KAPIOLANI

Alfred Tennyson

Analysis by Giovanni Bassi

Didactic Poem, Ode, Lyric

Alfred Tennyson’s 1892 poem “Kapiolani” focuses on the eponymous Hawaiian chiefess’s defiance of the volcano goddess Pele. Tennyson's volcanic imagery, grounded in geological accounts of the time, contrasts heathen beliefs about Kīlauea with a more positive view of the volcano as a natural entity created by God. Kapiolani’s conversion thus symbolically marks an epistemic shift from pagan superstition to a more effective paradigm for interpreting natural hazards.

Year of Publication	1892
Publication Place	London
Editor	Macmillan
Entity	Kīlauea
Collection	The Death of Oenone, Akbar's Dream, and Other Poems

GEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

Volcano Kīlauea

REAL EVENT

Time	1781–1841 [1781-1841]
Location	Hawai'i United States of America
Coordinates	19.413740, -155.275751
Base/Complex	Kīlauea
Typology	Terrestrial

"In plan view Kīlauea is built on the south flank of Mauna Loa . . ., and its history is therefore intimately tied to the presence and activity of Mauna Loa. Additional tectonic features found offshore . . . are two parts of a raised platform . . . associated with an early landslide" (Wright 6)

Effusive

"Traditional eruptions are short-lived, usually lasting a few days to weeks, and are characterized by rapid transfer of magma" (Wright 14)

Caldera

"Important tectonic elements of Kīlauea are . . . its summit caldera containing a nested pit crater" (Wright 6)

Explosive

"individual episodes are short, lasting hours to days, and are also accompanied by sharp deflation of Kīlauea’s summit" (Wright 14)

Anthropization Level

Houses

"As we walked through the village, numbers of the people came out of their houses, and followed us for a mile or two, after which they gradually fell behind" (Ellis 207)

Temples

"Temple of Pélé" (Ellis 348)

Villages

"As we walked through the village, numbers of the people came out of their houses, and followed us for a mile or two, after which they gradually fell behind" (Ellis 207)

Agriculture Areas

". . . which appeared divided into farms of varied extent, and upon these the houses generally stood singly, or in small clusters" (Ellis 195)

Sea Coast

"a mobile south flank . . . extending seaward" (Wright 6); "the habitations of the natives were also thickly scattered over the coast" (Ellis 208)

Churches

"The Missionaries at the station" (Ellis 276)

Volcano

LITERARY EVENT

Time	1781–1841 [1781-1841]
Location	Kingdom of Hawai'i Kingdom of Hawai'i
Volcano Name	Kilauēä
Base/Complex	Kilauēä
Volcanic Risk Ref.	Referenced

Typology

Terrestrial Effusive Caldera Explosive

Anthropization Level	Settlements, Temples, Villages, Towns, Sea Coast

INDIVIDUAL REACTIONS & AFFECTS

Attitudes

Name	Kapiolani
Age	Adult
Gender	Female
Native Place	Hawai'i
Nationality	Hawaiian
Reactions	Awareness, Acceptance, Trust, Distrust In Authorities, Prayer, Calm, Wonder, Adaptation, Recklessness

COLLECTIVE REACTIONS & AFFECTS

Attitudes

Name	Indigenous people
Reactions	Awareness, Acceptance, Avoidance, Mitigation, Adaptation, Distrust, Trust In Authorities, Prayer, Caution, Calm, Wonder, Fear, Anxiety, Distress, Unease, Terror

Name	Pagan Priests
Reactions	Awareness, Acceptance, Mitigation, Adaptation, Trust, Trust In Authorities, Prayer, Fascination, Fear

LINGUISTIC & STYLISTIC ANALYSIS

Keywords	Evil; Kapiolani; Berries; Peelè; Lava; Priesthood; Crater; Taboo; Christian
Metaphors	"fiery riot and revel" (Ricks 1451); "shake with her thunders and shatter her island" (1451); "Rolling her anger . . . in blood-red cataracts" (1451)
Similes	"Long as the lava-light / Glares from the lava-lake / Dazing the starlight, / Long as the silvery vapour in daylight / Over the mountain / Floats, will the glory of Kapiolani be mingled with either on Hawa-i-ee" (Ricks 1451-1452)
Motifs, Topoi, Mythologemes	Violation Of Taboos, Apocalypse, Hell, Deified Nature, Fire, Hyperdisaster, Superstition, Cruel Nature, Thunder, Gods

Mythical Creatures | Curse

Syntax	Complex Noun Phrases, Unconventional Position
Punctuation	Multiple Exl, Hypens
Morphology	High frequency of phenomena of the spoken language
Phonetics/Prosody	Relevance of word accent, Relevance of language rhythm, Sound-related word choice (onomatopoeia, rhyme, alliteration)

“Kapiolani” was written by Alfred Tennyson in 1892 and included in *The Death of Oenone, Akbar's Dream, and Other Poems* (1892), a collection published posthumously by Alfred Tennyson’s son Hallam. Epideictic in nature, the poem was one of the last texts penned by Tennyson. In his memoir of his father (Tennyson 419), Hallam points out that the prose preface which introduces the lyric was the final touch Tennyson added to the collection. As suggested by this episode, the preface is indeed textually meaningful in that it clarifies the subject matter of the poem, which might have otherwise been rather obscure:

Kapiolani was a great chieftainess who lived in the Sandwich Islands at the beginning of this century. She won the cause of Christianity by openly defying the priests of the terrible goddess Peelè. In spite of their threats of vengeance she ascended the volcano Mauna-Loa, then clambered down over a bank of cinders 400 feet-high to the great lake of fire (nine miles round) — Kilauea — the home and haunt of the goddess, and flung into the boiling lava the consecrated berries which it was sacrilege for a woman to handle (Ricks 1451).

Tennyson might have come across the story of the Hawaiian chiefess Kapiolani from various sources. Her ascent to the caldera of Kīlauea on 22 December 1824 — a form of social transgression with which she sought to show the falseness of the cult of the much-feared volcano goddess Pele and cement her people’s adherence to the Christian credo, recently introduced to the archipelago — was first reported by the American missionary Levi Chamberlain in a letter to a superior of his in Boston (Engle Merry 44, 48-49). Penned in 1825, the letter was then published in the journal *Missionary Herald* in 1826, but there is no sign that Tennyson was familiar with this document. His correspondence (Ricks 1450-1451), however, indicates that he read the account of Kapiolani’s deeds made by the artist Edward Clifford in an 1889 article on the evangelizer Father Damien that was published as part of a series in the magazine *The Nineteenth Century* (June 1889), the periodical founded and edited by Tennyson’s close friend James Thomas Knowles. Kapiolani’s rebellious act is also recounted in the fourth volume of the fairly popular travelogue *Polynesian Researches* by the English missionary and explorer William Ellis, who also seems to have personally met Kapiolani (Ellis 327). Ellis’s work was published starting from 1829, but Tennyson seemed to own only the first two volumes, although he could also read the complete second edition of this book, published from 1831-1833, from his brother Charles’s library (Campbell 47, 114). By the time he wrote “Kapiolani,” he had already taken Ellis’s work as the inspiration for at least one of his poems, the incredibly successful *Enoch Arden* (1864) (Lang and Shannon 464). Moreover, Charles Tennyson (358, 523) linked his grandfather’s awareness of the story of Kapiolani to his meeting with Queen Emma of the Sandwich Islands (this toponym, indicating the Hawai’i archipelago, was still used at the time). Emma visited Tennyson’s house at Farringford in 1865 and the native songs chanted by two attendants of hers while sitting on the floor of Tennyson’s drawing room seems to have contributed to occasioning the poem decades later. Intriguingly, these two natives, Mr. and Mrs. “Hoapili” (C. Tennyson 358), seemed to share their surname with Kapiolani’s maternal uncle, Ulu-meheihei Hoa-pili (Engle Merry 53), so it is tempting to believe that these might have been relatives of hers and that her story might well have been a subject of conversation, or of song, during the meeting. Further research is nevertheless needed to confirm this kinship.

While all the sources above are likely to have been used by Tennyson, both contextual and, especially, textual evidence seem to suggest that his poem was particularly influenced by Charlotte Mary Yonge's short hagiographic narrative "The Chieftainess and the Volcano," included in her *A Book of Golden Deeds* (1864). This collection of virtuous examples from history and myth was in Tennyson's library (Campbell 34, 107), and the beginning of another narrative in her book, "The Devotion of the Decii," also related to idolatry and divine wrath, inspired his poem "The Victim", privately printed in 1867 (Lang and Shannon 471). Similarly, Tennyson's 'St Telemachus', which opens with the image of volcanic 'fierce ashes' in the air and is included in the same collection as 'Kapiolani', is probably indebted to Yonge's 'The Last Fight in the Colisæum', also published in *A Book of Golden Deeds*. There is therefore little doubt that Tennyson was aware of Yonge's version of Kapiolani's story. Moreover, a number of textual elements indicate that Tennyson modelled his poem primarily on this source, at least with regards to the actions of the Hawaiian leader. The prohibition, or taboo, which Kapiolani publicly violated in order to show that there was no reason to fear Pele's revenge, and even less reason to keep worshipping her, is identified in Tennyson's lyric with both climbing up the volcano, Pele's abode, and with gathering the berries sacred to the goddess. In addition, Tennyson presents this taboo as exclusively affecting women. Different versions of the story offer slightly different depictions of the taboo and Sally Engle Merry (55), in her subtle collation of the most significant of these versions, points out that it was Tennyson who introduced this gender dimension of the forbidden fruit. Merry's essay is well-researched and arguably the definitive publication on Kapiolani, but she does not consider Yonge, thus ignoring the fact the berries had already been described as "sacrilege for one of her sex to touch" in the latter's book (422-423), almost three decades earlier than Tennyson's poem. Like Tennyson, Yonge characterizes the taboo as twofold, comprising both trespassing Pele's "precincts" (422) and handling the berries. And, like Tennyson, she intensifies the force of Kapiolani's profanation by focusing on how the chiefess went as far as flinging the fruits into the crater. Moreover, Tennyson may be seen as following Yonge also in openly presenting the first part of the taboo, the ascent to the crater, as restricted to women.

Of the other versions of the story undoubtedly known to Tennyson, Clifford (871) simply refers to the "sacred ohelo berries" being thrown into the lava pit, but does not give further details about the taboo nor links it specifically to women; Ellis does not even mention the berries in relation to Kapiolani's episode. Interestingly, though, Ellis does indeed expatiate on the forbidden fruits, specifying that they could be eaten only after being offered to the deity (234-235). However, he does not associate this neither with women only nor with Kapiolani. Similarly, he insists on the fact that, as part of the taboo system on the islands, Hawaiian women were not allowed to eat specific types of food (126), and also quotes previous observations on this habit made by James Cook (391). Such correspondences seem to indicate that Yonge probably formed her version of the story by elaborating on the representations of both Kapiolani and the Hawaiian society in Ellis or similar early sources, and that Tennyson later worked out his own version by combining Yonge with other antecedents, some of which Yonge herself might have already taken as a model. In this sense, it is no surprise that Yonge's model was so central to Tennyson. It was far more detailed than Clifford and much more poetically manageable than Ellis, providing a take on the story that was relatively easier to transfer into verse. Standing out for its compactness and expressiveness, as well as a good deal of literary self-awareness, Yonge's antecedent may have helped Tennyson in poeticizing Kapiolani's story. Furthermore, its moral tone may have assisted him in adjusting the story to his own epistemic and ethical concerns.

Tennyson's poem is also notably consistent with Yonge's text in the depiction of the ministers of the cult of Pele. While Clifford does not mention these figures and many other versions of the story, beginning with Chamberlain's letter, represent a single priestess confronting Kapiolani in the vicinity of the crater (Engle Merry 44-53), both Yonge and Tennyson refer to group of male or, at least, not exclusively female priests. Tennyson (Ricks 1452) deploys twice the collective term "priesthood" (the first time with the initial letter capitalized) and Yonge mentions the "priests of Pele" (422-423). Ellis (277) similarly uses the form "devotees," but then he does not mention the berries in relation to Kapiolani, which indicates that it is less likely that Tennyson followed him rather than Yonge. In this respect, this proximity to Yonge is also corroborated by several other linguistic affinities. First, Yonge (421) uses the capitalized phrase "One true Maker" to indicate Christ, which may have inspired Tennyson's evocation of the Christian god as "One from the Sunrise" (Ricks 1452). Normally, these epithets would be too conventional to suggest any form of intertextual connection, but it is worth considering that both texts use them to articulate the same moment of the story, that is, the progress of

Christianity in the Hawaiian archipelago and the resilience of Pele's cult to newly introduced religion. Also, most of the descriptive parts of the poem are remarkably consonant with Yonge. As we shall see below, the picturesque depiction of the "silvery" vapour over the volcano, the evocation of a "flaring forest" (Ricks 1451), the thunder-like noise that accompanies the eruption, and the magma flowing down the mountain towards the sea have all almost identical equivalents in Yonge. Admittedly, similar details occur in many of the sources related to Kapiolani, but Yonge's verbal choices are overall closer to Tennyson's and, most importantly, they are all concentrated, as in his poem, within a small number of consecutive lines.

In singing Kapiolani's story, Tennyson focused on what had arguably been one of the most frequently discussed volcanoes among Western travellers and geologists since the eighteenth century, Kīlauea — also known as "Kirauea" in earlier Anglophone accounts such as Ellis (276) and Chamberlain (42). Located on the southeastern side of the island of Hawai'i, this volcano is "built on the south flank of Mauna Loa . . . and its history is therefore intimately tied to the presence and activity" (Wright 6) of the adjacent, higher, and more ancient volcano (which formerly also went under the name of "Mouna Roa"; see Ellis 267 and Daubeny 327) — indeed, this much-cited structural link is probably what led Tennyson to mistakenly assimilating the two volcanoes in the prose preface to the poem. Although its appearance may have slightly changed throughout the centuries (Wright 20-36), Kīlauea has never stopped being famed for its peculiar morphology as well as its intense activity. The latter of these distinctive features was emphasized by many of the descriptions of the volcano of Tennyson's time and it must have inevitably caught his attention, especially since he had been interested, from his youth, in cataclysmic events and their poetic representations. To give but a few examples that may have stirred his imagination, in the 1855 edition of William Wittich's *Curiosities of Physical Geography*, a book which Tennyson possessed (Campbell 107), Kilauea is hailed as "the most remarkable of the volcanoes of the earth" and compared to Vesuvius for its scientific relevance (390), while Yonge's narrative similarly introduces it as "the largest and most terrible active volcano in the world" (420).

Tennyson's poem captures the violent activity of the volcano primarily by elaborating on its fiery demeanour. Although it also alludes to the seismic and explosive aspects of the eruption, which are metaphorically presented as caused by Pele ("or shake with her thunders and shatter her island"), the poem is mainly concerned with the lava issued by the volcano (Ricks 1451). By tapping into the prosopopoeic origin of the myth of Pele — which may be viewed as a culturally shared personification of the volcano — the release of lava is analogized to the goddess's "fiery" revels and her dancing with her train of "devils" in a "fountain of flame" (1451), a sort of infernal equivalent of the iconographic commonplace of revelling in the (watery) fountain of youth. The conspicuousness and incessancy of Kīlauea's effusive activity is also visualized by conjuring up red hues and luminous phenomena ("lava-light"), as well as, to an extent, blood ("blood-red"), the organic fluid typically associated with negative, destructive states such as war and slaughter (1451). The mobility ("Dance," "shake," "Rolling"), liquidity ("flame-billow," "fountain of flame," "cataracts"), and changefulness of the lava streams are also foregrounded and connected to the equally unpredictable motions of the sea, into which the molten materials sent out by the outraged Pele are said to flow after ravaging the island ("Rolling her anger / Through blasted valley and flaring forest in blood-red cataracts down to the sea") (1451). As an indication of this attention to magmatic flux, in the poem the word "lava" occurs as the first element of two compound nouns, whose stressed position at the end of two consecutive dimeter lines almost results in a rare triple rhyme: "Long as the lava-light / Glares from the lava-lake / Dazing the starlight" (1451-1452). (The effect of this pattern increases the aural flow, indeed, the liquidity, of the lines; and this is all the more so in that the lines involved are short, enjambed, and rich in alliteration of liquid sounds.)

The lava-compounds are instrumental in representing, with painterly vividness, the light that is constantly emitted from the magma on the caldera of Kīlauea, a menacing, reddish halo which is visible especially at night, when it shines brighter than the stars. Both visionary and realistic, this passage testifies to how "Kapiolani" homes in not simply on the volcano's abundant release of magma, but also on some of its more specific tectonic features. Indeed, the image of the "lava-lake" is not only strongly visual, but also morphologically accurate. It successfully evokes Kīlauea's distinctive "summit pit caldera containing a nested pit crater" (Wright 6), a structure that, for much of the history of the volcano, has appeared in large part filled with lava, thus literally resembling a lake

of fire from which magma pours out during eruptions. When particularly violent, these eruptions have been accompanied by the phenomenon of "fountaining" (Wright 89-90), the spurting of geyser-like jets of magma from the caldera, a natural process which is behind Tennyson's personification of the dancing fountain discussed above. Similarly, another key feature of Kīlauea, the "mobile south flank extending seaward" (Wright 6), is hinted at through the image of the lava flowing towards the shore. Additionally, the poem focuses on another lava-related and decidedly pictorial aspect of the volcano, that is, the continuous, slightly ominous presence of "silvery vapour" hovering over its peak ("Long as the silvery vapour in daylight / Over the mountain", 1452).

Tennyson's treatment of Kīlauea's key structures and eruptive patterns dovetails with the descriptions of the volcano in most publications of the time. To give but a few examples from the sources mentioned above, Clifford (874) focuses on the "lake of fire … full of boiling lava", metaphorically visualizing it as a "thick soup" animated by waves of the colour of "coral or of blood" and "not unlike the waves of the sea" as well as by a fiery "fountain" at the centre. He also notes how during the most recent eruption of Kīlauea, that of 1887, "the lava flowed down to the sea in a river" (873). As mentioned above, Yonge (420-421) displays an analogous concern with the "lake of liquid fire", with the image of the "forest in flames", with the vapour hanging "by day like a silvery cloud" over the summit of the mountain, as well as with the almost personified "rivers of boiling lava, blood-red with heat" and "cascades of living fire" devastating the island and pouring into the sea with a "thundering" sound (420-421). Similar details are also in Ellis's account of the volcano (252, 254, 262).

However, as much as it was influenced by these antecedents, the poem's volcanic imagery is neither entirely derivative nor simply decorative. Rather, it is engaged in dialogue with key aspects of Tennyson's poetics, exemplifying his fixation with unstable states of matter. Indeed, the poem's focus on magmatic phenomena reflects the way in which many of Tennyson's works, from "The Lotos-Eaters" to *In Memoriam*, from *Maud* to the late bravura piece "Crossing the Bar," from *The Princess* to "Lucretius," deploy water, fire, gases, and analogous fluid, metamorphic substances as symbols of creation, cyclicity, and eternity, but also as mysterious (if not dangerous) catalysts for change. Rooted in this master trope of Tennyson's verse, the depiction of Kīlauea emblematizes the main aesthetic and philosophical issues of the poem.

More specifically, much of Tennyson's symbolic reworking of Kīlauea's geological features is functional to the representation of the goddess Pele. A mythic personification of the volcano and its flames, Pele was said to live on (or inside) Kīlauea and was traditionally seen as manifesting from various phenomena linked to the volcano. For instance, the glass-like filaments of condensed minerals that can be found in the proximity of the caldera were venerated as her hair, and locals used to claim that they could spot Pele's figure within the lava and flames of the volcano (Ellis 252, 263; Yonge 421). Building on these mythical configurations, Tennyson evoked Pele by metaphorizing (and anthropomorphizing) the flaming materials and seismic effects produced by the volcano, as noted above. As in practically all versions of Kapiolani's story, in his poem Pele is characterized negatively, being connoted as a "terrible" entity, a whimsical "demon" ready to wreak havoc on the country, a wrathful "Spirit of Evil" which Kapiolani finally managed to oust from the island (Ricks 1451-1452). In this sense, the poem clearly presents Pele as the last remnant of a devilish pagan cult and opposes it to the titular "island heroine," whose faith in the Christian god was so indomitable as to dare to challenge the destructive force of the volcano (1451). By adopting (and possibly radicalizing) the Westernized, orientalist perspective that is typical of most accounts of Kapiolani's rebellion, Tennyson's poem identifies the Hawaiian chiefess with a Christian martyr, whereas Pele is assimilated to an infernal monster. For her part, Kapiolani (1451-1452) is lauded as the "Great and greater, and greatest of women," who liberated her people from the heathen beliefs of the past by breaking the most powerful Hawaiian taboo, the only one still standing on the island ("freed the people", "broke the Taboo"). Tellingly, the poem draws a domesticating historical parallel between Kapiolani and the first English person who rejected paganism to espouse Christianity ("Noble the Saxon who hurled at his Idol a valorous weapon in olden England", 1451). As pointed out by Owen Clayton (101-103) and Engle Merry (55), Kapiolani is therefore also celebrated by Tennyson as a paradigm of British (female) virtue and, at least implicitly, as a success of Anglo-Saxon and Protestant imperialism, with her defiance of the priests of the goddess supposedly hinting at the Reformed opposition to Catholic priests.

Rooted in a form of cultural supremacism, Tennyson's poem gives much prominence to Kapiolani's strength over Pele. Indeed, it is evident from the beginning of the text that Kapiolani is destined to triumph over the pagan goddess. The prose preface leaves little doubt as to the outcome of the story ("She won the cause of Christianity"), giving no agency to Pele, but only to her priests, who are presented as the only force that tried to stop Kapiolani (Ricks 1451). By contrast, the poem proper seems to invest Pele with some degree of power, offering a colourful depiction of the much-feared, catastrophic consequences of her vengeance. However, her amount of agency is, in truth, rather limited, if not purely imaginary. The goddess is exposed, from the very first line, as a false deity, the epitome of the foolish taboo system regulating social life on the island: "When from the terrors of Nature a people have fashioned and worship a Spirit of Evil" (1451). Even before being characterized as a menace, Pele is introduced as nothing more than a superstition, a fantasy which a people ignorant of Christ had created by misreading the most dangerous aspects of nature. The threat posed by her cruelty is minimized from the start in that her existence itself is immediately questioned. Just as Kapiolani's transgression succeeded in disempowering Pele's authority over the islands, so many of the poem's linguistic and conceptual choices are therefore geared towards downplaying the goddess's strength. Her actions and even her existence are only postulated from a hypothetical, subjective point of view. The opening of the poem dismisses her as a product of superstition and the apocalyptic effects of her revenge, introduced by the structure "A people believing that" (Ricks 1451), are only reported as an untruthful opinion.

If Pele is unquestionably seen negatively, the volcano itself is not. As noted above, the sinister metaphorical portrayal of Kīlauea's eruption in the third stanza is presented not as a fact, but as a false belief of the tribe. Typifying the "terrors of Nature," the volcano is admittedly terrifying, but should not be considered to be evil, Tennyson's poem seems to argue. A decidedly positive view of Kīlauea informs stanza 4, where the volcano is envisaged not as diabolical manifestation, but as the very (Christian) monument of the "glory" of Kapiolani (1452). As enduring as both the lava shining on the caldera and the vapour constantly floating over the summit, Kapiolani's everlasting fame is sung as inextricably "mingled" with the "mountain" (1452). Extending over the whole six-line stanza, this convolute comparison is multilayered and particularly meaningful. On a first level, it seems to deify Kapiolani, almost replacing Pele with her as the female spirit dwelling in the mountain. From a perspective that is closer to Tennyson's Christian thought, however, the long comparison ultimately points towards a connection between God — which is the origin of Kapiolani's sanctification — and the incessant volcanic activity of Kīlauea. Rather than casting a negative light on the volcano, the poem thus shares Kapiolani's opinion that Kīlauea should not be worshipped as a volatile goddess, but accepted as part of a world created by God and subject to his will. The fear of the volcano should not give rise to a religion of terror and rather be dispelled by a stronger feeling of adoration for the only deity that governs all natural phenomena. Even though this is only implied in "Kapiolani," the idea that the awe of nature should not degenerate into paralyzing terror is fully developed in another poem from the same collection, "Faith," which exhorts readers to no longer "quail" before "the fiery mountain" and other calamities, nor let "all that saddens Nature" shake their belief in a positive divine plan and in the existence of a "higher" life after death (Ricks 1455).

In this light, the religious change brought about by Kapiolani is not only conducive to a fairer, more ethical society — where discriminatory and vexing rules, and the tyrannical priests who enforced them, are abolished; it also leads to an advancement in the understanding of the natural world. Indeed, the poem's Christian reconsideration of the volcano is much likely to be rich in scientific implications, especially if it is read against Tennyson's poetics and thinking. As is well known, Tennyson was no less a poet of science than of faith, and his passion for geology has become proverbial. His representation of the process of conversion culminating in Kapiolani's deeds may therefore also be read as entailing a progress from a primitive, superstitious view of natural phenomena to a Christian *and* scientific one. In this respect, Kapiolani's apparent victory over the geological forces governing Kīlauea may signify that the new conception of the universe championed by the poem offers not only a theologically truer and less socially oppressive alternative to idolatry, but also a far more effective way of interpreting nature and dealing with natural risks.

Part of a series of late poems on religious subjects, both "Kapiolani" and its closely related "Faith" may be seen as adding to Tennyson's lifelong concern with geological processes, the evolution of the cosmos, and the role of humanity in the universe. In representing and/or re-orienting human

interaction with volcanic phenomena, these lyrics offer a perspective on geology that differs from some of Tennyson's late poems and harks back to the geological thinking worked out in his earlier verse. More particularly, irrespective of the extent to which this corresponds to Tennyson's own ideas, the conception of geology underpinned by "Kapiolani" seems not merely to diverge from the cosmic "pessimism" that scholars have linked to his reception of Lord Kelvin's theories and associated with some of his later verse (Purton and Page 90; Dean 24-26), but it may even be viewed as overcoming the contrast between teleological thinking and uniformitarianism that is typical of the poems of his middle years (for Tennyson and geology, in addition to the references above, see also Lockyer and Lockyer 11-65, Snyder, and Geric). While his mid-century masterpieces, *The Princess*, *In Memoriam*, and *Maud*, variously stage a rather ambiguous dialectic between Charles Lyell's uniformitarian, non-progressive view of nature and Christian (and post-Romantic) teleology, "Kapiolani" is more adamant in positing a progressive conception of natural change. As discussed above, rather than being depicted as a purposeless phenomenon, separated from the destiny of humankind, the geological entity in the poem, Kīlauea, is tied to human virtue, and reconducted to divine creation and design; it is therefore firmly inscribed within a providential reading of human and cosmic history. In this respect, the very success of Kapiolani's actions may also be interpreted as betokening the existence of a process of improvement in nature. By celebrating the epistemic advancement from a superstitious, animistic veneration of the volcano to a Christian and rational appreciation of it, the poem almost seems to presuppose the existence of a more general progressive tendency in the history of the planet.

The poem's optimism about cosmic teleology runs alongside a specific conception of the poetic medium. Scholars such as Isobel Armstrong (247-277) and Michelle Geric have explored the deep intersections between geology and poetry in Tennyson's oeuvre, showing how many of his works dramatize, indeed seek to bridge over, a quintessentially Victorian clash between (post-)Coleridgean conceptions of words as "living powers" (Hair 22) symbolically connected to things, on the one hand, and the uniformitarian tenet of the absence of purpose in the world, on the other. In the texts and discourses that exemplify this tendency, the belief in the mimetic and expressive abilities of (poetic) language usually depends on a more general assumption of some form of teleology in nature. If analyzed from this perspective, a text like "Kapiolani," which implies the existence of natural progress, may therefore be seen as advocating a particular faith in the power of language. This hypothesis is corroborated both at a conceptual and a formal level. Conceptually, it is worth noting how utterances and voices are given absolute centrality in the text, being represented as powerful instruments for change. Whether it belongs to Kapiolani, to Anglophone Protestant missionaries, or to Christ, the "Voice of the Teacher" that is praised as liberating Hawaiians from superstition is given pride of place at the end of the first stanza, where it is reported through direct speech and graphically isolated within the first short line of the poem: "'Set yourselves free!'" (Ricks 1451). Direct speech also introduces the ineffectual threats of the priests, to which is dedicated almost the entirety of stanza 5. Finally, the closing strophe features the voice of Kapiolani herself, presenting her verbal provocation against Pele as a key element of her violation of the taboo.

Formally, the poem's confidence in the creative possibilities of language manifests itself in a high degree of stylistic experimentation. In one of the few critical contributions on Tennyson that pay attention to "Kapiolani," Jason Nabi (192-195) has emphasized the avant-gardism of the poem's metre, pointing out its complex handling of line-lengths and its relationships with free verse. While this focus on the formal innovativeness of the poem holds true, I contend that its originality lies less in prefiguring modernist developments of Western poetry than in reworking the age-worn conventions of epideictic verse. Indeed, most of the stylistic peculiarities of the poem are functional to celebrating Kapiolani's revolution. The formal organization of the poem perfectly mirrors its panegyric purpose and almost amounts to a new form of hymnody. In terms of metrical structure, the poem consists of six stanzas of different lengths (made respectively of 3, 4, 5, 6, 5, and 10 lines). Like the stanzas, also the lines are heterogenous, containing either eight, four, or two beats, and are arranged in no fixed order within the stanzas. The rhythm is mostly dactylic, with a predominance of double offbeats, but many lines are catalectic. Overall, this carefully handled triple metre results in a swift, song-like rhythm that is somewhat reminiscent of the four-beat patterns typical of English hymns.

This rhythmic vicinity to prayers and encomiastic poetry, which is in tune with the subject matter and conceptual implications of "Kapiolani," is also fostered by other formal features. Like hymnic and celebratory verse, the poem is incredibly rich in exclamations, with four out of six stanzas terminating

with exclamation marks (although not technically closed by this type of punctuation, the syntactical and lexical configuration of stanza 4 also allows for an exclamatory reading). Moreover, the poem is replete with repetitions of phonemes, words (especially adjectives), and phrases, and is often organized in parallel structures. A key example of these iterative patterns is the incantatory rhyming of the final lines of each stanza with each other, a device which almost operates as a refrain, thus intensifying the aural closeness to a prayer. Articulated by means of these stylistic traits, the sound of the poem is evocative of the ritual words uttered by Kapiolani as well as of the prayers that are recited by her followers before the crater in some versions of her story (Ellis 277).

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Created: 2025-07-15 | Last Updated: 2025-11-21