden mallets or beaters upon a long anvil carefully hewn into shape from a log, and the sound of the kapa beater was a familiar one in old Hawai‘i (Kuykendall 6-7).

Besides clothing, kapa was also used as “domestic furnishings” such as mats; chiefs were sometimes known to sleep on stacks of mats thirty or forty high. Kapa was also used – among many other ways – as offerings to the gods, to wrap or adorn idols in the heiau, in marriage ceremonies, and as gifts to the ali‘i or retribution for transgressions (Linnekin 41-45). Handy and Handy elaborate:

The art of tapa beating...had been carefully taught her as a young girl by her kapuna (elders), as well as the designing and imprinting of the patterns, with dyes she learned to make from various native roots and berries. She took pride in the quality and beauty of her tapa, as in the softness and evenness of her woven mats, and year by year she stored away the best of both against the time when dowries would be needed for her daughters (305).

The connection that kapa making created between generations of women is significant when considering the pride and care they took both in passing down the craft and in producing kapa for themselves and for their families. Such a tradition cultivates intimacy not just between the women of the family, but also between a woman and her own kapa.11 How might this have inspired a woman in her efforts of beauty and sexuality?

Returning to the feminine attributes of goddesses, it appears that such qualities are the stuff of seduction, the language of arousing desire. It was the woman’s job to do so: “[Procreation] in Hawaiian culture implies all that relates to seduction, in which it is said that women play a more active role than men. This explains why properly feminine activities are making ornaments and clothing, chanting, dancing, and other activities that promote eroticism. It is the women who often compose and chant the mele inoa, ‘name chants,’ with their deliberately erotic content, and even the mele ma‘i ‘chant [praising] the genitals’ of the members of their families or their chiefs” (Valeri 123).

11 It is interesting to note that such a tradition and its ability to create connections crosses into many cultures around the world and is not unique to Hawai‘i.
It is through these enterprises, then, that women found the most important way to use their bodies. The sight of a naked woman’s body was too ubiquitous to excite a man to have sex with her; rather, it was the way she adorned her body, the way she moved her body, as well as the suggestive chants in praise of his body. After all, looking at his body naked, likewise, did not communicate to the man that the woman desired him, but lauding his genitals would have been an act of seduction. As for using their appearances, women dressed their bodies in jewelry made of shells, feathers, flowers, and other elements of nature; they often cropped their hair or bleached a fringe across their foreheads, which was considered comely. Tattoos were also beauty marks employed by women. Perhaps certain ways of draping the kapa or certain prints on the cloth could also have been forms of seduction. Such idiosyncrasies of the culture are difficult to know definitively, but the variety of ways in which kapa was used, and the extensive rituals of, for example, the dress in hula, suggest that there was more to the dress than historians now can be sure of.

Thanks to various, some dubious, some reliable, sources, some information can be found about the everyday Hawaiian woman and her relationship to her body. In summary, her body was as much descended from the gods as a man’s, and therefore related to the gods and entitled to interaction with them. Her gender did not impede her place in the natural order, since the entire creation of the islands and the life found in them was a product of both male and female entities. The sharing of the workload as well as pleasures extended to every aspect of life except to ritualized practice of sacrifice to the gods. In this a woman was often excluded due to frequent impurity suffered due to bloodshed. However, in the act of childbirth women could find an equivalent to the sacrificial system and thereby contribute to the culture, her population, and, as she was bringing forth an image of a human being – which, as we have seen, is an image of the gods – please and worship the gods. In order to become pregnant as frequently as she like, the Hawaiian woman had a highly developed set of tools to entice a male to have sex with her, allowing her to engage in a worshipful experience. Her body was not just for childbearing, though, as nothing in the religion prohibited sexual interaction at will and without restriction – as evidenced by the frequent and varied occurrence of sexual encounters between the gods both in the creation story and throughout lore. The Hawaiian woman was, all evidence and study suggests, free, empowered, equal, and no more or less privileged or regarded than a male of her same rank in terms of sex. And the culminating example of a Hawaiian woman’s empowerment is Ka‘ahumanu, one of the most famous rulers Hawai‘i has ever had.
The Leadership of Ka‘ahumanu

In its long history, Hawai‘i has had both kings and queens as the primary ruler and at least once, the primary ruler was not a king or queen at all, but rather a position known as kuhina nui, created and held by Ka‘ahumanu. Kuhina is now translated from the Hawaiian into English to mean “ambassador, regent, sovereign” but that is most likely because of Ka‘ahumanu’s work in rectifying the word (wehewehe.org). Earlier I noted the translation of kahinu or kuhinu, a word that means unclean and presumptuous as well as woman (Valeri 111). It appears that in creating this office, Ka‘ahumanu simply took the word for woman and added nu‘i, which means “grand, highest, best, biggest” et cetera (wehewehe.org). She was calling herself the best woman, and indeed that is what she became. Her role in history is of interest to me not just because she is featured in Kneubuhl’s play, but mostly for her position in the Hawaiian kingdom as a woman, her role in abolishing the kapu system, and the implications for the Hawaiian woman’s body in these actions as well as the very fact of her regency period. Any woman who can change the translation of a word originally used to connote her sex from “impure” to “sovereign” must be quite an influential person.

Kamehameha I died in Kailua on Hawai‘i on May 8, 1819. A week later his son, Liholiho, about to be installed as king, was approached by Kamehameha’s favorite wife, Ka‘ahumanu. Her words have been laid down in history as this:

Hear me, O Divine one, for I make known to you the will of your father. Behold these chiefs and the men of your father, and these your guns, and this your land, but you and I shall share the realm together (Kuykendall 64).

Liholiho agreed and became Kamehameha II, Ka‘ahumanu took the title kuhina nu‘i, and “a unique system of dual government was thereby instituted” (ibid). Kuykendall offers this helpful explanation of the new position: “If we keep in mind that the government was a nearly absolute monarchy, it is not far from the truth to say that the supreme executive power was about equally divided between the king and the kuhina nu‘i. Technically and ceremonially, the king was the highest officer in the state; in the routine administration of the government, the kuhina nu‘i was ordinarily more active than the king” (ibid).

Ka‘ahumanu’s unique new position and her presence and part in Hawai‘i’s most tumultuous time, the turn of the nineteenth century, has secured her importance in history. “Next to Kamehameha I, she is certainly the most imposing figure among the native rulers of Hawai‘i. A chief of rank and autocratic temper, she governed her people, as a contemporary observer remarked,

12 This is not to be confused with kahuna nu‘i, the chief priest who advised the king.
‘with a rod of iron’” (Kuykendall 133). She was revered and much loved, and therefore women of the time must have looked to her as a powerful figure.

Ka’ahumanu’s official political career as kuhina nu’i began at a most tumultuous time – non-Hawaiians had now been a reality of life for over forty years and their presence and influence, among other issues, threatened the Hawaiian culture. Talk had been circulating among many ali’i and kahunas about whether or not the kapu system could, or even should, continue to be a daily aspect of life. For years Hawaiians had seen foreigners breaking kapus daily, and nothing seemed to happen to any of them for their transgressions! Kuykendall elaborates:

The example of the foreigners, their disregard of kapu, and their occasional efforts to convince the Hawaiians by argument that their system was wrong, were the most potent forces undermining the beliefs of the people. There were incidents related to visitors to the islands showing that some of the people were willing to disregard the kapus if they could do this without being seen by the priests and chiefs (67).

Accounts tell us that there was talk at the time of Liholiho’s installation as king of whether or not it was time to abolish the kapu system, but concerns included first earning the loyalty of the Hawaiian people as his father had done, to ensure cooperation and a rebellion-free transition into what, it seems, many sensed was a significant new era (Kuykendall 65).

Further proof of the equality between men and women is the place of influence that not just Ka’ahumanu, with her new title and authority, held, but also the position of Keopuolani, Liholiho’s mother. Though she had no formal rank, Keopuolani is also considered a major player in the abolition of the kapu system, right alongside her peer Ka’ahumanu. The stories vary as to how the two women actually interacted with regards to the kapu overthrow; one rather tender account is as follows:

Some authorities state that immediately after the installation of Liholiho as king, Ka’ahumanu proposed to him that the kapus be disregarded and she announced her own intention to disregard them. The king, it is said, remained silent and withheld his consent. Then Keopuolani, who was present, ‘was touched with love for Ka’ahumanu because her proposal was refused. She thought perhaps that the proposal might eventually bring upon Ka’ahumanu the extreme vengeance of violated tabu [sic].’ Keopuolani therefore sent for her son Kauikeaouli, the younger brother of Liholiho, and ate with him in defiance of the kapu (Kuykendall 67).

For a while, Liholiho continued to resist the insisting of Ka’ahumanu and Keopuolani at the advice of his chief adviser Kekuaokalani; however, knowing that all over the kingdom people were beginning to disregard the religious practices held sacred for centuries, for millennia, the kahuna nu’i Hewahewa advised the king to “abolish the kapus and abandon the gods” (Kuykendall 68). What a
remarkable, practically unthinkable act: the Hawaiians’ religion, so thoroughly entwined in daily life and informing every action, every task, was suddenly and simply left behind. Kuykendall’s phrase, “abandon the gods,” certainly sounds as frightening and ominous as it must have been then. Still, Ka‘ahumanu and Keopuolani confidently led the way towards this choice and, as far as we know, did not falter. Somehow they had become assured of the rightness of this move for the Hawaiian kingdom.

Histories tell us that Liholiho was quite nervous at the abolition of the kapus; regardless, he did not choose a subtle way to express his decision. Around the first week of November, 1819 – a mere six months into his reign – the king announced a feast to be held at Kailua and invited the leading chiefs as well as some foreigners. Two tables were set, one for men and one for women:

‘After the guests were seated, and had begun to eat, the king took two or three turns round each table, as if to see what passed at each; and then suddenly, and without any previous warning to any but those in the secret, seated himself in a vacant chair at the women’s table, and began to eat voraciously, but was evidently much perturbed. The guests, astonished at this act, clapped their hands, and cried out, ‘Ai noa, - the eating tabu is broken’ (quoted in Kuykendall 68).

Upon completion of the meal Liholiho announced orders to destroy all the heiaus\(^\text{13}\) across the kingdom and to burn all idols; in addition, “on November 6 orders were received in Honolulu from the king directing that men and women should eat together and should eat equally of foods formerly prohibited to the women” (ibid). The kapus were gone. Among all the rest, no longer did the carefully and lovingly prepared kapa carry any significance when worn by an ali‘i, when used in a sacred ceremony, or even when given in sacrifice to the gods – because according to Liholiho’s actions, it was as if the gods no longer existed. What effect did this have on the women’s work? Their formerly prized and praised craft was greatly diminished in importance and need. Where did this leave them?

The emphasis by Liholiho on only the eating kapu is very interesting; somehow, this one kapu being broken communicated to the people that the entire system was destroyed. To understand why, a return to Valeri’s work on the two hierarchies of ancient Hawai‘i – one of sacrifice, and one of genealogy – is most helpful.

Valeri’s most pertinent theory for my purposes about the religion is “the whole system is based on the opposition of the pure and the impure, and is summarized by the following proportion: pure : impure :: male : female :: male superior : male inferior” (128). Given this

\(^{13}\) Temples or places of worship and sacrifice
articulation, Valeri points out that it is the ‘ai kapu imposed on women that acknowledges men’s superior position in the sacrificial system. Even though Valeri earlier suggests that perhaps childbearing is women’s equivalent sacrifice, he seems not to regard that here as he states that the “separation of the sexes [is the] epitome and basis of the hierarchical system” based probably on the foundational principle of purity; even if women can please the gods in childbearing, they remain always already less pure than men (ibid).

The breaking of the ‘ai kapu, then, by Liholiho, could represent symbolically the breaking of the entire religious system because it abolished the difference between the sexes, implying purity was no longer at issue and thereby abolishing the difference between ranks, and so eliminating the hierarchy of sacrifice. With the hierarchy of sexes gone, what is left to order society? “Henceforth the hierarchy survived only its genealogical form and consequently in its female-centered mode of reproduction. It is no accident, then, that female, not male, chiefs played the most important roles after the abolition of the Old Regime” (ibid).

In this way it appears that Ka’ahumanu’s power would have only increased – not only was she respected but she now possessed, in a sense, the only “magic” left, which is the magic of the female ability to give birth – though she never bore children, as a woman she was still associated with the female connection to the earth through the birth of the islands. What may have happened in Hawai’i if this new way of life had been allowed to continue uninterrupted by foreign pressures, cultures, and colonization? Would women have eventually become the ruling class? Would it have been a peaceful and happy place – or restless, full of resentment and factions refusing to let go of the past? The world will never know. From various sources, though, it becomes evident that a confusion of roles, expectations, and security occurred, especially (I speculate) among the women of Hawai’i. In one sense the female body was liberated from the accusation of impurity, simply for something she could not control (the blood loss of childbirth and the menstrual period). On the other hand, that accusation had never been maliciously intended. Though she was kept from interacting in the system of sacrifices as the men did, and from having contact with the gods through various means like certain foods or activities, she was able to participate in the religion through sex and through birth. What now? If birth is no longer an act of worship, what is the point of bearing children?

The fact is, contact occurred and resulted in, besides the changes already mentioned, a new view of sex and women’s role in it. Westerners took advantage of the more free sexuality present in

14 food
the islands, unfortunately bringing diseases that had never existed before in the islands; despite this abuse, for women it was the new teaching of the Christian missionaries that added greatly to their perplexity over what their bodies were now meant for. Patricia Grimshaw, a scholar who has written of Hawaiian culture and the missionaries, notes,

They [the missionary wives] came to Hawai‘i believing that Hawaiian women were sunk to the lowest place of abjection; they came to enable these women to ‘lift up their heads,’ and enjoy the fruits of a higher social status. In fact, mission wives attacked and undermined those very aspects of Hawaiian culture which offered Hawaiian women some measure of autonomy in their own system. Meanwhile they were powerless to recreate for Hawaiians the conditions which gave American women the degree of informal power which they themselves knew. After initial failures to make Natives behave like New Englanders, missionary wives felt that ‘the main thrust of the reform endeavor should be shaped around the family life of Hawaiians. …The main reliance, then, would be upon instilling ‘moral and religious culture’ in the females (Chinen 5).

Of course “family life” to the mission wives meant something entirely different than what it meant in Hawai‘i. The proper family of New England consisted of a mother and father, married, who had not had sex with each other or anyone else prior to the marriage ceremony; and a few children who they alone cared for. As noted, the concept of family in Hawai‘i was much more broad and community-based; marriage was not nonexistent, but polygamy was common and sexual encounter without any sort of relational “commitment,” in the western sense, was the norm. Not only were the missionaries grossly incorrect in their assumption that Hawaiian women were downtrodden and abused, but instead of “liberating” them, their instruction only furthered the confusing situation in which Hawaiian women now found themselves upon the abolition of the kapu system. Everything about their bodies had made sense, down to the making and use of kapa; now, without their religion and with new cotton, fully covering clothes, nothing made sense anymore.

The average Hawaiian woman must have been struggling with questions about her own body because of the changes – could she still bear children as an act of worship? If not, then what was her body for? Was it still a location of beauty and a means of seduction? But seduction for what – to get pregnant? And the circle repeats. These questions of identity and position are given life in Kneubuhl’s play, as Hannah struggles with her own sexuality and the attractiveness of her Hawaiian lifestyle, and the appeal of the teachings of the missionaries whose ethnicity she shares. Pali, too, is caught between the old and the new, as a kauā whose body previously made her unclean – is she still of a lower caste? To what authority can others appeal to justify Pali’s uncleanness? And for Ka‘ahumanu, the stakes are highest of all; not just for her own body and place in the religious system as a woman, but for her people and nation Ka‘ahumanu must answer these questions. When
for centuries, for millennia, Hawaiian women had been certain of their bodies’ roles, their place in
the religion, and their bodies’ involvement in worship, the sudden loss of stability and balance was
most likely quite traumatic. “What do I do with this body I have?” she wondered. Good question.
CHAPTER 4: THE LANGUAGE OF THE MISSIONARY FEMALE BODY UNDRESSED

Upon [the women], under Providence, depend in no small degree [the mission’s] comfort, its harmony, and its success. In the domestic concerns, - in the education of the Heathen Children, - in the various cares, and trials, and labours, of the Mission, - by their assiduous attentions, their affectionate offices, their prudent suggestions, their cheering influences, and their unceasing prayers, they will help the Brethren.¹

On October 23, 1819 seventeen women and men and five children left New England behind for very nearly uncharted waters with these words from the Revs. Bingham and Thurston’s ordinations ringing in their ears. Behind them, on the American shore, were family, church, and cultural fluency. Ahead of them, months and miles away on the Hawaiian shore, was for some home; for others, it was the mission field – unknown, “unchurched,” and foreign in all ways. The tasks before the company would be arduous – for the women, perhaps, than for the men. Their religion, Christianity; their doctrines, Calvinist; and their denomination, Congregationalism, required much of its female congregants – but did it afford them the means to accomplish the demands? Were they properly equipped in their minds, their souls, and especially, their bodies?

The missionaries were sent to Hawai‘i by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), organized in 1810 by the General Association of Congregational Churches of Massachusetts. The ABCFM’s mission statement declared their goal, “…for the purpose of devising ways and means, and adopting and prosecuting measures, for promoting the spread of the gospel in Heathen lands.” In the ten years of its existence, the ABCFM had sent so-called “willing workers” – missionaries – to India and to parts of Africa. Its mission to Hawai‘i was to be its largest and most ambitious yet, as no missionaries had yet visited these islands (after all, Hawai‘i’s presence had only just been introduced to the western world thirty-two years before the ABCFM’s inception) and so little was known about the land and the people. An ethic of sacrifice and obedience accompanied the missionaries on their tedious six-month journey around the bottom of South America, knowing theirs was a brave ambition. But from where did such rhetoric originate? Why was the trip viewed as sacrificial and obedient?

As part of the ABCFM, the members of this first company were affiliated with the Congregational Church and drew from it their theological beliefs that they intended to introduce in Hawai‘i. The Congregational Church originated in England in the 16th century – one of the first denominations formed out of the Protestant Reformation, led by Martin Luther - but was not so

¹ Prudential Committee, xiii
named until the 18th century in America. Its earliest members were called both Separatists, those who wanted to do away with state-controlled churches and therefore left the current structure and created their own; and Puritans, who tried to bring about change within the existing church. From the early nineteenth century of the missionaries backwards, tracing the history of the development of theological thought of the Congregational Church reveals much about the worldview of the missionaries themselves – particularly as their belief system related to the female body. For my purposes, to highlight theology relating to the female body, I will briefly summarize some of the most influential writers and their doctrines to approach an understanding of the complicated cultural construction of the female Congregationalist missionary body.

**The Influence of Greek Thought: Plato and Paul**

The cornerstone of most western Christian scholarship is classical Greek philosophy. Its direct influence is apparent in many Scriptural texts, including the writings of the apostle Paul, as well as its impact on early church fathers like Augustine. The writings of Plato, especially, in the Greek philosophical canon, address the classic problem of the body in western thought – its relationship to the soul and/or mind. Of Plato’s theories, the most significant here is the overwhelming disdain for the physical body. The conviction that the body is above all else a dirty, vile thing that contaminates the mind and keeps the human being from attaining “the pure” naturally translates into a self-loathing, a complete distaste for the physical self (indeed, the belief that there is no such thing as a physical self) and a stark difference drawn between mind and body. Specifically, the female, seen as a lesser being for her connection to nature through childbirth, which Plato saw as being associated with matter and not thought, is always already baser than the male. Hers is a double plight: not only is her mind less rational, her vile body is more important than her mind because she bears children.

A few hundred years later, in the early years of the first century AD, the apostle Paul began his ministry and in tracing the missionaries’ train of thought, his work is vital. His teachings, as documented in the epistles to the early churches, are integral to the faith of the Congregational Church for a simple reason. Paul’s mission work fulfilled Christ’s final commandment, given just before his ascension into heaven as recorded in the gospel books, called the Great Commission: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28: 19-20 NASB). The missionaries of the ABCFM took this commandment very seriously; upon it they based their choices to go to and their
actions in distant lands for the purpose of teaching Christianity. Their admiration of Paul led to their fervent study of his books. I am interested solely in Paul’s writings about the body, and his specific admonitions concerning the female body.

Paul seems at first glance to be continuing the idea of self-loathing of the physical body from the Greek age. However, his distaste for his own body is in regard to how it distracts him from the spiritual realm. In his first letter to the Corinthians, he writes, “Yet the body is not for immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body” (I Cor. 6:13b NASB). So Paul believed the physical body had some worth and merited attention in terms of what it meant to be “for the Lord,” but he did not view the body the same way as the Greeks. This explains his oft-repeated distinctions of the flesh and the spirit, or the carnal self and the spiritual self. He does not believe that the physical body is not part of the spiritual realm, significantly; Paul undoubtedly believed that the human person is composed of both body and spirit, and never will they be separated. Rather, he teaches that the body can hinder a person’s work in the spirit if not properly restrained or at least treated with discipline. For women, this caution is doubly stressed.

Paul is often attacked for his writing about women, and perhaps rightly so. His admonitions range from hair coverings to having authority to teach men, and have provoked discussion for centuries. It is so important, though, to realize that while Paul taught gender inequality in some areas of life, he considered there to be no inequality when it came to the cause of the Christian faith – that is, conversion of nonbelievers. For example, in his letter to the Romans he closes with greetings to several people, including many women. Specifically, he instructs the recipients to welcome a woman named Phoebe, whom he calls “a servant of the church,” “in a manner worthy of the saints, and that you help her in whatever matter she may have need of you; for she herself has also been a helper of many, and of myself as well” (Rom. 16:1-2 NASB). His tone and vocabulary is no different than when he speaks of men in the same passage. These first two tenets of Paul’s work – discipline of the body and equal responsibility to mission work – heavily influence and inspire the Congregational Church.

As for the place of women with regards to men, Paul as a well-raised Jew interpreted the law of the Old Testament to mean that women should be subordinate to men in the hierarchy of the home. In the well-known passage in the fifth chapter of Ephesians, he justifies this interpretation with an allusion to Christ:

Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. …But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your
wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her … So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. (Eph. 5:22-25, 28a NASB)

Clearly, then, if a husband is taught to “love” his body, that body has worth and a reason to be used and fulfilled. But just what does it mean to love your wife as your body? Perhaps Paul is suggesting that a man’s wife is a tool to be used, as an extension of his own body. Allowance is made elsewhere in the Bible for wives whose husbands are abusive; it is cited as the only reason for divorce. Even after divorced, though, the bodily oneness, spiritual and physical, that marriage and consummation creates necessitated that a woman not take another husband until her first husband has died (Rom. 7:2-3). Paul even goes so far as to say that a woman “shall be called an adulteress” if she is “joined” to another man even while her first husband lives. Very interestingly, there is no parallel description for a man. The implication is that while a woman’s body changes by the act of marriage, the man’s does not. Does her body somehow become a part of her husband’s, giving him something of herself that she cannot then give to another until her first husband has died?²

Paul’s multiple writings drive home the new significance of the physical human body in Christianity. The religion had become concrete through its inclusion of the human physical body, Jesus – no longer a lofty, philosophical, cerebral notion as interpreted by priests, but an earthy and accessible idea with practical implications. The earlier Greek notions of the body’s lowliness had been abolished for the Christian faith. No longer did Christians need to abhor their own bodies and think only of “spiritual things” – the dichotomy had been resolved in essence, but also had been greatly problematized, especially for women. Confusion was brewing: they wondered, who are we as Christian women? What does God want us to do with these bodies, capable of life but apparently so wrought with mortality?

**Augustine’s Doctrines: the Foundational Tenets of Christian Womanhood**

Called “one of the men who made the West” by Kim Power and acknowledged as the theological foundation for the Middle Ages by R.E. Houser, Augustine offered such critical ideas about the body that his work figures into every sect of Christianity existing today. Scholars often agree that an appropriate description for Augustine’s work is not so much theological as

² Unfortunately, (and a point that many overlook today) the enormous influence of Paul’s epistles, their canonization, and their subsequent importance in the formation of doctrine has carried cultural mores along with the theology. I contend that we have early first century Mediterranean culture to blame for much of the oppression of women within Christianity that exists today. Even so, Paul’s general directions to all believers in the new churches about their part in the ministry was meant for women as much as men and proved important later for the Congregational Church.
anthropological (Burnell 2; Power 5). The issue of the body/soul question was a foundation for most of Augustine’s writings and theological ideas and specifically, his thoughts about the female body figured prominently in his work. Having come from the philosophical and religious tradition that struggled mightily with whether the human person was a duality of spirit and flesh, two conflicting natures, or a whole being, Augustine attempted to reconcile the theories of Plato with the teachings of the apostle Paul, among other Scriptural texts (Power 37), to “construct an anthropology that both makes the human soul and body somehow one nature and is unequivocal about the exclusively spiritual character of the soul” (Burnell 36). For Augustine, though very influenced by the Neoplatonism and Stoicism of his day, the Bible was the ultimate truth and to it he appealed for justification of his theories, believing “that Platonic philosophy was the instrument used to lead him to self-knowledge and to bring him to the light of God” (Power 30).

From the Incarnation as well as his study of angelic beings, Augustine tentatively determined that though one being, the body and soul have different natures: the body is a temporal thing, and the soul is an eternal thing (Burnell 23).\(^3\) Natural order was considered by Augustine so tantamount to any belief system within Christianity, he went so far as to declare that love is determined appropriately by order. In this way, using Ephesians 5:21ff as a model, Augustine paralleled the following pairs of leader/follower: Christ and the Church; husband and wife; and the spirit and the flesh (Power 33). Basically, since God created Adam first and Eve second within his larger creation of the universe, Augustine believed that men are to be masters over women and women are to be subservient to men.

Importantly, and contrary to some modern opinions on the matter, Augustine did not believe the leadership of men to be a result of the first sin, but a deliberate intention of God’s creation (Power 32). Using Plato’s theories of rational/non-rational and form/matter as inherently male/female traits, Augustine brought the old beliefs about reason into his ideas about order – that is to say, it was not only the order in which God created man and woman, and God’s directions to the man and woman immediately after creating them, but also the accepted notions of ‘male’ being synonymous with ‘reason’ that justified Augustine’s giving authority to men over women.

Although he never wavered from the idea of the order of sexes, Augustine gave ample attention to sexual differences, as had so many of his predecessors. If, in fact, human beings are all

\(^3\) Though certain of the soul’s eternality after physical death, he never determined if souls have always existed ut figured if they had, it somehow did not compete with God’s eternality, which must be greater than our own. However, he eventually decided that the best solution to the problem of the body is, in fact, the temporal nature of the physical body and the spiritual, eternal-from-death nature of the soul (Burnell 23).
made in the image of God, why would those beings be two different 'kinds'? In essence, Augustine figured the only reason for sexual difference is procreation and therefore, the only difference between the genders is physical (Burnell 44). Physical sexual difference has no bearing on the soul itself, he surmised; it is rather just “two different aspects of one human nature” but “not the aspect of a human being in respect of which that being is made in the image of God” (Burnell 46). As for the imago Dei, Augustine could not resolve how both men and women could be created in the image of God but still have woman be subordinated to man in the natural order. Eventually, through his study of Mary, he determined that women are not in fact made in the image of God, so solving this dilemma. So much of what he wrote appealed more to culture and what he felt intuitively was the “right” way than to Scripture, and this is proven nowhere more readily than in his decision to inaugurate Mary into his theology.4

His idea that sexual difference had only to do with reproduction falls in line with a larger, more general belief that the body’s function on earth is for practical as well as aesthetic purposes and the absolution of humanity at the end of this life will include superseding the practical. Burnell describes this eloquently:

And woman will still be woman then, [Augustine] says, when she is God’s perfected image in heaven; but she will no longer be an assistant to man, that cause of subordination having been a practical one, now superseded – proving, therefore, to be not fundamental to sexual difference after all. According to Augustine, then, women will reflect God’s glory in their uniquely womanly way, thus fulfilling the ultimate purpose of their femaleness (48).

Compared to the other options available for women with regards to finding a place in theology, Augustine’s suggestion seems attractive and even respectful. Although he is emphatic about women’s inferiority to men, he considers it only a physical, earthly arrangement done for “provisional” purposes, not because women somehow deserve a lesser position (Burnell 49-50).

4 Before Augustine and his contemporaries, Mary was barely a part of church doctrine beyond her stated role as the bearer of the Christ-child (Power 172). However, in his attempts to determine the exact nature of Christ as fully human and fully God, scholars began to contemplate the role of Mary in Christ’s deity and/or humanity. So, the study of Mary first began as a part of christological discussions; even so, it was not long before Augustine and others of the day saw an opportunity in the historical person of Mary to articulate finally a role model for women. The idea of Mary and the debate surrounding it actually seemed to have very little to do with biblical fact concerning the historical woman, and everything to do with what church leaders wanted women to revere. It is important to note that Paul himself saw no need to include Mary in his teachings; the oft-used model of Christ as the new Adam did not, in Paul’s view, necessitate a “new Eve”. Any time Paul paralleled Adam and Eve to another pair, it was to Christ and the church – but Augustine began to suggest that Mary could fill that role and provide a new female role model that, as Christ to Adam, was a redeemed version of her predecessor (Power 172-173).
The Christian theology of the Middle Ages continued to draw heavily from Augustine’s work, and nowhere is this more evident than in the growing fascination with Mary. As the Catholic Church developed into a sophisticated, all-encompassing entity of daily life in Europe, the most important part of their theology was Mary. Although Mariology is a rich field of study with countless insights into the contemporary views of women and womanhood, she is not of relevance here since the missionaries were Protestant. Towards the mid-thirteenth century, however, the new emphasis on the importance of Mary as a physical, human person begged the question (finally!) about the baseness of women:

…the fact that Mary was a mother, yet virginal and sinless, made it possible to question the traditional notion that motherhood and women in general need be denigrated to a secondary position. Medieval philosophy may have persistently identified men with the superior soul and women with the body, but in the concrete spirituality of the late Middle Ages, some women were able to use this to a positive advantage as they lived out their faith (Ellington 250).

In abolishing study and worship of Mary, did the Protestant movement take away the only chance women had for a voice in Christianity during this time period just when they were gaining ground? Thanks to Luther’s revolutionary doctrines, that did not happen – in fact, I argue that women found a more authoritative and respected position than ever before…still not much of a distinction, admittedly, but progress nonetheless.

Luther and Calvin: the Birth of the Protestant Work Ethic

When Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the doors of the Castle Church in Wittenberg in 1517 – a casual, not unusual or aggressive act as this was how disputations were raised in university life (Bettenson & Maunder 205) – the western world was changed forever. This is not an overstatement, as the splitting of the Christian church affected all areas of life and gave rise to a number of decidedly western traditions, such as the oft-written concept of the Protestant work ethic and its responsibility for capitalism and more (Wogaman 108). Still, it began as a simple set of suggestions, little more than one hundred sentences, of what Luther thought was wrong in the church. Among them, Luther disdained indulgences, holding anniversary masses for the dead, and the idea that only the clergy could interpret Scripture (Bettenson & Maunder 205-212).

Besides the issues that addressed concerns specific to the day, Luther’s tenets have survived to the present and are preached fervently in many different denominations of the Protestant church. Among them, those that prove most significant for my study of the female Congregationalist
missionary body include the doctrine of justification by faith alone, and its then necessary accompanying beliefs about works and the work of this world.

Luther was not the first Christian to declare that faith alone is the way of salvation; in fact, much of his theology is indebted to Augustine, and even to Paul, in his ideas about works and also about predestination, or election (Wogaman 110). Christians are “free from all things,” Luther declared, and a Christian “needs no works in order to be justified and saved, but receives these gifts in abundance from faith alone” (quoted in Wogaman 110). He continues:

True, then, are these two sayings: ‘Good works do not make a good man, but a good man does good works;’ ‘Bad works do not make a bad man, but a bad man does bad works.’ Thus it is always necessary that the substance or person should be good before any good works can be done, and that good works should follow and proceed from a good person. (ibid)

Therefore, since Luther insisted that doing good things for others is not what saves a person, but rather a person who is saved will feel compelled to do good works for others, the medieval notions of ritual, asceticism and its guarantee into heaven, and the specifically material practices that Christians believed would secure a place in the next world were entirely abolished.

Luther also taught, then, that once a person recognizes that no action can save her or his soul, the person has no other choice but to rely entirely on her or his faith in the promises of God to save her or his soul. Salvation is thus a gift from God, and not something that can be earned, and in receiving this gift a person also receives the capacity to love others and to devote her- or himself to others (Wogaman 112). The natural progression from this teaching greatly affects vocation, as well as election – two issues I will address through the work of John Calvin.

John Calvin, only about half a generation behind Martin Luther, is often credited with systematizing Martin Luther’s beliefs: “Calvin’s genius was for organization rather than theological speculation” (Bettenson & Maunder 236). Because of this, it was Calvinism instead of Lutheranism that became “the most dynamic and widely established form of European Protestantism” and subsequently, of the Protestantism that would come to the American continent (Benedict xv). A succinct statement below sums up well the basics of Calvinism, or rather Luther’s ideas as interpreted and reiterated by Calvin:

Above all, Christian life was understood to be a life of faith and faithfulness in response to God’s grace. Salvation is entirely the gift of God’s grace; in no respect is it the effect of human “works.” Moral effort is response to grace, essential but not independently initiated. Moral law manifests the righteousness of God, but it also reveals the utter frustration of humanity mired in sin. As with Luther, Christian ethics is not so much about objective good
and evil to be done as it is about the response of the human subject to what God has already done. (Wogaman 116)

With this basic framework, Calvin worked out Luther’s ideas about vocation or calling, election, and many others. In examining Sybil, Lucy, and the other women aboard the Thaddeus, the issues of vocation and election are most compelling.

Since, according to Luther, those who receive the gift of salvation from God also have the capacity to love others deeply, that love must manifest itself in works (thereby proceeding from a good person and not the other way around). During the Middle Ages, Christian vocation was limited to asceticism and monasticism – a person who sought “a union with God” or, more specifically, strove to be a priest. But Luther attributed no more worth to “the ordinary work of the world” than to that of a priest. He believed that any work essential to the life of a human being was work one could do “for the Lord”, so to speak – a calling, a response to the gift of salvation (Wogaman 112).

If Luther liberated vocation from medieval ecclesiology, Calvin “also liberated [it] from the medieval forms of social organization…No aspect of human existence is, theoretically, insulated from the question whether it serves or impedes the realization of God’s sovereign will” (Wogaman 120). It is precisely the flexibility now afforded Christians in the ways to serve God available to them through their daily work that gave rise to the “Protestant ethic” – essentially, hard work.5 Finally, Christians had been liberated from guilt over the time that menial tasks commanded out of their day. No one could have been more relieved by this than a nineteenth-century Congregationalist woman, whose days focus mostly on housework, childcare, and the like, as will be examined below. For these faithful folks, Calvin’s words must have been a breath of fresh air:

Each man will bear and swallow the discomforts, vexations, weariness, and anxieties in his way of life, when he has been persuaded that the burden was laid upon him by God. From this will arise also a singular consolation: that no task will be so sordid and base, provided you obey your calling in it, that it will not shine and be reckoned very precious in God’s sight. (quoted in Wogaman 121)

Knowing as we do Calvin’s belief in Augustine’s and Paul’s teachings that all people, men and women alike, can take part in the word of God, the use of the word “man” here is meant to refer to

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5 Unfortunately the definition has also come to mean “tending to disapprove of pleasure,” according to The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, but its origin refers only to effort, discipline, and diligence.
all humanity. Nevertheless, the implication remains – was the equality purely theoretical, or was it practiced? A closer look at the opinion on this matter of the missionary women will seek to answer this important matter of equality.

The doctrine of predestination, or election, was one that Luther borrowed from Augustine’s theology – the belief that God has ordained before time each soul’s destiny of heaven or hell based on His omnipotent knowledge of who will or will not choose to accept His gift of salvation. Of course, the question that does and has always followed from this idea is, if God already knows if I am saved or damned, why should I live my life according to any particular code? The answer is that if a person is saved, she or he will be able to show tangible evidence of election through deliberate actions of good will to others. If, though, a person gives in to the temptation of “moral complacency” (Wogaman 120), it may be evidence that she or he is not among the elect! This constant fear that lack of good works meant a person’s soul is among the damned provided powerful encouragement and impetus for a life uprightly lived.

In combination with the idea of Christian calling, predestination resulted in believers being able to choose a vocation that would also allow them to reveal their devotion to God, proving their own election. With this in mind, it is easy to see why the missionaries to Hawai’i would choose the rough road they did. A chance to serve God and thus prove their election – to themselves more than anyone else – was the most appealing life for a Calvinist Protestant.

The fundamental aspects of Luther’s reform and Calvin’s adaptation of Luther’s thought – the doctrine of justification by faith alone and the importance of good works only, any works at all, as manifestation of election – had an enormous impact on the proper use of the physical body. Luther’s shocking ideas that works done for their own sake meant nothing, and that the heart of the worker made the work good, rescued the female body for the first time in history. How could her body be lesser if, now, any work she used it for could be holy? Hoeing the garden could now be done “unto the Lord,” a task she could do with her body certainly more than with her mind. The female association with the body and male with mind now shared benefits, for now women’s menial, earthly tasks might be seen as offerings to God – a calling, a vocation – done out of a pure heart, made good by the goodness of the individual woman.

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6 In his writing, Calvin uses the general word ‘man’ to mean all people, but even though he refers to current ideas about male superiority, that superiority does not translate into, say, predestination. There is no claim that more men than women will receive the gift of salvation, or that the work of a man is always more pleasing to God than that of a woman.
The Congregationalist Missionaries: Practicalities of Doctrine

If nothing else, bringing Calvinism to the American continent only intensified its followers’ adherence and devotion to its tenets. Given the freedom to build their faith from the ground up, the Puritans and Separatists now found that they could unite once again since the Church of England was an ocean away; in the mid-eighteenth century, the Congregational Church was born.

When Rev. Humphrey delivered a charge to the members of the company of missionaries to Hawai‘i, upon the occasion of Hiram Bingham’s and Asa Thurston’s ordinations, he considered the women to be a vital part of the mission. Their callings to the vocation were just as valued as men’s, and their ability to contribute to the success of the mission was acknowledged. However, what practical implications did this theological/theoretical equality carry? Examining historiographical works about women of this time period reveals that the female body was a contested space of tensions requiring much of them as women, mothers, and wives. In other words, their theology did not always answer all the questions that their society put to them. Congregationalism declared, their bodies were not just vessels for men’s use, or locations of sinfulness, or useless, earthly, and base – they were capable of works for the good of others and for the glory of their God. Societal and cultural norms and practices made quite another declaration.

In her thorough and expansive work *American Women in Mission*, Dana Lee Robert examines the women of the modern mission era (1792-1992) chronologically; her study of the “social history of thought and practice” of the women of the first company to Hawai‘i is most revealing of the very tensions and complications to the female body that both the American society and the practices of the Congregational Church created. The above analysis would seem to make clear that women were welcome and perhaps even expected to toil alongside the men in the work of God’s kingdom; however, extant writings and documents show how very wrong this assumption is. Rather than sharing labor equally, and dividing the required work among all who could help, some opinion suggests that the women were actually called on to do more than the men. In a charge sermon given in 1812 to ABCFM missionaries, the speaker exhorted the women that while their husbands were going to preach, they must go to teach:

The missionary men were supposed to devote themselves single-mindedly to disseminating the Gospel in preached or written form. The missionary women were expected both to assist their husbands in the primary missional responsibility of spreading the Gospel and to evangelize the women, teaching them of Christ, enlightening their minds, raising their characters, and challenging their social customs. …Effecting social transformation was thus part of the mandate of missionary wives from the beginning of the foreign mission enterprise. (Robert 3)
This is certainly a tall order – “social transformation” seems to encompass every aspect of the native peoples’ lives! “Early missionary wives universally assumed that their primary mission work would be directed toward women and children” (Robert 37), and this was to be done through endeavors like starting schools and teaching reading and writing using the Bible. In Hawai‘i, however, the missionary women realized very quickly that their aspirations to teach school were perhaps not as necessary as in other places of mission work. Schools were usually used as a way to interact with native people; in Hawai‘i, though, the missionaries were constantly surrounded by the Hawaiians who seemed fascinated with everything about the newcomers. Because of this attention, “…the American Board wives in the Sandwich Islands… developed the idea of the ‘Christian home’ as a mission agency. Because the favorable climate of Hawaii permitted the survival of large numbers of children, family needs [that is, using their bodies for housekeeping and childcare] preoccupied the missionary wives” (Robert 57). Since their time must be devoted to their family and home work, making such duties an act of evangelism and a way to begin that “transformation” seemed best. And of course, their “model of the ‘Christian’ family was in fact that of the New England evangelical nuclear family…the missionaries felt that the ‘Christian’ home was exemplified by clean, neatly-dressed, and well-disciplined children under the care of a loving mother. …The missionary contribution of the missionary wife was not merely to teach doctrine, but to model a particular lifestyle and piety” (Robert 67-68).

The missionary women of Hawai‘i very quickly erected an ethic of Calvinist-like good works, then, to justify the time-consuming and banal works of homelife – so much so that rhetorical reinforcement of the ideal became the norm, especially in women’s journals. For example, Lucy wrote, “In our situation, I approve the motto, that “The missionary best serves his generation who serves the public, and his wife best serves her generation who serves her family” (quoted in Robert 57). Similarly, before meeting Hiram Bingham, Sybil expressed in her journal her desire to be “a help-mate to thy servant, my husband…and, in thine own due time, a light to the benighted heathen whither thou sendest me” (quoted in Robert 32), revealing her belief that her first duty was to her husband’s needs. These thoughts reveal the influence of the cult of true womanhood⁷, for even though both Lucy and Sybil received their own personal callings to mission work, such a conviction took a backseat to their “societal calling” to be of assistance to their husbands and to fulfill the duties of motherhood (Robert 10).

⁷ I am of using this doctrine and its title as developed by Barbara Welter.
Can these notions be traced to Paul? Of course. However, the greater influence on such a division of labor and sentiment of the “proper” work of the missionary woman is the cult of true womanhood that flourished during the nineteenth century.

An elaborate set of intellectual and behavioral conventions, the doctrine of gender spheres expressed a worldview in which both the orderliness of daily social relations and the larger organization of society derived from and depended on the preservation of an all-encompassing gender division of labor. Consequently, in the conceptual and emotional universe of the doctrine of spheres, males and females existed as creatures of naturally and essentially different capacities (Boydston 144).

This ideology of gender spheres and its two gendered worlds is the reason that Robert declares, “The decision of the American Board to send these women also meant that child bearing, child rearing, and household management in a hostile foreign culture were implicitly included in their list of responsibilities” (Robert 3). True womanhood suggested that even though a married couple was crossing oceans and making a life in an unfamiliar place, the “natural” work of a woman in childbirth and housework should not be left behind in New England – it was, after all, what women were meant to do.

If that is the case, though, shouldn’t the missionary women feel that their work is just as important to the mission and is done for God? That is what Calvinism told them. It seems the perfect combination: missionary women can fulfill the true womanhood ideal and know that every task is an act of worship to God. Similar to the Hawaiian women, the very work that their society calls them to is deemed holy by their religion. However, also like the Hawaiian women, the equation was not so simple. In fact, ample records exist8 that show nineteenth century women were often most disparaging about their own work at home, so much so that the concept of usefulness became a key motivating factor to women wishing to become missionaries.

“The most poignant motivation for mission articulated by the female gender was the desire for ‘usefulness.’…The desire to be useful, to have one’s life count for something, appeared for many women as a product of their conversion and thus was a widespread feature of female evangelical piety in the early nineteenth century” (Robert 33). Why didn’t the women feel they could be useful at home, living life as a devoted Christian woman in her own sphere? Perhaps the root of the

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8 Boydston’s article contains references to extant journals and letters written by women demeaning themselves and their daily work; most revealing of these is a letter written by Harriett Beecher Stowe in 1850 to her sister-in-law, Sarah Beecher. In it, Boydston explains, Stowe describes the activity of a few months as having made “two sofas, a barrel chair, bedspreads, pillowcases, pillows, bolsters, mattresses;” painted rooms, revarnished furniture; lobbied for a new sink from the landlord; given birth to her eighth child; read the novels of Sir Walter Scott; kept up her work as an author; and in all of this maintained the daily tasks of housework and childcare. “And yet,” she pauses in the letter, “I am constantly pursued and haunted by the idea that I don’t do anything” (152).
devaluing of housework can be found in the societal need to distinguish the gender spheres in terms of their overall contribution to a family and to the culture at large. As Boydston states, “The denial of the economic value of housework was also one aspect of a tendency, originating much earlier but growing throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, to draw ever-finer distinctions between the values of different categories of labor, and to elevate certain forms of economic activity to a superior status on the grounds of the income they produced” (150). “Income” for the Congregationalists, in terms of a tangible result from their work, would be seen as progress for the cause of the Christian faith. This explains why missionary women “sacralized” their daily duties and made it their form of evangelism, often exulting the powerful impact of presenting the “proper” family unit to the Hawaiians. However, the struggle to keep themselves convinced of their contribution was sometimes a challenge, as Sybil expresses here:

My spirit is often oppressed as a day closes, busy and bustling as it may have been, to see so little accomplished. I could never have conceived when thinking of going to the heathen to tell them of a Saviour, of the miscellany of labor that has actually fallen to my portion… There are those on missionary ground who are better able to realize their anticipations of systematic work. But not a mother of a rising family, placed at a post like this… A feeble woman in such circumstances must be content to realize but little of the picture her youthful mind has formed of sitting down quietly day by day, to teach heathen women and children (quoted in Robert 60-61).

To be working so hard everyday and feel that so little is being accomplished was incredibly disheartening to these women who had sacrificed much and continued to sacrifice daily for their work. “Although a desire for usefulness drove women into mission work,” Robert elaborates, “the actual conditions of missionary life quickly turned motivations for usefulness into the realities of self-sacrifice. Loneliness, the indifference or even hostility of indigenous peoples, poor living conditions, difficult child births, and unremitting hard work frequently led to early collapses of health among the missionary wives” (35). Examples abound in biographies of missionaries of horrors virtually unknowable in New England; Lucy Thurston survived an attempted rape by a Hawaiian priest and, of course, the mastectomy without anesthesia dramatized in the play (it happened in reality in 1855) (Robert 57). Babies were stillborn or died young, women grew sick out of sheer exhaustion, and always the threat of death was looming – more so, though, than death was the fear that a missionary would be thought of as a failure. From the earliest missions of the modern mission movement, stories were told of women who died en route to mission work, upon arrival, or within a few short years; because of these precedents, “…missionary women tried to prepare themselves for the possibility that their own lives would be brutally short. No woman
planned to die as soon as she arrived at her field of service, but every woman hoped that if she did
die, she would remain true to her calling and would be remembered as a ‘martyr’ rather than a
‘failure’” (Robert 50). The remembrance would be based on her reported dying words or perhaps
her disposition throughout the sickness; even a woman who became sick on the ship and died
before doing a day of mission work was revered for her sacrifice.9

The willingness to take on a task that put her body in grave danger demonstrates the
important leap that women have taken in their own opinion of their own bodies. Their physical
health and existence have become completely subordinate to the will of God. As Lucy states in the
play, upon her mastectomy, “Depraved, diseased, and helpless, I yield myself up entirely to the will
of the holy one” (Kneubuhl 68). She was likely frightened; such rational fear does not diminish her
experience; rather, the fact that she knew the tales of other women – she knew that “anything could
happen” to them as they undertook the mission – and she still went is indicative of her opinion of
her body. It was not for her earthly, “selfish” use; it was to be used as a means to God’s will.

Other aspects of missionary women’s lives reveal additional thoughts about their bodies’
purposes and functions; perhaps most consequential is the fact that in order to become a missionary,
a woman must marry a missionary. Robert points out that the term “missionary” was narrowly
defined as ordained males sent to preach the gospel and found churches” (xii). According to a chart
from the ABCFM’s official papers recording the names of the entire company, the women on their
own were not missionaries. The categories are Missionaries, to which belong only the newly
ordained Hiram Bingham and Asa Thurston; Assistants, five other Congregational men; Native
Teachers, three Hawaiian Christians, returning to their homes to assist the mission; and Females, the
wives of the seven white men. “By themselves, a good education and a desire to proclaim the gospel
were not sufficient qualifications for a woman to engage in missionary service. Regardless of their
personal qualifications, most women in New England could live out a missionary vocation only if
they married male missionaries” (Robert 18). This was considered the necessary for many reasons;
firstly, for the men, “a wife seemed desirable to ward off loneliness, as well as to take over
household tasks so that they would not be distracted from their ‘true’ mission work of preaching the
gospel” (Robert 31-32); secondly, it was of course most inappropriate for a single woman to be on
board a ship for six months at a time with so many men and, as the cult of true womanhood
ddictated, the best way for a woman to serve the mission was through family concerns anyway. If she
was unmarried, how would she bear children and exemplify the ideal Christian woman? No, if she

9 See extensive and detailed examples in Robert, Chapter 2.
wished to be a missionary, she must marry one. “For some women, the choice of a mate in the ministry was a vocational one. The solidification of the doctrine of separate female and male spheres in the early nineteenth century, combined with the religious activism awakened by conversion, meant that marriage to a clergyman opened for his wife a realm of public service, albeit one officially limited to work among women and children” (Robert 18). If this was in fact the woman’s calling, she must fulfill it (as we have seen) – and marriage was practically the only way.

The implications of Christian marriage for the female body were most serious. As we have seen in Paul’s writing and as the Congregationalists believed, a woman’s body becomes the property of her husband when united with him in matrimony. In other words, to become a missionary a woman must relinquish control over her own physical body to a man, not only in the daily tasks of being a good wife to which she would now devote her body, but also in sex. A young Congregationalist woman, a virgin most likely who had perhaps never really spent time alone with a man at all, must now make the “ultimate sacrifice” of womanhood (in terms of Congregationalist belief) and yoke herself to a man for life, yielding to his wishes and bearing children with him.

As if this sacrifice is not on its own life-changing, it is compounded by the rather shocking brief period of courtship that was often the case for missionaries. Though not the norm in New England life, there are numerous accounts of women and men marrying hastily so as not to impede the plans for the mission.10 As it so happens, Robert calls the courtships and marriages of Sybil Mosely and Lucy Goodale “the most startling illustration of the vocational significance for women of the missionary marriage” (Robert 22). Hiram Bingham and Asa Thurston were both engaged to be married before they agreed to lead the mission to Hawai‘i; once they signed on, their mothers-in-law-to-be forbade their daughters from marrying Bingham and Thurston for fear of their lives. Both men, feeling “desperate to procure wives immediately,” turned to friends for recommendations. Thurston met Lucy Goodale and her family at the suggestion of another member of the company and married eighteen days later, sidestepping Massachusetts state law of publishing bans on three successive Sabbaths. Even more hastily, Bingham and Sybil Moseley met and married within one week (ibid). Robert clarifies, “Both Lucy and Sybil were committed to missions prior to meeting their husbands and were waiting for the appropriate opportunity to enlist as missionary wives” (Robert 22-23). Such opportunities were probably viewed as providential and thus, seeing their

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10 See Robert, Chapter 1. Among the examples includes a recently widowed man in the mission field in India proposing marriage via a letter to a woman back home who was “recommended” by another of his company. The woman agreed and sailed to India, where they were married immediately. 
chance, the women did not hesitate to give up control of their own bodies and their virginity to devote themselves entirely to the service of the mission through the service of their husbands.

Thus their bodies became spaces of dual ownership and myriad duties; in one fell swoop they had acquired husbands, children (inevitably), vocation, and an “official” call to the cult of true womanhood. Their work as the “typical” Christian woman began before they even set foot on the Hawaiian shore: “Before the missionary women were allowed to disembark, they were forced to sew a western-style dress for Kalakua, the queen dowager, who came on board for the fitting” (Robert 59). They seized the opportunity, even setting Kalakua’s attendants to practicing stitches on calico while the missionary women worked. Shortly after, the cult continued:

Upon landing and securing their possessions, the missionaries erected a grass hut for shelter, and the women washed and ironed six months of laundry. Sybil Bingham noted in her journal that the stresses of getting settled were compounded by a huge pile of sewing demanded by the chiefs: ‘the first week, a suit of superfine broadcloth, soon a piece of fine cloth to be made into shirts, etc. etc.’ (ibid).

The duties of the women were therefore established right away, and they settled to their work. Eventually the frustration and feelings of ineffectualness would plague them; were they also troubled by their so hastily acquired new bodily identity as a married woman? Even if unable to articulate such an emotion, did Lucy and Sybil feel a loss of self at the sudden change in their lives, or a loss of worth when their daily tasks were so arduous? The six months it took to journey from Connecticut to Hawai‘i was spent studying, bonding, and getting to know the men with whom they had recently agreed to spend the rest of their lives. Upon arrival, though, the full reality of their vocation and of their commitment came to light and with it, a prescribed set of expectations of the missionary women and of the uses of their bodies.
CONCLUSION

In one of my first classes in graduate school, my professor, Sally Harrison-Pepper, explained that learning does not mean answering all the questions; it means understanding how to ask better questions. If anything can sum up the thesis process for me, it is Sally’s observation, so succinctly phrased but profoundly true. I have learned during the fifteen months of research, reading, writing, revising, designing, building, and evaluating that I do not now have all the answers when it comes to costume design theory. I have instead learned how to ask better questions about costume design theory – and this bodes well, given my future plans.

Here, at the close of this project’s life as my master’s thesis, I am grateful to realize that it has been only the first step for me and for the work. The better questions I will ask in the future will seek to illuminate so many topics that were only briefly explored in the preceding chapters. In the context of an intercultural play, my apparatus here for theorizing the method of costume design I employed, ethnographic studies are ripe for excavation. The issues of othering, the gaze, and the museum tendency are all concepts I borrowed from gender studies as well as ethnographic considerations, and their implications for a designer are vast. In order not to be a part of the perpetuation of stereotypes, the designer can use ethnography to understand how such a phenomenon takes place and, therefore, how to dispel it. In the future development of the theorizing begun here, I foresee an entire chapter dealing with the possibilities of ethnographic study for design.

More than just ethnography should be explored in order to understand better how the audience becomes a part of the theatrical event. This, too, is an aspect of theatre studies that costume design theory must consider. Just how exactly does an audience read the design text that I have theorized? Such a mode of communication is multifaceted; further work in this project will explore the complexities present in the exchange between costumes on bodies and people in the seats. Furthermore, bodies themselves – though given a major focus in this work as I applied the theory to Hawaiians and missionaries – need to be considered in terms of the actors. I studied the historical cultural body to understand why those cultures then chose the kind of clothing they did; but I am here referring to the merging of the actor’s body with the character’s costume to become a physical, actual fictionalization (that is to say, the actor is still present as herself or himself, a real person in actual space; but the audience sees the individual as the character because of the costume and the framing of the theatrical event). Such a phenomenological occurrence will surely need a
more thorough study so that a designer might be able to manipulate this relationship in whatever way best fulfills the design.

The endeavors described above are certainly in my future; I plan to pursue their development through a few means. First, the way I can best continue to theorize this method of design is to engage these new areas of study in my own design work. My limited design experience requires much of this theory to remain research-based on my part, instead of being able to support it with my own evidence. Also, I plan to conduct a large primary source research project, interviewing designers about their own approaches to design, their understanding of audience (especially resident designers, whose knowledge of the audience of a particular theatre will be most thorough), and any other insight they can provide to achieve my goal of theorizing the method. And lastly, I plan to earn my MFA; through the honing of my design skills I will continue to learn – just what are the best questions to ask about costume design theory? The final goal (at least, as of right now) is to write and publish a costume design textbook that contains a thorough, scholarly, and research-based method of costume design that begins with the study of the body to be costumed, so that young designers may benefit from the theorized method that so many experienced designers now use. Why should they be confined to the sorts of limited methods in textbooks that exist currently, when better methods are in use?

The preceding work, then, is simply a checkpoint – a chance to pause and consider, as I have just done, what the next steps ought to be. It is by no means complete unto itself, although the design of *The Conversion of Ka‘ahumanu* was, of course, fully realized and performed. My work on the production served as a tool for fleshing out the theories of this method. As it stands now on its own, even though so many areas have still to be expanded, I hope that the thesis at least serves to do what Sally suggested: I hope that it causes the reader not to strive to accumulate answers from it about costume design, but rather to begin to ask even better questions.
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No matter what the clothing is, a body is beneath it. This is perhaps one of the few universal truths remaining in the world. But it's not just that a body is present – that body, and the individual's and culture's view of the body, informs how it is clothed. So when faced with costuming a play about two very different cultures encountering one another, it became clear that an understanding of each group's view of the body would be essential to creating dramatically enlightening clothing.

The Hawaiians' view of the female body, both pre-contact and in the few decades after, was influenced most by the sacrificial system of ritual worship of their gods. Men were permitted to enter heiau, the temples, and to make sacrifices. Activities like fishing and food preparation were also holy occupations, and reserved for men. Women's means of engaging in spiritual practice, though, was entirely by and through their bodies. Sexual activity and, if it so resulted, childbearing were the contributions to the gods women were permitted to make. Jewelry, tattoos, and other forms of grooming and beautification including the draping and wrapping of cloth they made themselves, called kapa, were sometimes the primary use of time in order to attract a male partner and worship their gods in the act of sex. Therefore, their bodies were treated, by women and men alike, as locations of seduction and pleasure.

The missionaries of the Congregational Church, which was built primarily on the tenets of Calvinism, believed strongly in the concepts of vocation, discipline, and election. Previously in Christianity, it was believed that only clerics, who devoted every day's work to religion, could feel they had a vocation, or "calling," but thanks to Luther's teaching and Calvin's interpretation, now everyday folks could serve God in any tasks. This resulted in essentially the sanctifying of all daily duties, and thus strict discipline was applied to everything, as if it were a sacrament. Luther's additional admonition that no one could be certain of salvation—the idea of election, or predestination—reinforced the notion of discipline, as one sought always to please God to achieve his grace. The combination of these tenets cultivated what is now known as the "Protestant work ethic," and reveals how the
missionary women must have viewed their own bodies. They were utilitarian tools—means of exacting discipline, completing necessary tasks, and seeking to be “pure” in all things, especially sexuality. Clothing, then, kept them covered and modest, protected their bodies in their physical daily exertion, and above all, the lack of deliberate adornment or sexual attractiveness served to sidestep the pleasures of the world that might distract them from their calling.

The design seeks to recreate some historical aspects of clothing for all the women, as well as to dramatize the character traits of each through color choices and a juxtaposition of one culture to another. Everyone in the story experiences a breaking down of barriers, whether passively or actively, and everyone undergoes a change of some kind. The design strives to highlight the journeys each woman takes—journeys of maturation, aging, illumination, deteriorization, regeneration, and more, as two cultures meet and change one another forever.

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