

**Cecilia Skemp**  
Costume Design

For

**Top Girls**

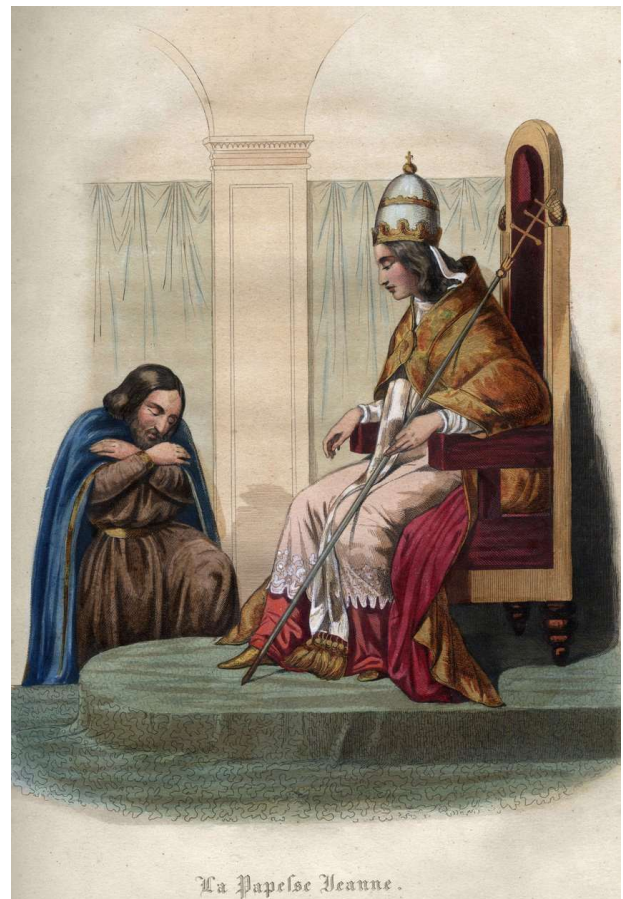
By Caryl Churchill

## **Design Approach**

The primary concept for my design is enhancing the theme of the universal experience of women across space and time. For the modern characters, I wanted to move their appearance forward in time to 21st century contemporary wear. Although it may feel anachronistic to an audience hearing characters in 21st century dress discussing Margret Thatcher as a contemporary issue, I believe portraying these characters as close to our time as possible allows our audience to more closely connect with the messages of the play. Making the characters contemporary to the audience also prevents the audience from dismissing the story as being from “the past.” The issues from the play still persist to today, and clearly have persisted for centuries as the dinner guests clearly show. The dinner guests, who come from history and folklore around the world, most symbolically exemplify this theme. I focused my research on understanding the dinner guests in their historical context and reflecting that in their outfits. “The more things change, the more they stay the same.” Highlighting the differences between the women but the threads that connect them all.



All depictions of Pope Joan were made long after her projected time period (mid 9th century)..







6. The Transfiguration. Byzantine, about 549. Mosaic. Sant' Appollinare in Classe, Ravenna. Photograph: Hirmer Fotoarchiv, Munich



Looking at these above mosaics from churches in Ravenna, Italy made roughly in the 6th century, similarities arise such as the seams of the chasubles and style of palls. Images pulled from The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin March 1971.



Depictions of Sergius III of Rome (left) and Gregory the Great (right).

The coin of Sergius III depicts hat and necklines of vestments and a tall pointy hat. The portrait of Gregory is attributed to a 12th ce French manuscript, portrait depicts hat and vestments. Pulled primarily for depiction of hat.

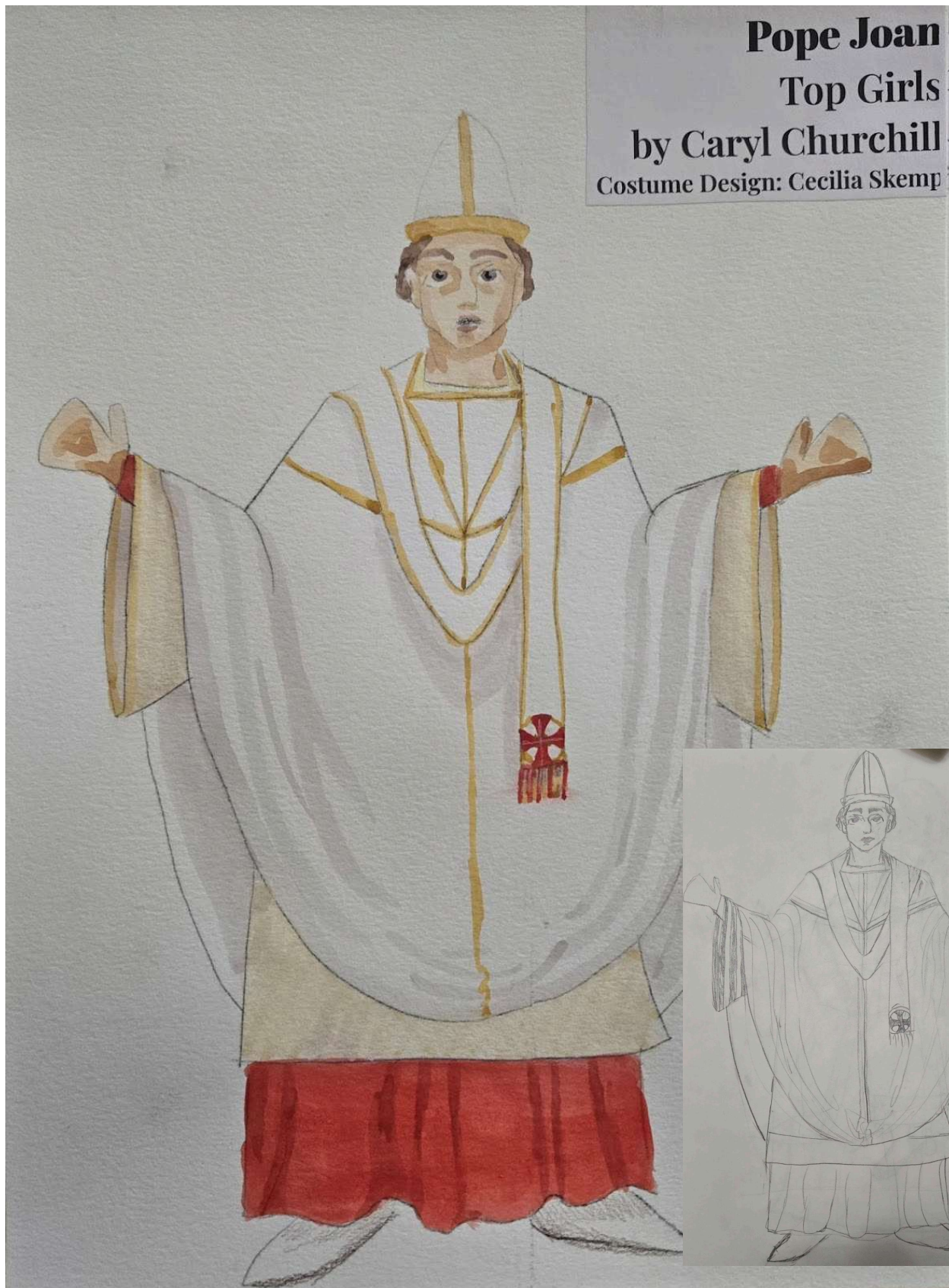




## Sources and Articles

- **The Origin and Symbolism of the Popes Attire**
  - <https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/origin-and-symbolism-of-the-popes-attire-1713>
  - Discusses red purple and gold w/ the pope early as 4th century
- **What Does the Pope Wear? A Guide to Papal Garments and Their Meanings**
  - [https://ascensionpress.com/blogs/articles/what-does-the-pope-wear-a-guide-to-papal-garments-and-their-meanings?srsId=AfmBOooBWz7hxfNBldJeEM-O7wjifmetbxoVzTXA0X\\_ly\\_bfslTO2xxz](https://ascensionpress.com/blogs/articles/what-does-the-pope-wear-a-guide-to-papal-garments-and-their-meanings?srsId=AfmBOooBWz7hxfNBldJeEM-O7wjifmetbxoVzTXA0X_ly_bfslTO2xxz)
  - Explains the modern look of the popes.
- **The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin March 1971**
  - <https://cdn.sanity.io/files/cctd4ker/production/0428249705ead5684d51192f85e8f5ffc38ff448.pdf>
  - Metropolitan museum study on medieval clerical garments. Thorough and useful!
  - “Rabanus Maurus, archbishop of Mainz, writing about 820, listed nine vestments as proper to a bishop: the pall, alb, girdle, amice, stole, maniple, dalmatic, chasuble, and sandals. Vestments in this list not previously mentioned by medieval writers are the amice and sandals.” p 304
  - “Three additional vestments are mentioned in the letters of Gregory the Great as being peculiar to Rome: the dalmatica, mappula, and pallium.” p 304
- ***Pageant of the Popes* by John Farrow “Ninth Century”**
  - <https://sacred-texts.com/chr/ptp/ptp09.htm>
  - Discusses Pope Joan’s fable in context of the line of papacy.
  - “Benedict died in 858 but before progressing with the papal continuity some mention should be made of the “Popess Joan,” a female who is supposed to have occupied the Holy See at this period. The fantastic legend makes its appearance four hundred years later and at various times has been given great circulation by enthusiastic enemies of the papacy. It makes a colorful story but historians, even those most critical of the Church, unite in denying credence to such a weird libel. The story is that she ruled for two years—and between the reigns that history, by irrefutable documentary evidence, assigns to Leo IV and Benedict III! The former died on the 17th of July 855 and as has been seen Benedict succeeded him almost immediately. The Emperor Lothair died during the September of the same year and in the two months his reign coincided with that of the new Pope a coin was minted bearing both his likeness and Benedict's. This is one of the briefest of the many proofs that give the lie to the absurd story.” pp 76-77
- **Enciclopedia dell’Arte Medievale “Papa”**
  - [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/papa\\_\(Enciclopedia-dell%27-Arte-Medievale\)/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/papa_(Enciclopedia-dell%27-Arte-Medievale)/)
  - Italian source discussing Medieval Arte and histories of the popes, including what they wear
- **The Complete Guide to Priest Outfits**
  - <https://clergywearshop.com/the-complete-guide-to-priest-outfits/>
  - Discusses modern clerical wear

**Pope Joan**  
**Top Girls**  
**by Caryl Churchill**  
Costume Design: Cecilia Skemp

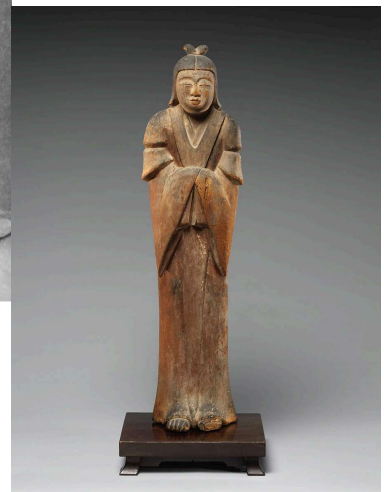
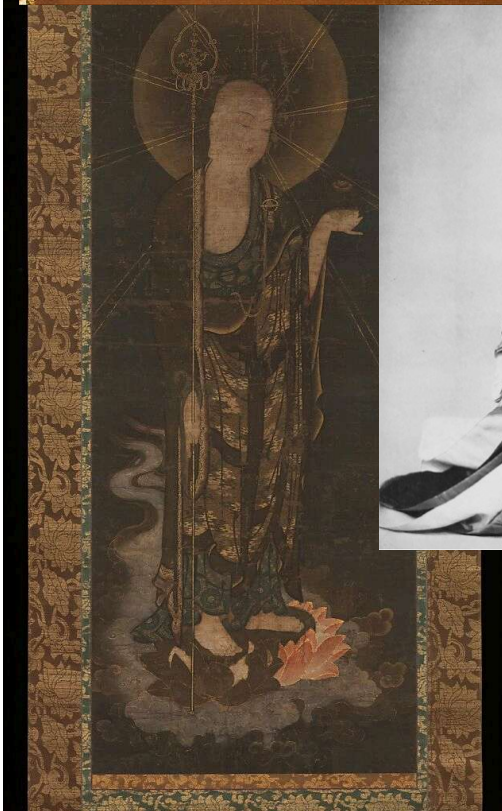




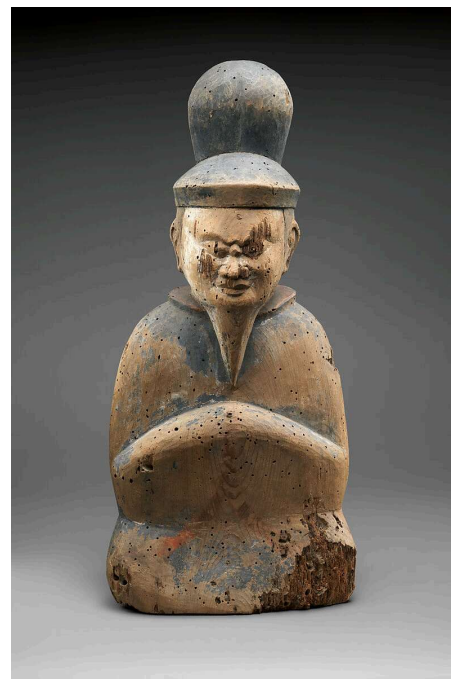
### Pope Joan Design Decisions

1. No triple tiara but a tall hat. Or helmet shaped white hat with “coronet like fillet”
2. Layers
  - a. Alb plain, full base layer to ankles... no belt (for design) tighter sleeves, fuller body
  - b. Dalmatica, particular to Rome at time of Gregory the Great, looser garment with large sleeves, ends about the calves
  - c. Chasuble type cloak, “circle” cloak, longer in back than front
  - d. Pallium or Pall, worn over all else. I prefer the earlier designs of loose scarf over that of the completed loop for Joan
  - e. Papal hat- conical “helmet-shaped” with band up center and coronet like band (precedes papal tiara)
  - f. mantle/cloak? Perhaps not.
  - g. Gloves? Nah. if yes though, white.
3. Colors
  - a. Red and white.
  - b. In vestments, white represents purity and rebirth (christmas, easter, occasionally at baptisms and weddings). Through the years, the Pope became associated with wearing primarily white (with the exception of mass celebrations and certain accessories such as red shoes)
  - c. Red is another clerical color associated with cardinals and the Pope historically alongside authority and royalty. In vestments, red is worn for ceremonies dedicated to martyrs (blood). Red is also worn for Pentecost (fire), and special Lenten services such as Palm Sunday and Good Friday which respectively symbolize the foreshadowing and subsequent sacrifice of Jesus of the cross.
  - d. I choose these two colors, with accents of gold, to represent Joan in her clothing. The white for her purity and blessing of God as well as her dedication to truth and theology especially for knowledge in a world where knowledge was denied to women. I get the impression that she was a fair and good pope. Although she describes sexual promiscuity, she is not the only pope to be recorded to have children or be caught up in sexual scandals. The real crime here in the perspective of the clerics is her sex. For that, I will not blame her.
  - e. Red here I wish to represent her blood. The blood of childbirth and soon blood from being stoned. She herself is a martyr. I am still deciding between the alb being full red beneath white robes or for her to be in all white with blood stains.

Lady Nijo





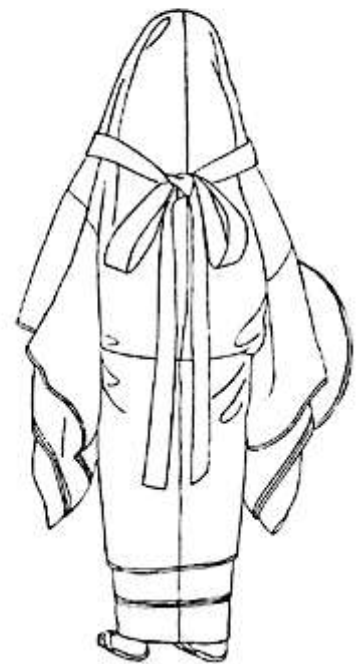
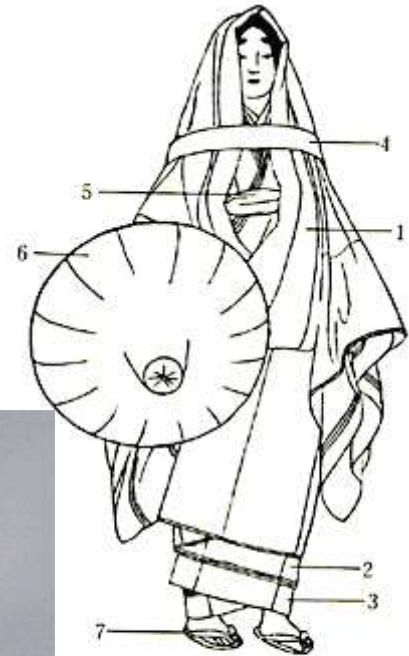




# Lady Nijo

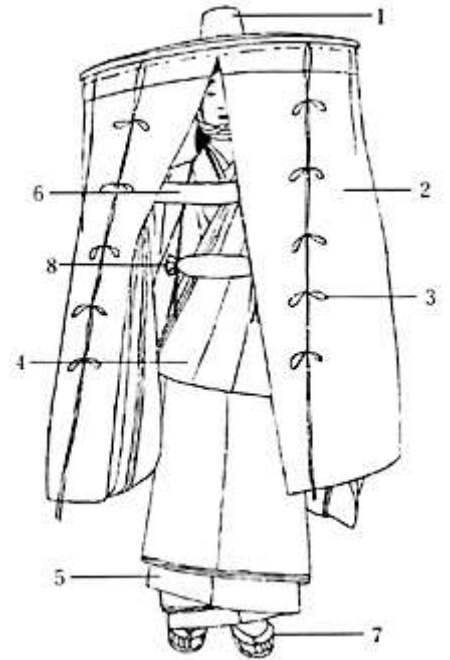


- 1 uchiki-wo tsubo-oru
- 2 uchiki
- 3 kake-obi
- 4 kake-mamori
- 5 ichime-gasa
- 6 obuto-no zori

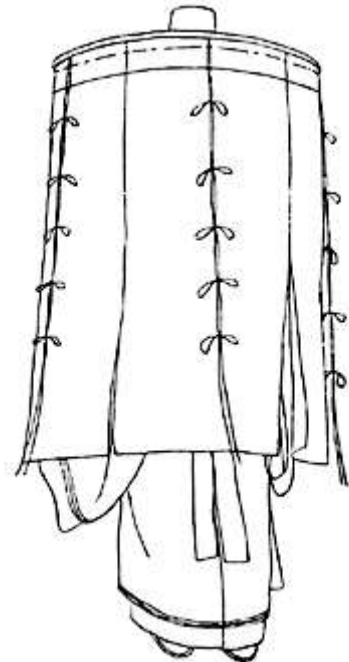


- 1 sagegami hair
- 2 akome-ohgi fan
- 3 kaniararemon-ko-uchiki
- 4 hitoe
- 5 aka no uchi-bakama
- 6 akome-ogi fan





- 1 ichime-gasa-no koji
- 2 mushi-no tareginu
- 3 kazari-himo
- 4 uchie
- 5 hitoe
- 6 kake-obi
- 7 obuto-no zori
- 8 kake-mamori

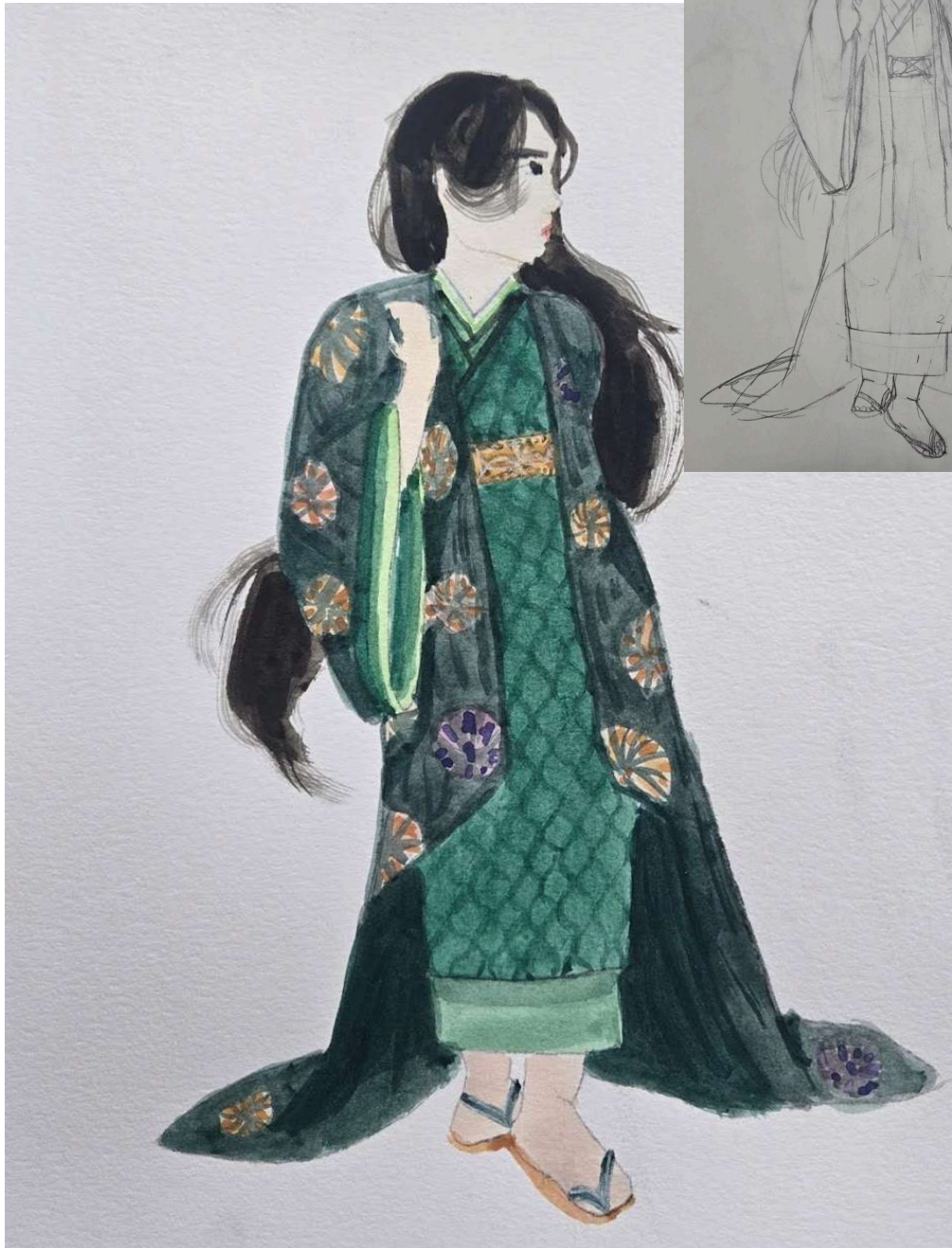


## Sources and Articles

- ***Japanese Costume: And the Makers of Its Elegant Tradition* by Helen Benton Minnich in collaboration with Shojiro Nomura**
  - Book detailing the evolution of Japanese clothing throughout the ages accompanied by contextual lessons in Japanese history.
  - Uchikake, women's over kimono, draped loose
  - Hakama, samurai pants
  - Chrysanthemum associated w/ imperial family "chrysanthemum throne"
  - "The abdicated emperor's robe had encircled designs of paulownia and bamboo."
- **Coercive Sex in the Medieval Japanese Court: Lady Nijō's Memoir**
  - <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25066446>
  -
- **The Metropolitan Museum of Art collections**
- **The Costume Museum - The Rebirth of the Tale of Genji**
  - <https://www.iz2.or.jp/english/>
  - Provided the life size doll photographs and garment diagrams while displaying various Japanese outfits throughout the ages. Each outfit is tagged with an era and potential category of person who may wear such outfits.
- **Women's Garments**
  - <https://sengokudaimyo.com/garb/womens-garments>
  - Presents descriptions of various pieces of clothing and their origins and evolution.
  - Pattern reference on site background
- **Japanese Beauty Standards**
  - <https://flexiclass.com/japanese/beauty-standards/#chapter-5>
  - Brief description of beauty standards in various Japanese periods.
  - "In this period [Kamakura], as the samurai ruled, female dress changed from elegant to active, and light makeup was preferred. Until the Heian period, today's daily hygiene habits, such as bathing and combing hair, were done a few times a year. But in this period, it increased to about once every five days."
- **Kasane no Irome (Layered Color Patterns)**
  - <https://sengokudaimyo.com/garb/kasane-no-irome>
  - There are particular ways to layer garments and their colors for various purposes and meanings. This source shows examples and when they may be worn.
- **Women's Outfits**
  - <https://sengokudaimyo.com/garb/womens-outfits>
  - Provides various layering options and potential/typical accessories.



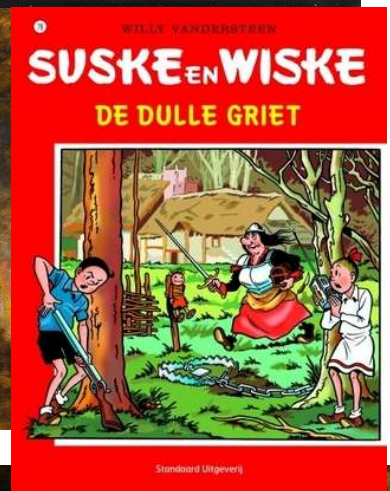
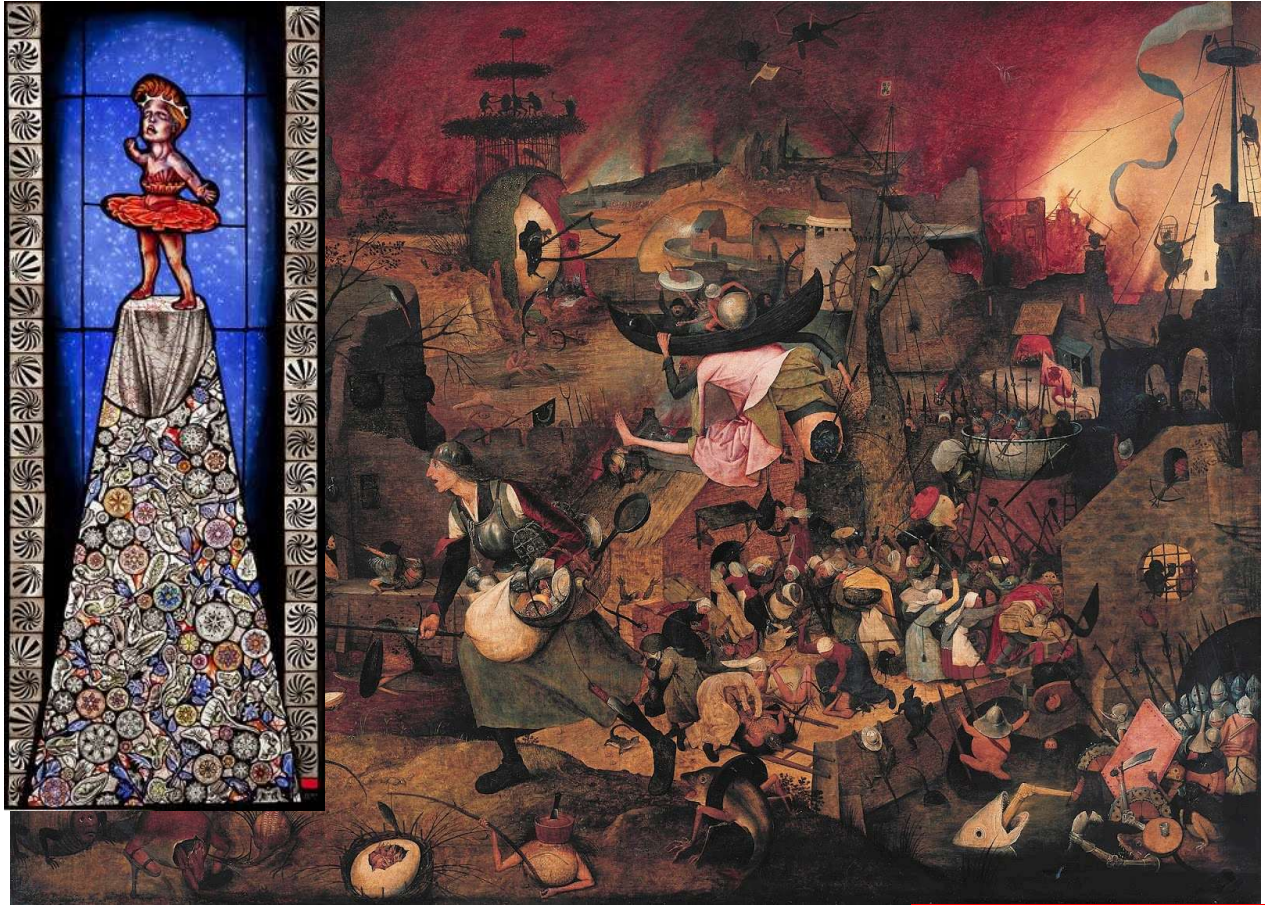
Lady Nijo



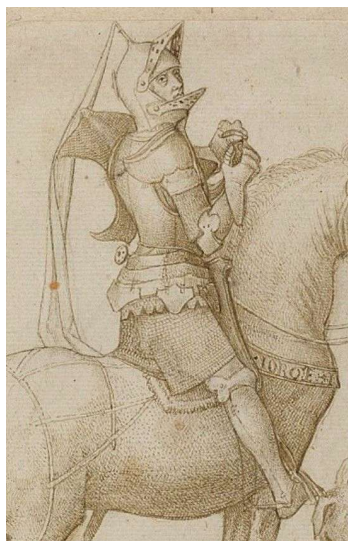
## Lady Nijo

1. Layers - Three layered robes based on her argument in the play that she deserves to wear three layered robes.
  - a. Kosode, underlayer
  - b. Hitoe, first fashion layer
  - c. Hitoe pt 2 electric boogaloo (unsure what to actually call this layer) 2nd fashion layer, maybe it's called uchiki too?
  - d. Uchiki primary outer fashion layer, very long, typically brocade. Who knows why Lady Nijo keeps talking about thin silk. I will assume she is talking about the layers closer to her skin.
  - e. Hair in low ponytail or loose
  - f. Straw sandals w/ "fat straps" or else no sandals to reflect her time during the abdicated emperor's funeral
2. Colors
  - a. Green (and white)
  - b. The kosode is very traditionally white.
  - c. The rest of the outfit will be in shades of green. Lady Nijo's connection to Buddhism and her days as a traveler lend the idea of her connection to nature and her peaceful ideology along with traditional associations with growth, vitality, and youth. Her act of violence against the emperor is a contradiction to such a state and she often displays regret. A color I associate with regret is a deep bluish green, a mixture of grief and envy at what could have been and what was lost. The colors will radiate out from light to dark as she is draped in a heavy brocade uchiki of dark value which can both physically and symbolically represent how she is weighed down by her position.
  - d. Kosode (white), hitoe (pale green), hitoe pt 2 (green green), uchiki (dark blue green) obi color undecided... perhaps gold for a refined formal look
3. Light makeup preferred in Kamakura period, darkened eyebrows, light white face powder, and some lip color







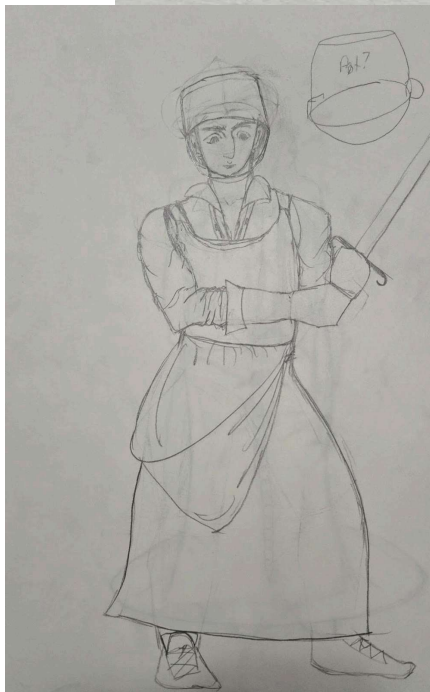




## Sources and Articles

- **Mad Meg**
  - <https://museummayervandenbergh.be/en/page/mad-meg>
  - Museum Mayer Van Den Bergh's description, investigation, and detail images from Brughel's Dulle Griet Painting
- **Dulle Griet (Mad Meg)**
  - [https://www.wga.hu/html\\_m/b/bruegel/pieter\\_e/05/20dulle.html](https://www.wga.hu/html_m/b/bruegel/pieter_e/05/20dulle.html)
  - Another brief description of the painting relaying that the true meaning of the story and painting are unknown.
- **GETTING DRESSED in 16th Century Low Countries**
  - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lskGJndG-Ys>
  - Get ready with me style video, in which the creator wears and explains the layers of 16th century Flemish women's wear.
- **Pieter Aertsen**
  - <https://www.wikiart.org/en/pieter-aertsen>
  - Artist with plenty of market and home scenes of low class Flemish life in the 16th century.
- **"XV Century European Armor" Facebook Group**
  - <https://www.facebook.com/groups/2238420386383150>
  - Provides samples and discussion on Armor from the era
- **Flemish Cooking Pot**
  - <https://www.samuelherrup.com/flemish-cooking-pot/flemish-cooking-pot.html>
  - Its a pot. The pot is on auction, dated around 1600.
- **Dulle Griet: The Many Faces of Mad Meg**
  - <https://winsham.blogspot.com/2015/04/dulle-griet-many-faces-of-mad-meg.html>
  - A blog post compiling various depictions and interpretations of Gret. The name Dulle Griet actually is a title and nickname for "Mad Margaret." Interpretations range from literal, to domestic, to supernatural, and schizophrenia. This post also provided the dutch idiom "to put on armor."

**Dull Gret**  
**Top Girls**  
**by Caryl Churchill**  
Costume Design: Cecilia Skemp





1. Dull Gret

a. Layers (courtesy of daisy victoria on youtube)

- i. Chemise
- ii. Kirtle
- iii. Sleeves
- iv. Partlet white
- v. Overdress
- vi. Apron
- vii. Black partlet, red silk edging
- viii. A cap
- ix. Helmet (pot?)
- x. Breastplate

b. Colors

- i. Red and Black
- ii. These two colors were very common in the era and are represented well in paintings. I also learned that there is a dutch phrase “to put on armor” meaning to be enraged which an article associated with this painting. Since Gret’s story has an underlying current of rage, red and black make an excellent compliment to Gret’s emotions.





Anne of Brittany, Duchess of Brittany and Queen of France. "Fashion Icon"

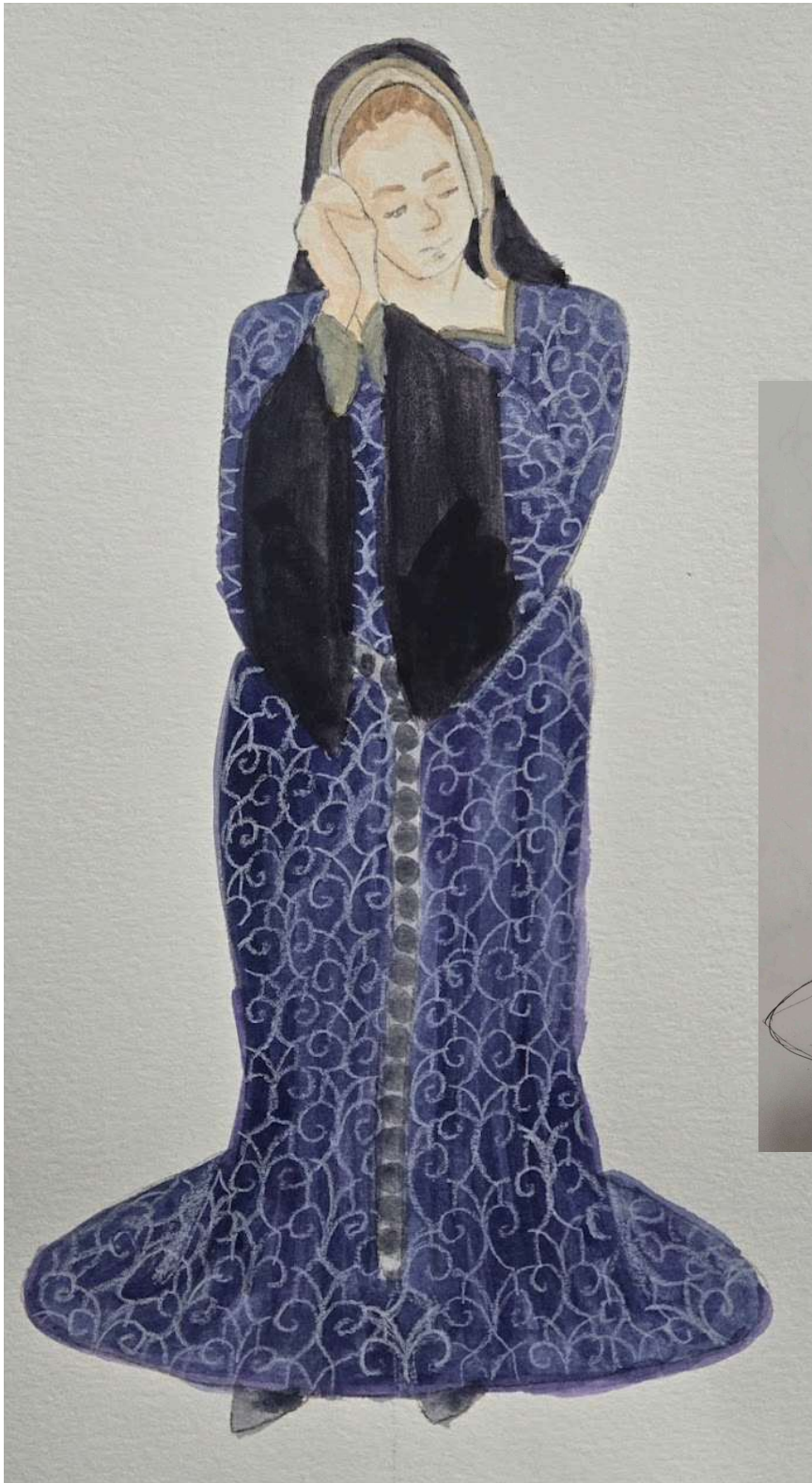


## Sources and Articles

- **The Decameron**
  - <https://chaucer.fas.harvard.edu/pages/decameron-tenth-day-tenth-tale>
  - John Payne's translation of Chaucer's Clerk's Tale
- **Petrarch's Tale of Griselda**
  - <https://chaucer.fas.harvard.edu/pages/tale-griselda>
  - From Robert D. French, *A Chaucer Handbook*. Another version of The Clerk's Tale
- **The Clerk's Prologue, Tale, and Envoy**
  - <https://chaucer.fas.harvard.edu/pages/clerks-prologue-tale-and-envoy>
  - The Clerk's Tale original and modern translation
- **Fashion History Timeline**
  - <https://fashionhistory.fitnyc.edu/1480-1489/>
  - <https://fashionhistory.fitnyc.edu/1490-1499/>
  - <https://fashionhistory.fitnyc.edu/1500-1509/>
  - <https://fashionhistory.fitnyc.edu/1510-1519/>
  - A vague overview of European dress throughout the ages. This site includes portraits as evidence and shows overall silhouette and detailed gestures.
- ***The Costume History* by Auguste Racine**
- Additionally, I studied this period Spring 2025 for a paper project of "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead" by Tom Stoppard set in the 1400s. Here are some of those sources:
  - <https://centuries-sewing.com/2019/02/26/book-series-review-historical-clothing-from-the-inside-out/>
  - <https://handcraftedhistory.blog/tag/15th-century/>
  - <https://www.villagehatshop.com/blogs/history-of-hats/chapter-7-medieval-europe>
  - <https://rosaliegilbert.com/15thcgowns.html>



Patient Griselda





1. Patient Griselda

a. Layers

- i. Chemise
- ii. Kirtle
- iii. Overdress
- iv. Belt
- v. White cap
- vi. Veil

b. Colors

- i. Blue
- ii. The color of calm, reserved, and patience, blue can represent Griselda's temperament well. Because she is veiled as a married woman, she might elicit the impression of the Virgin Mary from audiences. I don't believe this to be a deficit considering how, in my research, I found that Griselda was considered a role model for Christian women (at least Christian men would like to make her so). Blue, made darker with accents of black can represent her grief in her children being taken away from her and the strife she suffered. She is calm and patient as well as sad in her dark moments. She is both virtuous and pitiful. Obedient and depressed.



No. 1—Is a traveling-ulster, of checked brown-and-white woolen serge. The ulster fits the figure at the back, and is loose in front. Plain

No. 2—Is a house-dress, for a young lady. The skirt is of a wide plaid camel's-hair. It may be either perfectly plain or laid in large kilt-plaits. Some of the plaid skirts are cut on the bias; this is only a matter of fancy. The over-drapery and bodice are of self-colored camel's-hair of the prevailing color in the plaid, and must match exactly. The long drapery in front is plaited high on the left side, and opens to display the skirt. The back-drapery falls straight in the centre, and is arranged to fall in a jabot



No. 1.

No. 2.

close-fitting coat-sleeves. For the early spring and summer fashion in ulsters, this is the new shape. The hood is lined with brown surah. Cord-and-tassels to match, for the neck and waist. Hat of beige-colored felt, faced with brown velvet, trimmed with loops of brown-and-white gros-grain ribbon.

at the sides. The bodice is a simple waist, gathered back and front into yoke. Cuffs, collar, and waistband of

PET MAR 1888



- **Victorian traveling dress: guidelines for a proper lady**
  - <https://recollections.biz/blog/victorian-traveling-dress-guidelines-for-a-proper-lady/>
- **Fashion History Timeline**
  - <https://fashionhistory.fitnyc.edu/1870-1879/>
- **Fashioning the frontispiece: The role of clothing in the travel narratives of Isabella Bird**
  - <https://www.amdigital.co.uk/insights/blog/clothing-in-the-travel-narratives-of-isabella-bird>
  - Looks more into the functions of clothing more than appearance but gives Isabella Bird's opinion and uses for clothing. I focused on the words that reference Bird's insistence on feminine appearance which inspired my simple victorian women's travel dress design.
- **The Wardrobe of a Lady Traveler: The Life and Adventures of Isabella Bird Bishop**
  - <https://www.cordella.org/isabella-bird-bishop>
  - Another account of Bird's clothing in which she is described to have "defenced her femininity."

Other resources used include Auguste Racinet's "The Costume History" (1888) and Fashionary's "Fashionpedia: The Visual Dictionary of Fashion Design" (2019) for all Designs!





Isabella Bird

1. Most visible layers
  - a. Travel skirt
  - b. Matching Bodice
2. Color
  - a. Maroon or deep Burgundy
  - b. Isabella Bird has a very elegant, feminine feel to her character. In her writings, there are accounts where she “defends” her femininity due to her practical clothing choices as a traveler. Purple and deep reds suit her. I lean toward the deep colors especially with purple hues which compliment her age and maturity. Supposedly, deep purple was also a color to be worn after the mourning period to continue expressions of loss. With the deaths of her sister, lovers, and husband, weighing prominently on her mind, a deep reddish purple or mauve makes for an excellent dress.