

‘E nā kānaka o ka ‘āina’

Three Readings of John Kneubuhl’s *Mele Kanikau: A Pageant*

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Abstract

This paper examines cross-cultural meta-theatre in the dramatic works of Samoan playwright John Kneubuhl as explored through my PhD in Creative Practice which included a pan-Pasifika production of Kneubuhl’s Hawaiian play *Mele Kanikau: A Pageant*.

Through the lens of a single moment spanning five lines in the script, this article presents three critical readings of *Mele Kanikau* which allow consideration of the script as firstly, a kind of social criticism of the declining state of Polynesian culture in the 1970s. Secondly, the play might be said to function as psychological drama, as curative as the *Fale Aitu* tradition that Kneubuhl draws from his Samoan heritage. Finally, the play is also representative of Kneubuhl’s rich Western education and it can be read as a palimpsest, revealing deep resonances with Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*. Each of these critical readings is necessary to an understanding of John Kneubuhl’s significance as Polynesian theatre-maker and his contribution to a wider understanding of transnational, syncretic dramatic writing.

*The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Ye all which it inherit, shall dissolve
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.*

William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, IV:i:153-8

As a self-professed pan-Polynesian with a deep-seated belief in the potential of Polynesian theatre, John Kneubuhl negotiated and navigated the space, the place and the *vā* of transnational, syncretic, post-colonial modernist theatre. By birth, Kneubuhl was American and American Samoan, with Swiss and Welsh ancestral ties. He also spent periods of his life in Hawai‘i, on the United States mainland and in Tonga. Kneubuhl was an expert in language and languages and as well as being bilingual in English and Samoan, he learnt Tongan and Japanese and included in his plays Polynesian, Japanese, Philipino and *papalagi/haole* characters. Throughout *Mele Kanikau*, Kneubuhl draws on both traditional Western and Pacific theatre forms, melding them to incorporate Pacific languages and cultural texts (such as the Hawaiian hula) and makes them an integral part of the drama.

This article begins with a synopsis of *Mele Kanikau* and then moves into three critical readings of five lines in the playtext. These readings examine the play first as cultural crisis, then as a psychological drama and finally as a palimpsest of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*. The article argues that these readings and others are integral to an understanding of the significance of Kneubuhl’s work to Polynesian theatre-making.

***Mele Kanikau: A Pageant* – Synopsis**

Mele Kanikau: A Pageant is set in the Hawaiian pageant world of Waikiki on the set of an upcoming hula pageant currently in rehearsal. On this set, a character calling himself “the Author of the play you are about to see... John Kneubuhl” (p. 99) introduces himself to the audience, breaking the fourth wall and immediately establishing both the meta-drama and “metaphysical shtick” (Sinavaiana-Gabbard, 1999, p.116) that will frame the play. As the play progresses, the Author’s commentary on the play and his narrative of a woman named Georgina from his own past parallel the central action of the play. In this central action, and at the heart of *Mele Kanikau* is the story of an unresolved love triangle that has returned to, quite literally, haunt Carl Alama – the pageant director and the play’s protagonist.

Carl himself soon enters to address his cast of slick Waikiki hula dancers and a pageant court who are proudly descended from the Hawaiian *ali'i*. The concert has a sense of being ‘fake’ and a hollow display of, rather than a genuine performance of cultural practices. Carl tells them that there has been a change in choreographer and it is soon revealed that Carl has hired the controversial recluse and *kumu hula*, Noa Napo’oana’akala, to oversee the pageant. This appointment arouses discontent in the cast, particularly from Lydia Jenkins, who plays the pageant queen and is especially both proud and defensive of her *ali'i* bloodline. Noa and his “*haole* mistress”, Frances Corrington, soon arrive with their hula *halau*, and it is revealed that Frances was once betrothed to Carl.

Noa immediately creates scandal and uproar by drinking openly in front of the cast, by disappearing to the bathroom with two boys and by firing the Waikiki dancers after he watches a small portion of their performance declaring that the word “shit” – blurted out by the technician – is the appropriate word to describe them. Throughout the play, Noa

condemns Carl, Lydia and the pageant cast for being culturally inauthentic and for prostituting the Hawaiian culture for the sake of tourism.

The story of what transpired many years ago between Noa, Carl and Frances is gradually revealed and discussed by these three main characters and it becomes clear to the audience that much has been left unresolved. The emotions of these characters are simmering just below the surface and each of them is struggling to maintain their composure. Noa is a heavy drinker and is at one stage overcome by the *mo'ō* who possess him and in a wild hula performed with his *halau* he beats Frances and attempts to rape Charles Kelsoe, the stage manager of the pageant. Frances is defensive of Noa and reveals her own fears of what is described as the “murmuring darkness”, unexplained until later. Carl suggests to Frances that he still has feelings for her and only hired Noa as an excuse to see her again. An explosive confrontation occurs over what it means to be a “real” Hawaiian occurs between Lydia and Frances.

In Noa's re-writing of the pageant, he adds Hawaiian *leo* to Carl's speech which Carl struggles with, emphasizing his discomfort with “real” Hawaiian culture. At the play's climax, Noa has his hula *halau* perform the legendary tale of the young *ali'i* Kahikiloa, his love for the beautiful Kea and his betrayal at the hands of his best friend, Laupi'o. Carl recognizes this as the true story of the events between himself, Noa and Frances and he becomes enraged at Noa. Noa then turns to blame the rest of the pageant court for their part in driving Carl's son – who, he claims, he and Frances both gave birth to – to suicide. Carl's frustration at this blatant untruth escalates and he fires Noa, who leaves the pageant set with Frances and their *halau*.

Carl, however, is then shaken when the financial backer of the pageant arrives on the set and announces that Noa Napo'oana'akala and his wife and *halau* were killed in an accident earlier that morning. This causes Carl to realize that the ghosts of Noa and Frances

and their *halau* had returned for him, to “leave [him] with [their] aloha” (p. 173). Determined that he will learn to live more authentically, Carl quits the pageant, and after one last fiery confrontation with Lydia, he too, departs the Waikiki set.

The Author addresses the audience again, as he has done throughout the play, and reminds us to “listen...always listen...and remember. For it is only in our remembering that we can make our *mele*, like houses of words into which our dead can move and live again and speak to us” (1997, p. 175).

E nā kānaka o ka ‘āina

At this point in the text, Noa has taken over the direction of the pageant. He interrupts the polished, but highly ‘inauthentic’ Waikiki hula dancers to re-write the pageant script. Noa calls on Carl to deliver a speech in Hawaiian about the legend that Noa has created to replace the hula of the pageant dancers. In the scene prior to ‘E nā kānaka’, the audience has seen Carl have a cursory look at the speech after Noa declares that “something is missing” from Carl’s pageant (Kneubuhl, 1997, p.117). The “something missing” from the pageant is the key concern of the play as a whole, beginning with the lack of *leo* that Carl demonstrates here. When Carl stands to read the speech at this point in the play it is with his entire Waikiki pageant cast watching him. He is embarrassed because he cannot read the Hawaiian despite his *ali’i* lineage and despite the fact that in the pageant he is playing a Hawaiian King. Noa has come into his world, disrupted it and seems determined to humiliate him in front of his people:

Noa interrupts the hula.

NOA: This is where you read your speech, Carl...Would you try it please?

CARL: (*Taking out the speech*) You want me to read it in Hawaiian?

NOA: Well, it isn't written in Japanese is it?

CARL: No. E nā kānaka o ka 'āina...? (*He murders every word*)

NOA: (*Correcting*) E nā kānaka o ka 'āina...

(Kneubuhl, 1997, pp. 119-120)

These five lines of dialogue dramatize many of the important themes and elements of the play with particular regards to representation and authenticity – Hawaiian hula and leo as markers of cultural authenticity; Carl's marked lack of Hawaiian cultural capital; Noa's determination to hold Carl accountable for the pageant and finally Carl's own growing realization of his lack of authenticity and self-knowledge.

Noa's first words "this is where", are significant. "This" is not only the marker of the place in the script, but the time and place of the pageant rehearsal itself in front of his people, the time of Noa's arrival at the pageant and set, and finally the long-awaited reunion of Carl and Noa. The "where" refers to their location, not only at this point in the rehearsal but the Waikiki pageant world. The "read" is important, as is Carl's stumble through his reading. Although he has seen Noa's script before, he still stutters over the Hawaiian words. As an accomplished descendent of the Hawaiian *ali'i*, and a self-made businessman of high social standing in Hawaiian society, he is 'shown up' as incapable of learning or producing his own Hawaiian speech. He is reduced to reading and learning by rote the language that is essentially a part of his birthright but is unfamiliar enough to him that he must read the words from a piece of paper written by someone else. These lines also reveal some of the play's meta-theatre as Noa is cast as the director, instructing the actor "This is where you read your speech", then Carl, as the actor, replies "You want me to read it in Hawaiian?" and the director replies (perhaps sarcastically) "Well, it isn't written in Japanese is it?", and then Carl, as the actor, now playing the pageant king, reads his line, which the director then

corrects. Even this small section of text reveals the meta-theatrical play within a play device that underscores the playscript, as well as provides an opportunity for many other readings of these five lines and the play as a whole.

Psychological Drama

As a psychological drama, the events of *Mele Kanikau* can be read as occurring inside Carl's head. This reading supposes that the play functions as a release for his feelings of guilt and remorse over what he has lost. It is his acknowledgment that he is living a parody of what it is to be Hawaiian and that his treatment of Noa in the past has been grossly unjust. In this way the play functions as a part of his psychological journey of learning what it is to be Hawaiian and to be himself. On a personal level, the reading of *Mele Kanikau* as a psychological drama also considers the story of loss, in which in the past Carl has been betrayed by his best friend who once ran away with his betrothed, causing him to lose the love of his life. Carl's seeking out of Noa has in fact been prompted by his chance sighting of Frances waiting for a bus. As he confesses this to her, he also confesses that he "wanted to see [her] again" (p. 145). Carl's love for Frances has endured over their years apart, and his failure to understand why she left him for Noa still haunts him. In his desire to see Frances again, Carl must face Noa and the very mixed feelings he has about their past.

Some of the personal truths that Carl must confront in the psychodrama include the fact that he is not as Hawaiian or as important as he pretends to be in his work. Frances earlier identifies him as "Treasurer, Hawaiian People's Association... Vice-President, the Hawaiian Foundation... President, the Society of *Ali'i*... Chairman, the Jubilee Festival Week" (Kneubuhl, 1997, p.109) and yet he cannot read the basics of the language. His *ali'i* status is attacked in this exposure. In the context of the psychodrama, Carl summons Noa to the pageant in the full knowledge that Noa will exact his revenge. Carl seeks the purgation

that Noa's return will bring, and seeks the pain of that reunion. Noa has been effectively banned from Hawaiian society for twenty years and he intends to make Carl suffer. He has stopped the pageant hula and demands that the dancers and entire court witness Carl humiliating himself. It is cruel, but Carl has requested this for himself in his specific selection of Noa as the *Kumu hula*, while Frances recognizes that "there are a lot of other *kumu hula*" (p. 145) that Carl could potentially have hired. If this is to be seen as the psychological drama of Carl, then Carl himself willingly confronts the truth of what he has put Noa through and endeavours to make amends by having Noa return the infliction of suffering in one of the worst ways Carl can envisage – to be shamed in front of all the people who work for him and his fellow *ali'i*.

In a psychodramatic reading, the character of the 'Author' is invented to represent Carl's psyche, attempting to re-stage and resolve a particular conflict in Carl's past. The Author can be read as the analyst and Carl as the analysand. The Author then creates the other characters, claiming the playwright's name as his own, saying that "without these characters I have no reason for being here, and without us the real author really has no reason for existing. In fact, has no existence" (p.99-100). Kneubuhl's existentialist concerns are aired through his philosophizing about playwriting. The Author argues that "poets don't merely create, they are themselves created" (p.100) and by the end he has realised that "That is what a play is, I think...a reaching out for the other, an act of faith, an act of love...Poets act. They celebrate" (p.165). In the psychodramatic reading, the characters' existence is determined by their ability to bring to the fore the key conflict of Carl's life and to help him resolve it. The Author's role as analyst in the psychodrama is to cause Carl to feel the alienation of his existence and to help him try to resolve issues from the past that he has hitherto suppressed. This is also manifested in the story of Georgina that haunts the Author

character and echoes the story of Carl and Noa, adding another layer to the conflicts of the psychological drama.

Moreno, widely recognized as the founder of psychodrama, purports that “all psychodramas share the one common element that makes them therapeutic: the presentation of personal truth in the protected world of make-believe as a way to master and cope vicariously with stressful life events in a creative and adaptive manner” (Kellerman, in Wilkins, 1999, p. 6). Certainly for Carl the moment of “personal truth” inherent in the psychodrama provides an interesting reading of this scene, the “stressful life events” involved in Carl’s story have been in the past he shares with Noa and Frances and the moment at which they betrayed him and he enacted his revenge by having them cast out of society.

From the moment the Author steps onto the stage and denounces the playwright’s and his own authenticity, the audience is firmly in the realm of the psyche. The Author is himself a ghost, created to call forth the other voices of Carl’s dead. Through the course of the play, Carl makes an immense psychological journey. He invites in the ‘ghosts’ that have haunted his past in the hopes of making some sort of reconciliation with them. He admits that he is the one who convinced the committee to hire Noa for “his integrity”, but the truth is closer to what he tells Frances and he seeks to confront these people from his past who had hurt him badly and who he had hurt badly in return. Simultaneously though, the ghosts seem have their own agenda in visiting Carl. They have come from the “murmuring darkness” to tell him that they love him, and to remind him of the rich cultural heritage to which he has a responsibility. It takes a great deal of pushing on the part of Noa and Frances for Carl to reach his mental breaking point, and when he is finally pushed past his tolerance, Noa says to Frances “we have done what we came to do” (p.162) thus ending the work of the psychodrama, and pushing Carl, as the analysand, into the act of healing himself.

Carl's internal realization eventually comes at great cost. The legend of Kahikiloa and Kea, as told by Noa plays a significant role in the drama of Carl's psyche. It is through this legend that Carl is shown his own role in the conflict that occurred between himself and Frances and Noa. Carl is driven inexorably to the final Act, where he must confront Lydia, denounce the pageant and begin to take up the Hawaiian mantle left to him by the ghosts from his past. The psychodrama of the play serves to bring Carl from his complacent, Waikiki, tourist-centred existence to the realization of the incredible truth about himself and what it is to be a 'real' Hawaiian.

Cultural Crisis Drama

To control a people's culture is to control their tools of self-definition in relationship to others. For colonialism this involved two aspects of the same process: the destruction or the deliberate undervaluing of a people's culture, their art, dances, religion, history, geography, education, orature and literature, and the conscious elevation of the language of the colonized.

(Schechner, 2006, p. 282)

From a cultural perspective, it is not insignificant that the line that Carl first 'murders' is the one that translates as "People of the land". Samoan scholar Sinavaiana-Gabbard says that "Kneubuhl's plays thus interrogate the notion of 'cultural identity' and more generally, how theater can work as a site of revelation in which problems of identity or race can be performed, challenged, re-inscribed and/or symbolically reconciled" (2006, p. 211). This moment in the play reveals a great deal when considered from the perspective of cultural crisis. Here, the issue of the dying language and cultural identity of the Hawaiian people is

exposed and Carl, as the chosen representative of the people of the land, is commanded to speak Hawaiian.

Cultural loss is a significant and recurring theme that underpins *Mele Kanikau*. In the focus scene, Noa deliberately reacts against what Schechner terms the “conscious elevation of the language of the colonized” and draws our attention to the loss of Hawaiian culture as represented in its language. The characters of Noa and the Author bring this loss to the surface throughout the play. This is particularly apparent when the Author says, in the closing speech of Act Two “‘What flew away out of our lives?’ I could think only of ...*o’o...mamo...i’iwi...o’u...A mele kanikau of birds names*” (p. 164) in an echo of Noa’s earlier lines in his lament for the extinct, native Hawaiian birds “‘How sad that sounds, just saying their names. *O’o, mamo, i’iwi, o’u ...a mele kanikau of birds names*” (p. 114). The birds represent the Hawaiian culture that has been lost. Frances suggests, their “‘little lives’” have gone “‘to make feather capes and helmets for the *ali’i*” (p.115), thus cementing her own condemnation of the *ali’i* and laying the blame for the loss of Hawaiian culture at their feet. Frances’ criticism of the *ali’i* builds throughout the first act to her confrontation with Lydia where she accuses the *ali’i* of being ‘fake’ and ‘cheap’, as opposed to Noa and herself who she declares are ‘real’.

As a wake-up call for all Polynesians to the state of their diminishing cultural traditions, languages and beliefs, this scene from the play symbolizes what has been lost and what Polynesians stand to lose if they continue to allow this representation of their culture. Noa’s biggest fear for Carl is that he does not know what he has lost “‘and if you don’t know that, you are not a Hawaiian!’” (Kneubuhl, 1997, p.148) and when examined with a culturally critical lens, the ‘E nā kānaka’ scene divides the characters into the ‘real’ Hawaiians – Noa and his *halau* (ironically including Frances, the play’s only *haole* character) and the ‘pretend’ Hawaiians who are Carl, Lydia, the court and the pageant dancers.

The play's balanced title – “mele kanikau” which translates as ‘anthem of lament’ – shows the Hawaiian language used, evoking sadness and depicting a very real and tragic moment of mourning. This is followed, however, by “a pageant” which can be defined as “a pretentious display or show that conceals a lack of real importance or meaning” (<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/pageant>). Throughout the play these opposites are presented and ultimately, if the play has done its work, the audience will side with the ‘real’ Hawaiians as represented by Noa, will applaud Carl’s decision to walk out of the pageant world in order to come to terms with what he has lost and will feel the hollowness of the final Waikiki hula despite its polished beauty. In this view there is only room for the culturally ‘right’ (or authentic) – represented in Noa and demonstrated in this instance in his command of the Hawaiian language, and the culturally ‘wrong’ (or inauthentic) – represented in Carl who, despite his elevated position in society as a symbol of the Hawaiian *ali'i*, is exposed as a fraud, a ‘pretend king’ who flounders in the culture he is meant to represent.

Throughout the play, cultural crisis recurs as one of its central themes, deeply tied to the undercurrents of loss that are evoked, from Noa’s mourning of the absent birds to the Author’s on-going lament for Georgina and the loss of her child. Wendt reminds us that “Our [Polynesian] dead are woven into our souls, like the hypnotic music of bone flutes. We can never escape them” (Wendt, 1972) and the presence of the ghosts and the Polynesian notions of the continual presence of the dead, that hover throughout the playscript and performance are all rife with the sense of cultural crisis. In this crisis, we are charged to take sides – either we are with Lydia and the pageant court, “trapped in their make-believe world”, or we are with Carl, attempting to discover and recover what has been lost. It is the Hawaiian culture that comes to be represented by Carl’s son who is tragically driven to kill himself after being cast out by his own people. This suicide is echoed in the Author’s story of Georgina who, in the forest, takes a knife and sharpens a branch from an ohia tree, just as Carl’s son

“sharpened a short stake from a small branch of a koa tree” in order to “stab...the hurt out of his broken heart” (p.160). In this way, cultural loss is embodied in the notion of the grieving child – innocent, betrayed by his own people and forsaken by all. We, along with Carl and the court, are made to feel a sense of individual grief for the lost child, and Carl and his colleagues are pronounced guilty of the murder – much as Carl, in these five lines, “murders every word”.

Palimpsest

The lines from Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* that precede this article speak of an “insubstantial pageant” and “such stuff as dreams are made on”. These phrases, and others, are directly applicable to *Mele Kanikau*. If we read Kneubuhl’s play and the ‘E nā kākana’ scene in particular as a palimpsest of *The Tempest*, many parallels are immediately apparent. Noa is Prospero. After many years in exile, and imbued with supernatural powers, he draws in his enemy in order to exact his revenge. This revenge is necessary because his mana has been stolen from him. He re-writes the story established by others (in Prospero’s case it is his brother’s usurpation that he wishes to ‘re-write’) in order to script his own. He causes his adversary to face some of his deepest fears and he humiliates him – exacting a promise for better conduct in the future. He is the outcast Bohemian artist figure who disregards the rules of society. The stage (island) which provides the setting for his revenge is significant and symbolic. Prospero, the sorcerer, and Noa, the ghost, are simultaneously the most and the least authentic characters in their own dramas.

Both *The Tempest* and *Mele Kanikau* have strong retrospective qualities in the “dark backward and abyss of time” (I:ii:50). Each seeks to redress mistakes of the past and functions as a drama of revenge. In the back story of *The Tempest*, Prospero has been usurped by his younger brother Antonio who is now the King of Naples. Prospero claims that he was

“so reputed/ In dignity, and for the liberal arts/ Without a parallel” (I:ii:72-74) but admits that he neglected his “worldly ends” (I:ii:89). Noa is not without fault either. In his past he is guilty of having fallen in love with Frances although she was betrothed to Carl. Both Noa and Prospero are betrayed by men who are very close to them and cast into exile. Prospero has fled to Caliban’s island and Noa is banished from Hawaiian society to his back village settlement. In the course of each play, both characters are engaged in revenge – Prospero conjures a storm that delivers Antonio to him and Noa accepts Carl’s invitation to be the *Kumu hula* of his Waikiki pageant. In his commentary of *The Tempest*, Shakespearean critic Stephen Orgel says that “there is a profoundly retrospective quality to the drama, which is deeply involved in recounting and re-enacting past action, in evoking and educating the memory. If there is a path to reconciliation in the play, it is only through this” (Orgel, 1987, p. 5). Each remembers, and evokes and educates the memory, in order to move forward – Prospero recounts the mistakes of the past to Miranda and Noa recounts his past events via the legend of Kahikiloa and Kea that he tells to the pageant court. As Orgel says of Prospero “To narrate his history is to gain control of it, to revise and rectify the past” (Orgel, 1987, p. 15) and Noa derives power from such a narration also “It’s your story, Carl. You taught me the story. Remember?” (p. 153), and later “the young *ali’i* made a big thing out of it, Carl...He wouldn’t let them go...Do you remember the story now, Carl?” (p. 154). Both Prospero and Noa seek reconciliation for the events of the past and each is determined to recount and re-enact this past action in order to regain the mana that they have lost.

Both Prospero and Noa are imbued with supernatural powers that help them to achieve their ends. Both of them use these powers to re-write their scripts. Prospero uses his powers of sorcery to create the tempest that causes the shipwreck that brings Antonio to him. Noa is a ghost, an inhabitant of the spiritual world, who returns to teach the court to have “pity for each other” (p. 170). In a sense, each character re-writes their own script to rectify

the mistakes of the past. Prospero reclaims his Dukedom and creates a future for his daughter as the next queen of Naples. Noa returns to cause Carl to come to terms with who he is and who he should strive to be. Both Prospero and Noa are artists – Prospero declares his prowess at the liberal arts and Noa is a reputable *kumu hula*. They are seen as living ‘authentic’ existences (although their supernatural/spiritual elements may contradict this) and they step outside normal societal conventions to challenge others to do the same.

The Tempest and *Mele Kanikau* are plays that look both forward and backward. They each recount and attempt to resolve a moment of conflict from the past, but they each work towards a happier future. The end of *The Tempest* sees Prospero leave the island to return to Milan, and Miranda about to marry Ferdinand and live happily ever after. *Mele Kanikau* is a tragedy and so it not as hopeful in its ending, however there is the real possibility of change for Carl as he leaves the Waikiki pageant set. The play implies that his end is hopeful as he departs, refusing to live in the “make –believe world of *ali'i* and thrones and crowns” (p.172) any longer.

Both of the plays can be read through the discourses of colonization. As well as having been usurped, Prospero is also a usurper, having taken ownership of Caliban’s island from him and re-enslaved the spirit Ariel. Noa is on the other side of colonial tropes. His land and culture have been taken from him, but the continuing betrayal of this culture occurs at the hands of Hawaiians themselves. Noa counsels Carl and all Hawaiians, by extension, to live more truly to their pre-colonial selves. He wants the colonized people of Hawaii to know what they have lost because “if you don’t know that, you are not a Hawaiian” (p.148), and without this knowledge there is no hope for the future of Hawaii.

A palimpsest is described as “something having usually diverse layers or aspects apparent beneath the surface...an overlay of classes and generations” (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/palimpsest>). In the case of *Mele Kanikau*, the play may be read as a

palimpsest of *The Tempest*. The layers of Shakespeare's much older play are evident beneath the surface of Kneubuhl's script and as a well-educated young playwright, Kneubuhl would have read the *Tempest* and have been aware of its characters, content and themes although he may not have been aware that some of these same themes, characters and events may be read through the "overlay of classes and generations" in *Mele Kanikau*.

Conclusion

Each of these readings provides a different critical insight into the world of the play.

Kneubuhl's deliberate use of some of the features of different genre attest to his wide literary knowledge and his skill as a playwright. The play might also be read as a drama of mana, or as autobiography, or as allegory, analogy or melodrama. The depth of Kneubuhl's layered writing contributes to his writing for "Polynesians of mixed blood and second thoughts" (Sinavaiana-Gabbard C. , 1999) and his work is saturated with references and allusions to his extremely wide cultural and literary knowledge. *Mele Kanikau: A Pageant* works constantly to establish binary oppositions – whether it is in the representation of 'real' and 'fake' Hawaiians, or in the dichotomy inherent between the hero and the villain. Each of these pairs of conflicting opposites reminds the audience of Kneubuhl's own dual heritage and also raises the questions of cultural authenticity, alienation, and the playwright and his craft that drove his writing for theatre and for Polynesian peoples. In addition, Kneubuhl's presence in his own play "I am the author of the play you are about to see" (p.99), and his attestation that "Poets do not search for final meanings; we act, we celebrate" (p.165) contribute to deeper, critical consideration of the existential beliefs about creative acts that permeate his playwriting.

Glossary

Samoan words:

Fale Aitu	traditional Samoan performance
Vā	“the Space-Between-All-Things which defines us” (Wendt, in Heim, 2012, p. 8)
Papalagi	pakeha

Hawaiian words:

Ali'i	descended from the Hawaiian ruling class
Haole	pakeha
Hula halau	hula school or troupe
Kumu hula	hula master
Leo	language
Mo'o	lizard

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