Charlot, John. The Hawaiian Poetry of Religion and Politics. Honolulu: The Institute for Polynesian Studies, 1985.

Ua lawa mākou i ka pōhaku
I ka ʻai kamahaʻo o ka ʻāina.

We do not value
The hill of dollars of the government.
We are satisfied with the rock,
The wondrous food of the land.

The dense image in lines 3–4 has been variously interpreted.[143] In my opinion, it is based on the expression *ʻai pōhaku* "eat rock," used for someone who has nothing else.[144] The Hawaiians have been dispossessed and are reduced to what, for the non-Hawaiian, appears to be worthless. But the poet transforms this pejorative expression into a positive description of Hawaiian culture. The rock is *lawa* "enough, sufficient." The needs are basic. The rock is indeed *ʻai* "food." That food is *kamahaʻo*, a religious term used by Lunalilo in his anthem for the name of the king.

The Hawaiian eats the rock and is formed by it into a pua of Hawaiʻi. He brings the land inside of himself and thus becomes one with it. At the same time, the land becomes his. A chief is *ʻai moku* "eater or ruler of the island or land section." The land is the Hawaiian's in the Hawaiian sense of tenancy or usufruct, rather than the Western sense of private property. That is, the Hawaiian rejects monetary prosperity in favor of sovereignty as defined by his own traditions.

A further source for this image—and a further dimension of its meaning—can be found in a traditional description of the volcano goddess Pele: *ka wahine ʻai pōhaku* "the rock-eating woman." She eats the rock and rules the lava flows and the lands around them. Pele also *produces* rock, *extends* the land. The Hawaiian also should give back to the land from which he receives. He should care for, *mālama*, his land. The relationship of humans to the land is, therefore, not one of exploitation or arbitrary rule, but of mutual care, of alternating receiving and giving.

Ultimately, the lines contain an authentic poetic symbol—that is, one that cannot be exhausted by interpretation but yields ever more to meditation. This is, in fact, an ideal of Hawaiian poetry: to reproduce in words the density of experience.

The difference between Hawaiian and Western culture is not, therefore, merely one of politics, but of perception and response. The use of such a symbol in such a situation is itself another point of difference between Hawaiian and Western culture and perpetuates the practice of using Hawaiian poetry as a screen, impenetrable to non-Hawaiians, behind which authentic indigenous concepts and feelings can be expressed.[145]

6.

A Politics of Beauty

The differences between Hawaiian and Western culture have been felt since first contact and have been examined by such writers as Kepelino. In the crisis of the overthrow of the monarchy, Liliʻuokalani broached the subject of "the genius of a tropical people."[146]

> But will it also be thought strange that education and knowledge of the world have enabled us to perceive that as a race we have some special mental and physical requirements not shared by the other races which have come among us? That certain habits and modes of living are better for our health and happiness than others? And that a separate nationality, and a particular form of government, as well as special laws, are, at least for the present, best for us?[147]

Besides hospitality[148] and sensitivity to and dependence on nature,[149] she mentions "the great fondness and aptness of our nation to poetry and song."[150]

Poetry should be considered, therefore, an important source for our understanding of Hawaiian history. The fact that poetry has been used frequently for important occasions and purposes suggests that it has a utility thus far overlooked by historians. Moreover, the strong poetic bent of important public figures might not have been without influence on their views and policies. Indeed, my study of religio-political chants and songs indicates that poetry was felt in that field, just as it was in others, to be the most congenial form for the expression of feelings and philosophy. Only by achieving some appreciation of that poetry, I would argue, will we be able to understand the concerns and coherence of certain Hawaiian policies and tendencies. For instance the high, noble poetry of the Kalākaua dynasty renders comprehensible the place its members occupy in much contemporary Hawaiian thinking—a

place that cannot be explained if only the literature of their English language detractors is studied. Ultimately, poetry has proved the best medium of expression for a primary factor in the thinking of Hawaiians as they confronted the problems of the postcontact period: their strong sense of the appropriateness of their traditional culture to the beautiful land they loved.

APPENDIX 1

The Use of Akua *for Living Chiefs*

Statements in nineteenth-century Hawaiian accounts that living chiefs of the highest rank were traditionally called *akua* "god" have been followed in the secondary literature (e.g., Davenport 1969:3, with references; Goldman 1970:218ff.). The historicity and/or exact extension and significance of this practice need, however, to be examined on the evidence of Hawaiian literature.

The use of akua for living high chiefs is well attested for the short period from the death of Kamehameha I through the early missionary period. See, for example, Stewart 1970:190; *He Kanikau no Kaahumanu Opio* "A Lamentation for Young Kaahumanu," by Niau, in Fornander 1919–1920:451–57; *Kalani nui kua Liholiho i ke kapu he inoa*, by Liliha, in *Buke Mele* n.d.:25f.; 25, ll. 1–4.

This use of akua is, however, difficult to demonstrate from earlier literature. For instance, Kamehameha I is clearly not an akua in the welcoming chant of Ululani discussed above, page 3. On the contrary, in *Haui Ka Lani* (Fornander 1919–1920: 409, ll. 769–74) Kamehameha I is *kanaka* "human"; *waiakua* "godly blood" (ibid.: 387f., ll. 299f.) preserves the distinction between Kamehameha I and akua. It could be objected that Kamehameha I was of insufficiently high rank to be called akua; but Kamakau (1961:230) claims that in the case of a victorious chief, "ua hoomana aku kekahi poe iaia me he akua la" (some people worshipped him as a god).* If akua was used as freely as claimed, the fact that the term was not applied to Kamehameha I must remain strange.

An even graver objection to the conventional position is that the claimed use of akua does not occur in earlier chants. (I agree with Dickey [1928:149] that the string figure chant line 5, *He akua na 'lii o Kona*, should be translated "ghosts"; compare *He Molelo* 1891, July 7,

*My translation from the Hawaiian text in *Ka Nupepa Kuokoa*, 16 November 1867, p. 1.