

**THE POLITICS OF POETRY ON THE HORN OF AFRICA:
A CASE STUDY IN THE DYNAMICS
OF MACRO-LEVEL AND MICRO-LEVEL TRADITION**

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Invited lecture in the series:
**ART AND POLITICS IN SIX CULTURES
Six Open Lectures & a Graduate Seminar
Department of Anthropology
Humanities Foundation
Department of History
University Professors Program
African Studies Center
Asian Development Center
Boston University
21 January, 1987**

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Any traveler to the Somali Democratic Republic today might be intrigued by the particular items that customs officials look for in the luggage they check through at the ports of entry. Among the items which one might not expect the authorities to search for are cassette tapes. Why should a cassette tape be considered potentially subversive to these officials? The answer lies in the fact that Somalis support a tradition of rendering to verse their most profound feelings and opinions in the political and social arenas of their lives. In those parts of the world where Somalis can be found today, there is a dramatic manifestation of this political poetic tradition in the form of what Somalis call *silsilaad*. This term comes into Somali from Arabic and means "chain," in its use here, "chain of poems." Verse which supports the present government and that which criticizes it can be found in this *silsilaad*, and I have been told that in actual numbers, there are over 150 individual poems in the present chain.

A tradition where the government is so sensitive to the uses of oral literature in such a serious social context as politics is the stuff upon which folklorists' research dreams are made. Moreover, an important theoretical question in the sociology of oral literature can potentially be answered by research into Somali verbal art, and that is this: what is the relationship between form and social behavior? Let me explain.

Somalis are obsessed with the notion that their poetry must

employ a strenuous set of scansion rules and that when a specific poem is recited or sung in public, it must be reproduced verbatim. When a poem on a political topic does not scan properly, or when it is thought to have been manipulated or changed from its original form by its current reciter, he is chastised or ridiculed and his message is not taken seriously. And there are always people in a crowd to "correct" any lines considered incorrect by experts. Why is this obsession with form so important to Somalis and what is its relationship to their social behavior? I hope to suggest a solution to this question this afternoon, and I would also like to suggest that the study of Somali poetry can contribute to broader theoretical issues in my discipline of folkloristics and in the humanities and social sciences in general. Let me elucidate a bit on some of the implications of this question.

Somali poetic tradition is somewhat of an enigma to at least two current theories concerning oral literature. One of the most prominent theories concerning the composition and performance of oral poetry today is the *Oral-formulaic or Parry/Lord Thesis*. Milman Parry and later Albert Lord, both professors at Harvard University and both dealing with the recorded epic poetry of Homer and the living epic of southern Yugoslavia, have shown that at least one form of oral data, that of epic poetry, is indeed recreated each time it is recited. An important theoretical question here is this: is the Somali poem a once-created, often-repeated text, or is it recreated each time it is recited? Obviously, each time a Somali poem is recited, it is physically recreated, but the crucial question is this: *is it*

recomposed? Such a question has important social implications particularly in the area of politics. All the evidence to date points to the once-created view, a view which is unpopular with scholars embracing the oral-formulaic thesis. However, the collaborative research between me and a Somali colleague, Cabdullaahi Diiriye Guuleed has led us to the conclusion that Somalis do indeed attempt to memorize their poetry. Let me quickly explain.

Our study of *Koofil*, a poem composed by the Somali national hero, the Sayyid Maxammed Cabdille Xasan, indicates that only minor portions of that poem differ when comparing different variants collected over the years. I have analyzed these differences in detail, and time does not permit a detailed discussion of them here, but you may study them at your leisure on the handout I have provided for you today. Dialect differences exist, but are not important to the question of recomposition. Some differences in grammatical use can be found. Minor morphological differences exist, but all changes which are made scan within the extremely tight rules of Somali metrics. Conclusions on the reality of verbatim memorization to date may be represented by B. W. Andrzejewski's use of the term, the *goal of verbatim memorization*, which argues for the intent of reproduction and not of recomposition. Although this technical question is not yet solved completely, a great deal of evidence has been found to support it. It is in fact a major research question I plan to pursue in Somalia this year. I am in fact on my way to spend a year's research leave there next week.

To return to theories concerning oral literature, the other theory to which the Somali tradition also appears enigmatic on the surface is the *performance-centered* focus of the school of folklore called *contextualism*. Performance theory argues that folklore forms are deliberately manipulated and changed to fit new social contexts in which they are used. The crucial question here is this: *can a Somali poem with political and perhaps historical content be changed to fit the new political situation?* Or, since the poem is once-created and expected to be delivered verbatim, can it only be used to argue one point of view? While the Somali tradition is not explained very well by the oral-formulaic thesis, performance theory can indeed be used to explain it. Theories in the sociology of literature have progressed beyond mere formal analysis, and the work of several scholars such as Richard Handler, Jocelyn Linnekin, Roger Janelli, and Richard Schechner are very helpful in understanding issues surrounding the enigma of Somali poetry.

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But before tackling any of these issues, I think it might be helpful if I presented some background about the Somali nation and the Horn of Africa. The territory of the Somali Democratic Republic is about the size of Texas. If one does not include the Somali territories inside Kenya, Ethiopia, and Djibouti, the population of Somalia is often cited at around five million. As a nation, Somalia is almost unique in Africa, because it is a multi-state ethnic group, as opposed to a multi-ethnic state. Somalis occupy the entire Horn of Africa, but for reasons of colonial conquest, the frontiers of the Somali Democratic

Republic do not go as far as its people.

Although the Somalis represent a single ethnic block as far as social identity is concerned, there is considerable cultural diversity within this unity. Of the approximately five million Somalis who live on the Horn of Africa, most are seasonal nomadic herders, caring for camels, sheep, and goats, and in some places cattle and horses. The nomadic population occupies all of the eastern Horn except for the coast and the area between the two main rivers of the country, the Shabeelle and the Jubba. The seasonal migration based on rainfall separates the men from the women and children, as men must take camels deep into the countryside where rainfall is not as critical to the animals' well being as it is for the other livestock. By contrast, the sheep and goats must remain closer to the watering stations, and they are herded by women and children.

Between the Shabeelle and Jubba rivers live those Somalis who practice agriculture, sometimes in combination with livestock rearing. Here a different group of Somali dialects is spoken, and a social organization different from that of the nomads is found. These Somalis practice a variety of agriculture which begins with firing the land for clearing. Formerly, animals were not used for plowing by all Somali farmers, but today the tractor is a common sight in this area. Since frequent travel is not the problem here as it is with the nomads, settlement is more permanent.

An old, mercantile culture can be found in cities along the coast from just north of the coastal capital Muqdishu and

continuing to the south. These cities, mainly Muqdishu, Marka, and Baraawe, have rich traditions of DHOW trade with Arabia, India, and even the far east. Historically, this region, known as the Benaadir Coast, was a part of the larger Swahili-speaking culture that stretches as far south as the middle of Mozambique, rarely penetrating very far inland. Swahili, in fact, survives today in a speech island in and around the city of Baraawe. Any visitor in Somalia quickly recognizes that the window and door carvings on the buildings, as well as a host of other material arts, are of similar style to those of places like Mombassa and the island of Zanzibar.

I should point out that today these cities also include communities of Somalis from all regions of the country, plus older communities of Arab and Persian immigrants. Some of the traditions in Mogadishu and the Afgooye area inland from it, such as the annual new year celebrations of the *istun* stick fights, are shared with other non-contiguous groups throughout east Africa. Evidence suggests that these new year celebrations practiced in this region of Somalia are similar to that in ancient Persia, suggesting migrations of a very early age. More than any other region of Somalia, the coastline has been the conduit of cultural exchange and borrowing. Ideas from abroad have entered Somali society here and Somali ideas have been exported from here.

I think it is probably unnecessary also to point out that Somalia today has her share of trained bureaucrats, auto mechanics, plumbers, electricians, and middle class shop keepers. Overland trade and commerce is part of the modern scene, as is

the Somali National University and a new and growing fishing industry. Somali pilots fly the planes in the national airline company, and Somali engineers, announcers, and administrators run the national radio stations in Hargeysa and Muqdishu, which, I might add, often broadcast live and taped recordings of Somali poetry.

Somali poetry overarches all other forms of artistic expression in the country. It is no exaggeration to stress the importance of this poetic tradition in the daily lives of Somalis, although I have been accused of doing just that. My first occasion ever to speak about Somali poetic tradition was in 1969 shortly after my first fieldwork in that country. When I arrived as a student at the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London I was asked by the chairman of the Department of African Languages and Cultures to address the faculty on the topic of my field research in Somalia. After my talk, one of the senior scholars stood up in an obviously very agitated state and made the following comment (words to the effect). "Poetry, poetry, poetry!" he said. "You and Andrzejewski are always going on about poetry in Somalia. You'd think the blinking Somalis ordered their bloody tea in verse!" My tutor, Prof. Andrzejewski and I did not entirely disagree with the man's facetious comments. What was involved here was a difference in expectations concerning the proper use of poetry, a point to which I will return later.

In order to understand this difference of expectations, let me refer you to Ali Mazrui's recent television series entitled *The Africans: A Triple Heritage*, and to his book by the same

name. In an attempt to explain this difference of expectations, Mazrui makes an interesting contrast between the Western poetic tradition and the Swahili one. He introduces this contrast by referring to a point of view expressed in the first major work in the Romantic Period of the English poetic tradition, *Lyrical Ballads*, by William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, published in 1798. Let me expand a bit on Mazrui's comments.

In the introduction to the book on Romantic verse, the authors object to the flowery and overly stylized language employed by the poets of their day, causing poetry to appear to them insincere and too far removed from real human emotion. Mazrui states that the poets felt "poetry should approximate ... the ordinary language of conversation." He goes on to say that "in Swahili culture there is a school of thought which would argue that ordinary conversation should try to approximate the elegant language of poetry." Although he does not choose a Somali as an example in his book, it is interesting that in the film he demonstrates how this different expectation in the use of poetry is actualized by showing a Somali poet chanting a political poem in a crowd. Mazrui was attracted to the Somali tradition for good reason, as have been many other scholars. Academic interest in Somali poetry, both in Somalia and in the West is and has been, the subject of study for quite some time, and again for good reason. As I stated earlier, the theoretical question concerning the relationship between form and social behavior can potentially be answered by research into Somali verbal art. I should like to turn now to the larger issues and

theoretical implications of Somali metrics upon a general theory of oral literature.

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As stated above, Somalis possess a poetic tradition which is of great interest to theoreticians of oral literature, as some of their genres represent an enigmatic system not yet fully exposed to Western thought. Indeed, what students like myself and my mentor B. W. Andrzejewski, as well as a number of Somali and other European scholars, have claimed about Somali poetry over the years is the subject of a theoretical controversy in the school of folkloristics which embraces the oral-formulaic or Parry/Lord thesis mentioned earlier. What I should like to do here is to present a bit of the background to this controversy in order to illustrate how the composition and performance of Somali poetry may be considered different from those traditions described by the oral-formulaic thesis. Moreover, a related theoretical problem in the discipline of folkloristics, the on going debate on the nature of the concept of *tradition*, will also shed some light on our views about the practice and performance of Somali poetry.

In order to understand the process of tradition in the societies they have studied, many folklorists have been oriented toward the study of oral texts as one of the main conduits through which tradition is manifested, and over the years they have changed their minds about the nature of the text and in the variations in them they have found. Older views in the Historical-Geographical School of folkloristics considered change to be a negative and corrupting influence on tradition, a

deterioration of an older, purer form. Change was described in such negative terms as forgetfulness and/or misunderstanding during diffusion. The dominant view of composition at the time held that people were not very creative. They were only capable of carrying on tradition. The text was seen as a once-created, often-repeated, and above all, *old* form. If these conditions were not met, the text was considered recent and not a part of the authentic traditional lore of the folk.

From ballad scholarship came an idea first proposed by Philips Barry and later perfected by Gordon Gerould. In Gerould's book, *The Ballad of Tradition*, published in 1932, he proposed the *theory of communal recreation*, stating that a ballad text did indeed have a single origin but was "recomposed," and thereby possibly changed, even if only slightly, by each singer who became involved in its diffusion. Now you have to understand what this folklorist meant by "recomposition." He considered the text, collected at any point in the life of its diffusion to be a composite text of communal recreation, a collective product of the folk. Change was not negative; it was the result of this collective recomposition.

Another challenge to the view that change was negative came from Carl von Sydow, whose theory of the *oyketying* of folktales argued that change was a "reconstruction" for local cultural consumption. Germans might tell the story of Cinderella in a way more meaningful to a German audience, and the French and others would do likewise. A quick example is the fact that the French, who apparently had great difficulties in the Middle Ages feeding

themselves, might reward the heroes and heroines at the end of a tale with a great feast, while the German variant of the same *maerchen*, or fairy tale, might end in a wedding, where the lowly peasant gets the royal prince or princess as a reward for valor. Von Sydow's view of change involved a "cultural retranslation."

The next most important theory to emerge was the oral-formulaic, or Parry/Lord thesis. Milman Parry and Albert Lord postulated that change was due to individual, not communal reconstruction. They held that each time the text was performed, even by the same raconteur, it was completely recreated. Texts were never merely passed on; they were always reshaped. Using a methodology of morpheme by morpheme and line by line comparison of variants of the same poem composed by the same bard at different times and by different bards singing the same poem, these scholars have shown that epic poetry is indeed recreated each time it is recited.

To get to the next step in this progression of ideas, we must now turn to a parallel progression of ideas concerned with the study of tradition as a concept, and again views of the nature of change are important. For a long time in folkloristics tradition was defined as a body of knowledge passed down from generation to generation by word of mouth or by imitation. This definition has recently come under fire from another set of scholars, perhaps most articulately represented by Richard Handler and Jocelyn Linnekin. In an article in the *Journal of American Folklore* in 1984 entitled "Tradition, Genuine or Spurious?" Handler and Linnekin argue that tradition must be understood as a set of wholly symbolic constructs, and that there

is nothing *natural* about it. They also postulate that, as an interpretive construct, tradition is composed of elements of both *continuity* and *change*. They state that tradition is passed to individuals in both a formalistic and a symbolic state, each of which undergoes change over time. Although, they attack another scholar who has recently published a seminal study of tradition, Edward Shils, they do agree with him in stating that tradition may come from the past, but it is *of the present*. It is a contemporary set of constructs which influence the behavior of its practitioners and is used to argue about the past, not to reconstruct it perfectly. The illusion that it is a flawless memory of the past is just that, an illusion. In reality, it is a contextually-bound interpretation of the past for use in the present, and change is an integral part of it.

In an article published earlier, Roger Janelli, a colleague of mine at Indiana University, anticipated the conclusions in Handler and Linnekin's article. In a pioneering piece in the *Folklore Forum* in 1976, Janelli attempted to reconcile the older definition of tradition as a body of handed-down knowledge with some of the newer arguments from the performance-centered focus of the contextualist school in folkloristics. If tradition is not an inherited body of knowledge in the real world, Janelli asked, "how is it...that we can recognize textual or plot stability over centuries if each folkloric performance is unique to the immediate context in which it occurs?" On the surface, this question almost appears to be a challenge to Handler and Linnekin's views, but it is in fact an attempt at reconciliation

of opposing extreme views. Janelli attempts to reconcile the question with two levels of causality, which operate to produce the products of tradition. He calls these levels the *macro-level* and the *micro-level* of tradition. Let me describe these levels using my own understanding of, and additions to, his views.

It is common for members of a folk group to hold the view that they possess a collective memory of the past. But in the real world, groups cannot have memories; only individuals can. The social process of tradition thus results from each member relying upon his or her own memory and discussing and debating each given situation as it arises. This endeavor constitutes the process of tradition and its resulting products, which Shilds calls *tradita* (sing. *traditum*). In the real world, then, tradition represents not so much an actual body of knowledge, but instead a form of group behavior involving the interaction of all of the participating members of the group relying on their own individual memories in an attempt to reconstruct what they think happened in the past and including not only their agreements but also their disagreements and resulting compromises. It is during the performance of these forms that this process occurs, often invariably leading to unstandardized multiple variation in the *tradita* and in the resulting behavior associated with it. The collective memory of the folk and of the older definition of tradition is thus an illusion. It is this illusion, this fiction, that Janelli calls the *macro-level of tradition*. Because there may be a great deal of agreement about how to perform a *traditum*, the illusion is fairly strong and *tradita* may change so slowly that the folk group does not even notice the

changes.

Janelli calls the performance level of tradition, where the renegotiated *traditum* is actually conducted and debated using the individual memories of its practitioners, the *micro-level*. Put another way, *macro-level tradition* is a fictive notion held by individual members of a group who think it to be the inherited body of lore which has been passed down from generation to generation by word of mouth or by imitation. *Micro-level tradition* is the symbolic social interaction of tradition at the performance level, in which memories of past performances of tradition are reconstructed and renegotiated among the active bearers of tradition and their audiences.

Richard Schechner, in his recent book *From Theater to Anthropology*, employs the term "restoration behavior" for this act. For him, tradition may be seen as a process of restoring a remembered form of behavior to a contemporary shape, form, and meaning by the act of recreating it in a performance or a rehearsal of a performance. Working within a remembered "set of rules" or literary conventions, the individual recreates a tradition, but at the same time, influences the various ways it will be remembered in the future, which is another important point. As soon as a *traditum* is reconstructed from the memories of its bearers and performed, perhaps being innovated to some degree, the new performance then becomes a part of the memories of the participants again at the macro-level, and will potentially influence a future performance. The potential for change thus occurs in every single performance of a *traditum*.

For the most part these arguments deal with the *lore* of folklore but not with the *folk*. It might be helpful if I developed this definition of tradition a bit further by stating my own position. In my view, tradition is a form of learned behavior. It is not information deduced from reason or logic. It is not information that one learns by oneself. And it is not a part of instinctive behavior, although it is bound by human limitations and possibilities. But it does not encompass all of what people learn. This learned behavior contributes to group identity by verbalizing the group's beliefs and worldview through the conduit of the lore. If one has learned most of what one knows from members of one's group, it only stands to reason that what one has learned will reflect the concerns and worldview of those members. In turn, as a member of the group, one's own views influence the macro-level of the tradition the group members possess together. This idea of groupness is important to the practice of tradition, because, through normative behavior, it facilitates the recognition of form Janelli writes about.

I have covered a lot of theory here, so let me quickly summarize. Scholars through the years have changed their minds about the nature of the text and of changes which occur in its diffusion. A shift has occurred beginning with the theory that the text was created once and diffused to others in the same society, to other societies, and to other generations, in basically the same form. Any change in the text was considered a negative deterioration of forgetfulness and misunderstanding. Later views held that the text was recreated in a chain of diffusion from one raconteur to the next, resulting in a communal

composition. Parallel views postulated that communally composed texts reflected the regional ethnic worldviews of their groups. Still later arguments held that although the text was indeed recreated each time it was recited, change was due to the act of individual composition by the raconteur, because the text was performed at the same time it was recited, thus leading to variation in its form. Most recent views picture change as an integral part of tradition and caused by the situations in which the text is recited. Change is now seen as a deliberate way of making the text more relevant to the context and to the audience for which it is intended, although the group practicing the tradition may not notice innovation as change at all. The illusion of changelessness in tradition is viewed as a macro-level of causality, while the actual performance of tradition is viewed as a micro-level of causality. And it is here we might ask that if Somali poetry is recited in a verbatim or near verbatim form, how can it be employed in the many contexts in which it is recited?

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It is clear that the macro-level of Somali verbal art represents sets of complex *expectations* dealing with literary and social conventions concerning the performance of oral art. Somali poets, memorizer/reciters, and audience members alike share these overlapping individual sets of expectations, indeed this sense of what is proper and fitting for artistic verbal creativity. The heated debates on literary matters one hears in the tea shops and at other social gathering places in Somalia

make it clear that there is both agreement and disagreement as to the specifics of these conventions at the macro-level of Somali poetic tradition. In order to approach an answer to the question of the relationship between form and social behavior I should like to explore both the formal and the social expectations at the macro-level of the Somali poetic tradition and demonstrate with examples how they are realized at the micro-level.

An overwhelmingly prevalent macro-level expectation concerns Somali notions of accuracy. One of the ways this expectation is manifested is in the custom of citing the poet by name before the recitation of any poem. In his book on the Somali national hero mentioned earlier, the Sayyid Maxammed Cabdille Xasan, Said Sheikh Samatar refers to this expectation as an "unwritten copyright law," and he cites an interesting example of its violation and the resulting social reaction. One of the major contexts for the recitation of poetry in Somalia is during a session of qaat chewing. Qaat is a green leaf chewed in East Africa and the Yemen for its stimulating effects. During one such session in which Said was present, a young poet was reciting with such skill that the audience was enthralled, but in the midst of his performance, an elder Somali in one corner of the room shouted out: "Liar -- thou art a liar and a charlatan." An uneasy silence ensued among the company of all-male chewers.

At long last the poet inquired, 'Who?'
'Thou,' the elder responded.
'Why do you insult, uncle?'
'Because thou claimest what thou hast not labored for.'
'I only claimed what is mine.'

After a repetition of some of the lines of the poem by the elder, who did indeed know parts of it, the young would be poet left the room, and the men later inquired of other town elders as to the veracity of the first elder's claim. Because they were able to recite the debated lines verbatim, it was easily determined that the poem belonged to Ugaas Nuur, a mid nineteenth century ruler in northwestern Somalia. Said concluded the episode as follows:

So the amiable [elder] was vindicated; as for the poet, rumor had it that, far from attempting to take legal action [against the elder, as he had threatened], he left town in a hurry rather than linger around to face the laughter and ridicule which were certain to greet him upon discovery of his unsuccessful antics.

Verbatim reproduction of a poet's work, like stated authorship of that work, is an important manifestation of Somali notions of accuracy. Verbal messages are often sent in Somalia in poetic form and sometimes have to be given to a stranger to deliver. The message is recited to the carrier until he or she has it memorized, and the messenger is often asked to repeat the poem until satisfaction on the part of the person wanting to send the message is met. In order to maintain secrecy, the poet will employ veiled speech with which to deliver his or her message, a system called the "oral envelope" by Andrzejewski. Somali poetry and rhetoric in general is permeated with veiled speech, and is often an important technique when politics is the topic of a poem, as I shall illustrate below.

Verbatim reproduction of poetry is made possible by the incredibly complex scansion rules of Somali classical verse, one rule of which involves the rhyme scheme. Somali classical poetry

alliterates with only one sound, a sound here defined as a single consonant or all the vowels together. Another example from Said's study will illustrate the relationship between form and social behavior. In his twenty-year struggle against ^{the} colonial ~~the~~ powers which occupied his country, the Sayyid Maxammed Cabdille Xasan often sent messages to his enemies, both foreign and Somali, in verse. His Somali enemies sometimes answered in *silsilaad* fashion mentioned at the first of this paper. In a poetic diatribe against the poet Cali Jaamac Haabiil, with whom he frequently debated, the Sayyid composed a line which Said translates as follows:

Call you this Italian-infidel a Mahdi? How puzzling the
[thought.]

This passage was first translated in the early part of this century by an Italian Roman Catholic priest who was offended by the snide remark about his countryman. His attempt to change the word Italian ('Talyaani' in Somali) to Jew ('Yahuudi'), however, was easily discovered by Somalis because the poem alliterated in "T."

Another set of literary expectations at the macro-level of this tradition is the imagery employed in pastoralist poetry. This expectation is best described in what I propose to call the *Premise of Environmental Semiotics*, which states that groups tend to employ their environment and its folklife as symbols in its folklore. This premise attempts to codify what folklorists mean when they say that a group's worldview or culture is reflected in its folklore or by its tradition. This is not to say that

environment causes oral literature to take the shape it does; it merely provides potential symbolism for use by creative raconteurs. And in the Somali case, specific pastoralist symbols in their poetry are expected to maintain a certain semantic continuity. The late, great Somali scholar Muuse Xaaji Ismaaciil Galaal used to divide Somali poetic images into two main groups, the "wet" images and the "dry" images. With a few exceptions, most of the symbols used in pastoralist poetry that derive from the rainy season are positive, while drought provides many negative symbols. At the micro-level of this tradition, however, when a poem is composed, it is the skillful use of this set imagery that constitutes creativity. A poem will illustrate this point.

The social background to this poem is very interesting. It was composed in late 1960 or early 1961 and is really a shining example of veiled speech. The poet claimed that his verse concerned a bad marriage match, the literal meaning of the first stanza, and further that stanzas two through five were metaphors supporting the first stanza. Government officials, however, saw the entire poem as a metaphor criticizing the 1960 political unification of the former British Somaliland Protectorate and the country with surely the longest name in history, the United Nations Trusteeship Territory of Somalia Under Italian Administration. The poem goes as follows.

Haweeyoo geyaanoo, gacal igula taliyaa,
Garbo ii hillaacdoon, sii daayay gacantee,
Anigaysu geystoo, galabsaday xumaantee,
Wixii ila garaadow, gobannimo ha tuurina....

When [my] kinsmen advised me [to wed] Haweeyo, who is
marriageable to me,
Lightning flashed for me by a precipice and I stretched
out [my] hand [towards it].
'Tis I who brought [this] evil upon myself;
All ye who think as I do, do not cast aside [your]
freedom.

While you keep camels which have just given birth in a
prosperous camp,
[You should] not arrange a move and travel into a drought.
'Tis I who brought [this] evil upon myself;
All ye who think as I do, do not cast aside [your]
freedom.

You who are lean and whom hunger grips
Should not o'erturn your frothing milk vessel.
'Tis I who brought [this] evil upon myself;
All ye who think as I do, do not cast aside [your]
freedom.

When I sharpened the axe, I cut my own joint;
My senses left me--I have missed the good things [of life].
'Tis I who brought [this] evil upon myself;
All ye who think as I do, do not cast aside [your]
freedom.

The Fate which I sealed for myself halted me in that place;
I will take counsel from no one, for the matter is special
to me.
'Tis I who brought [this] evil upon myself;
All ye who think as I do, do not cast aside [your]
freedom.

Here we see at the micro-level the individual poet's genius
at manipulating macro-level images to fit a social context of
political controversy. At the micro-level of tradition,
creativity is measured on one plain by how far the poet can
manipulate or even deviate from the expected literary
conventions. Thus, it is the aspiration of a poet to introduce
innovation at the micro-level within the constraints of the
literary conventions at the macro-level.

It must be the ultimate aspiration for a poet to become
known as the innovator of a completely new genre of poetry. I

know several ways this can be accomplished by formal manipulation. One of the traits in the scansion of Somali classical poetry involves long and short vowels and ~~the~~ their syntax on a line. To cite an example, the foot pattern of a GABAY, one of the classical genres, must be LONG, LONG, SHORT. The rearrangement of these syntactic patterns into which long and short vowel combinations can fit is one way to create new genres. There are other formal ways to accomplish innovation, but time does not permit me to go into such detail this afternoon. Much more common is the manipulation of one of the conventions within an existing genre. The innovation of composing *gabayo* in triplet lines, for example, was introduced by the Sayyid.

There are many other ways the structure of poetry may be innovated within macro-level expectations, but let us now explore some of the macro-level social expectations of the Somali poetic tradition. Again, creative deviation within the convention operates on social levels. Notions concerning the proper role of poetry in Somali society are especially strong. Somalis expect certain genres to deal with certain designated topics. And there is even an expectation that certain genres are reserved for one or the other of the sexes. The genre called *buraambur*, for example, is reserved at the macro-level for women, and needless to say, there are scores of *buraambur* composed by and for women each year. But at the micro-level one again finds deviation. There is a large body of *sufi* poetry composed in this generic style by and for men. A Somali scholar, Abdisalam Yaasin Mohamed, wrote his doctoral dissertation on this topic at the

School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. And in another case, I was told by Muuse Galaal that the Sayyid Maxammed Cabdille Xasan once composed a poem in the rhythm of a women's churning poem as a joke on his secretary of state, Xuseyn Diqleh. Although these poems are more commonly composed by women and the expectation is that they will be, at the performance level many things are possible.

Although there are many social expectations concerning the role of poetry in Somali society, one of the strongest, and the one relevant to my discussion this afternoon, concerns its place in the political arena. No political movement is possible without the aid of a skilled poet, and scholars like Said Samatar have pointed out that one of the keys to the many successes of the Sayyid was his ability to carry on political debates in verse. The expectation of political content, especially through veiled speech, is so strong that a piece of oral literature is sometimes suspected of political content when none was intended. Let me cite an example.

In 1968 when I was working in the Ministry of Education with Muuse Galaal, Yuusuf Duxul, a local lawyer and publisher of the bimonthly journal *Dalka*, asked Muuse to give him a folktale or legend transcribed in the Latin script Muuse had prepared for the Somali language. Yuusuf did not care what we gave him; his intent was to show the public what Somali would look like using Muuse's proposed script. Somali was not officially written at that time, and there was in process a great national debate over which of some 25 or more proposed scripts to adopt. Muuse and I had just finished transcribing and translating a story which he

called *Basho iyo Jiir*, "The Cats and the Rats," which we decided to give to Yuusuf, who subsequently published it. Let me quickly give you a resume of the plot.

The Cat Clan held a meeting to discuss the total elimination of the Rat Clan, and they proposed a meeting with the latter ostensibly to discuss peace between their two clans. The rats smelled the ruse however, and agreed to the meeting, only after they had made preparations to defend themselves by digging trenches and disguising them in which to hide very close to where they would stand when the official meeting took place. These trenches were carefully concealed so the Cats would not see them. Sure enough, when the meeting was held, the Cats attempted to kill the Rats, but to their dismay, the Rats were prepared for them and were able to jump to safety into their trenches.

An innocent folktale? The reading public did not think so. For about two weeks after *Dalka* was released, our work was being disturbed by people coming into Muuse's office at the Ministry wanting to know who the Rats represented and who the Cats could be. What was the situation that the story represented? Muuse did his best to explain that the entire exercise of transcribing and publishing the folktale had been merely an experiment in rendering Somali to a written form, but few believed him. The macro-level expectancy called for a veiled message in this story.

Let me conclude my examples with another rather remarkable case of the micro-level use of a poem in an incident which happened in the Somali Parliament when I lived in Somalia in 1967. Early in the year a poem which Somalis call *Leeho* had been composed by Axmed Suleebaan Bidde. It may have contained veiled speech, but I still do not know the background to it. On the other hand, it may have been simply a poem on the topic of

forlorned love. In those days, the president of the Somali Republic was elected in the Parliament and not by the general public. The president then appointed a prime minister who would form a government, much like the Italian Parliament does today. The incumbent president, Aadan Cabdulla Ciismaan was again running for the office, and he was being challenged by Cabdirashiid Cali Shar-Ma-Arke and others. No clear majority was gained by anyone for two ballots. The whole process was being carried live by Radio Muqdishu, and between ballots, music and poetry were played and also broadcast onto the floor of Parliament. During the caucus between the second and third ballots, the poem *Leexo* was broadcast, and on the third ballot the new president Shar-Ma-Arke was elected, and the old president was ousted. The poor chap who played the poem on the air was arrested and hauled off to court. Because of the veiled speech, however, nothing could be proved against him, and he was released. The poem goes as follows:

Innakoo lammaane ah,
Iyo laba naf-qaybsile,
Talo geed ku laashee,

Adigaa is lumiyo,
Isu loogay cadowgoo,
Libintaadii siiyee...

While we were [yet] together,
Helping each other in every way,
You cast good council away, to the top of a [high] tree;
You caused yourself distress,
And slaughtered yourself for your enemy,
Giving your victory to him.
Now you are so weakened
That the light breezes bear you up,
And from time to time you grasp at a branch.

For all the pleasures of this earth
One cannot fully enjoy;
[Tell me:] what causes you this distress?

The world is [but] a mirage.
And for every two brothers,
Only one being happy each day,
The one who is fortunate
Should not abuse his prosperity--
Should not maltreat [his neighbor].
And in your case, however,
[Your] breast and feet were out of accord.
For you are drifting up, up [into the air].
For all the pleasures of this earth
One cannot fully enjoy;
[Tell me:] what causes you this distress?

[Look at me:] my flesh and [all] my bones
Were completely consumed by him.
I cannot even swallow food!
The abundance of milk,
[Pure] rainwater,
Fresh air, and rest in the cool shade, you have rejected.
It is you, who like the male garanuug,
Left the [other] game, and
Turned to a desolate place.
For all the pleasures of this earth
One cannot fully enjoy;
[Tell me:] what causes you this distress?

So often in the prosperity of the rains--
As though you were a [proud] lion--
You walked about majestically,
Whilst I, because of your carousing,
Had sleepless nights from impotent anger,
And [sometimes] behaved like a fool.
The [beacon] fire in the [dark] night
And love, never disappear;
The roll on [after you, unrestrained].
For all the pleasures of this earth
One cannot fully enjoy;
[Tell me:] what causes you this distress?

This incident clearly illustrates how a poem, once-created, recorded on magnetic tape, and often broadcast over the radio, and thus already a part of the macro-level of tradition, came to be used in a new way at the micro-level in a specific political context..., or was it? Did the disc jockey have a political

motive, or was he just playing a popular love poem with a good musical tune for the sake of entertainment? The macro-level expectation of both the audience and the government denied the latter conclusion, leading to two results. The first was the arrest of the disc jockey. The second was that, regardless of the man's real intentions, the Somali public now remember this poem as the poem that overthrew a president. In other words, poetry created for specific contexts at the micro-level, having been performed thus becomes a part of macro-level memory, but may be reused in other contexts again at the micro-level. Memory of the reuse again becomes a part of the macro-level of this tradition. The constant interplay of macro- and micro-level causalities in the Somali poetic tradition provides us with the answer to the problem of how verbatim texts can be employed in changing political and other social contexts, and leads directly to the conclusion of my paper.

* * * * *

I have asked several theoretical questions during the course of my discussion this afternoon concerning the relationship between form and social behavior, particularly political behavior in poetry on the Horn of Africa. Permit me to recapitulate those questions. Why are Somalis obsessed with verbatim, or near verbatim, form in their poetic structures? Is the Somali poem in fact a once-created, often-repeated text, or is it recreated each time it is recited? I pointed out that each time a Somali poem is recited, it is obviously physically recreated, but that the crucial question is this: "is it recomposed?" I also asked if a Somali poem with political and perhaps historical content can be

changed to fit a new political situation? Or, since the poem is expected to be delivered verbatim, can it only be used to argue one point of view?

I think the key to the issues suggested by these questions lies in the nature of language and in the nature of politics. When I was in graduate school, I studied French as one of my required languages. French for graduate students really isn't designed to help a student learn to speak the language, but rather to help the student utilize the language as a research tool. Therefore, the chief pedagogical method employed in such classes involves teaching enough of the grammar to help a student learn to translate printed matter. I remember really struggling with the exercises in translating French literature, wondering if I would ever learn enough of the fool language to be able to read scholarly articles. One day, I put aside the daily assignment in literature and, on my own attempted to read an academic article. I was astonished to find that I could do so with relative ease, as long as I kept my dictionary close. I think that this incident, more than any classroom discussions in a linguistics class on the concept of semantics in language, taught me the difference between technical language and literary language.

Poetry is by its very nature ambiguous. It is not the kind of language intended to be scientifically accurate. It does not eliminate ideational possibilities in order to arrive at a clear point; it does just the opposite. It creates them. It deals in metaphor, image, and symbol, and above all, the creative manipulation of symbol. Using his or her memory and

understanding of a complex set of expected images at the macro-level of the poetic tradition, the creative Somali poet poses political arguments and viewpoints in verse. Creativity and the sheer manipulation of ideas and of language itself often is so impressive to an audience that the argument gets lost in the aesthetics of the poem. An argument can be won by a good poet, regardless of the social implications or the political results the actual argument may have in the body politic. Veiled speech, which functions to avoid open political conflict and possibly prison for the poet, is language at its most ambiguous. The goal of verbatim memorization in Somali poetry reinforces a macro-level allusion of accuracy, while in reality it is being used to argue social and political opinion, which brings me to the nature of politics.

In a sense, politics is to social interaction as literature is to language. While it may not be ambiguous, it is opinionated. We say that lawyers practice the law and argue their cases before the bar. In Somalia, politics is argued most effectively in verse because people expect it to be done in this manner. While composed of certain formal expectations, macro-level tradition is also composed of certain social expectations. Poets create verse in order to argue political points of view. In the case of the poem *Leexo*, we can even see that a once-created poem can be manipulated to relate to a political situation for which it was not originally composed. The reinterpretation of the lines in this poem after its composition leads to the conclusion that Somali poetry is not *textually* recomposed; but it is in a sense *contextually* recomposed. The

interplay between form and social behavior in the Somali poetic tradition, and the interplay between the macro- and micro-levels of causality in this tradition, thus helps us to understand how public expectations are both met and changed in the performance of Somali oral poetry.

COMPARATIVE GABAY TEXTS:

"KOOFIL," A GABAY IN "J"

by the SAYYID MAXAMED CABDILLE XASAN

Analysis by John William Johnson

and Cabdullaahi Diiriye Guuleed

(Note: Examples in this handout are not for publication, and thus should not be quoted from or referred to without expressed written permission.)

The following texts represent a comparison of five variants of a poem by the Sayid Maxamed Cabdille Xasan, one of the national heroes of Somalia. The variant texts are reproduced from the following sources: Text a is from B. W. Andrzejewski and I. M. Lewis, *Somali Poetry: An Introduction* (London: Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1964): 73-75; Text b is from Muuse Xaaji Ismaaciil Galaal, *A Collection of Somali Literature Mainly from Sayid Maxamed Cabdille Xasan* (Muqdishu: Pub. by the collector, n.d.): 14; Text c is from Sheikh Jaamac Cumar Ciise, *Diiwaanka Gabaydii Sayid Maxamed Cabdulle Xasan, Ururintii Koowaad* (Muqdishu: Wasaaradda Hiddaha iyo Tacliinta Sare, 1974): 65-66; Text d is from Faarax Maxamed J. "Cawl," *Garbaduubkii Gumeysiga* (Muqdishu: Akadeemiyaha Dhaqanka, Wasaaradda Hiddaha iyo Tacliinta Sare, 1978): 108-09; and Text e is from *Suugaan Dugsiga Sare, Fasalka Koowaad* (Muqdishu: Xafiiska Manaahijta, 1976): 27-28. The English translation of each variant was accomplished (even where an existing translation already existed) by John William Johnson and Cabdullaahi Diiriye Guuleed.

It is not the purpose here to give explicit contextual notes to this text, but rather to concentrate on a structural comparison. Readers interested in the context of the poem may refer to Andrzejewski and Lewis, *op. cit.*, pp. 70-72. For the broader historical context surrounding the poem, readers may refer to H. F. P. Battersby, *Richard Corfield of Somaliland* (London: Edward Arnold, 1914); Douglas Jardine, *The Mad Mullah of Somaliland* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969): 197-299; Aw Jaamac Cumar Ciise, *Taariikhdiis Daraawishta iyo Sayid Maxamed Cabdulle Xasan* (Muqdishu: Akadeemiyaha Dhaqanka, 1976): 225-35; Said S. Samatar, *Oral Poetry and Somali Nationalism: The Case of Sayyid Maḥammad 'Abdille Ḥasan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982): 83, 131-33, 153, 174-77; and I. M. Lewis, *A Modern History of Somalia: Nation and State in the Horn of Africa* (London, 1980): 74-80.

Each variant line of the poem is printed with its counterparts unless they are identical; in which case, the line is printed only once. Some hemistichs are identical while their sister half lines vary. In this case, the identical half lines are printed only once. Readers will also note that some lines in the translation differ from the original Somali. This is due to the fact that some of the variations in Somali, such as dialect differences (e.g. *iri*, *idhi*) have the same English translation.

The translation is followed by a complete scansion of only text a. The symbols employed in this scansion have the following meanings. Macrons (—) denote long

vowels while microns (◌̣) mark the short ones. Double vertical lines (||) divide feet. Single vertical lines (|) divide semes which cannot be crossed by a long vowel, while dotted vertical lines (⋮) divide semes which can be crossed by a long vowel. The foot in the *gabay* is composed of a diseme, followed by another diseme, followed by a monoseme. Space between hemistichs marks the position of the caesura. Lines which are imperfect in their scansion pattern are noted with an asterisk.

Finally, a complete analysis of the variants makes up the final segment of this comparative study. Rather than clutter either the Somali texts or the English translations with numerous and cumbersome footnote numbers, line numbers are used as points of reference. Each line is treated separately and completely. All comments concerning that line (either the Somali or the translation) will be elucidated before going on to the next line; the reader, therefore will need to follow along with both Somali and English texts in sight.

SOMALI TEXTS

- | | | |
|---------|----------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1a. | Adaa jiiitayaan Koofiyow, | |
| 1b. | Adaa Koolow jiiitayaan, | dunida joogayn e, |
| 1c,d,e. | Adaa Koofilow jiiitayaan, | |
| 2a,e. | Adigaa jidkii lagugu wacay, | |
| 2b,c,d. | Adigaa jidkii lagugu wadi, | jimic la'aaneed e, |
| 3a-e. | Jahannamo la geeyow haddaad, | Aakhirow jahato, |
| 4a-e. | Nimankii Janno u kacay war bay, | jirin inshaalleeye, |
| 5a-e. | Jameecooyinkii iyo haddaad, | jawhartii aragto, |
| 6a,c,d. | Sida Eebahay kuu jirrabay, | |
| 6b. | Siduu Eebahay kuu jirrabay, | mari jawaabteeda, |
| 6e. | Sidii Eebahay kuu jirrabay, | |
| 7a-e. | Daraawiish jikraar nagama deyn, | tan iyo jeerkii dheh, |
| 8a. | Ingriis jab yoo waxa ku dhacay, | jac iyo baaruud e, |
| 8b-e. | Ingiriis jab yoo waxa ku dhacay, | jac iyo baaruud dheh, |

- 9a. Waxay noo jajuunteen na waa, jibasho diineed dheh,
 9b. Waxay noo jujubteen na waa, jamashadiinnii dheh,
 9c,d. Waxay noo janjuunteen ba waa, jibashadiinnii dheh,
 9e. *OMITTED*
- 10a,c,d. Jigta weerar bay goor barqaa, nagu jiteeyeen dheh,
 10b,e. *IDENTICAL, BUT TRANSPOSED TO POSITION AFTER LINE 11*
- 11a-e. Anigana jikrey ila heleen, shalay jihaadkii dheh,
- 12a,c,d. igaga joojeen dheh,
 12b. Jeenigaa hortiiisay rasaas, igaga jaadeen dheh,
 12e. igaga jiideen dheh,
- 13a. Jiidhaayaday ila dhaceen, jiricafkoodii dheh,
 13b-e. jilic afkoodii dheh,
- 14a-e. Siday kuugu jeexeen magliga, jararacdi sheego,
- 15a-e. Billaawuhu siduu kuu jarjaray, jeedhadhka u muuji,
- 16a. Naf jaclaysigeed baan u iri,
 16b,e. Naf jaclaysigii baan ku idhi, jaalow iga daa dheh,
 16c,d. Naf jeclaysigii baan u iri,
- 17a,c,d. jeeb ka soo ruqay dheh,
 17b. Jaljalleecadii baa wadnaha, jeex ka soo ruqay dheh,
 17e. jeex i soo ruqay dheh,
- 18a,c,d. Jeedaaladii baa indhuhu, kor u jillaadmeen dheh,
 18b,e. Jeedaaladii bay indhuhu,
- 19a. Jimic ka ma helin tuugmadaan, jeriyay ruuxii dheh,
 19b-e. Jimic kagama helin tuugmadaan,
- 20a. Kolkaan juuq iraaqdo ba afkay, iga jifeeyeen dheh,
 20b-e. Markaan juuq idhaahdo ba afkay,

- 21a. Wax badan baan jalleecee dhegaan, jalaq La ii siinin,
 21b,e. Dhaaxaan jalaadaye dheg baan, jalaq La ii siin dheh,
 21c,d. Dhaaxaan jalaacaye dheg baan,
- 22a,c,d. Goortaan jarreero na gafoo, nolol ka jaan-qaaday,
 22b. Goortaan jarreero ba gafoon,
 22e. *OMITTED*
- 23a-e. Sida janannadii hore tashigu, igu jaguugnaa dheh,
- 24a-d. Taladii jinnigu ii hor-maray, jaasadeed helay dheh,
 24e. Taladii jinnigu ii hor-kacay,
- 25a-e. Jiidaha xanuunka leh markii, La igu jeeraarshay,
- 26a,c-e. Jibaadka iga soo baxay dadkii, jiifka qaban waa dheh,
 26b. Jibaadka iga soo bixi dadkii,
- 27a. Kolkay rabaddu jow tiri or bay, iga ag-jiibsheen dheh,
 27b-e. Markay rubaddu jaw tidhi or bay,
- 28a. Jiirkaygii na bahal baa cunoo,
 28b. Jidhkaygii ba bahal baa cunoo, jiitay hilibkii dheh,
 28c-e. Jirkaygii bahal baa cunoo,
- 29a,c,d. Jurmidiyo baruurtii dhurwaa, jugux ka siiyaa dheh,
 29b,e. Jurmigiyo baruurtii dhurwaa,
- 30a. Jiiljiiladiyo seedahay tukuu, igaga jaadeen dheh,
 30b. Jidhjidhadiyo seedaa tukay, igaga joojeen dheh,
 30c,d. Jiiljiiladiyo seedaha tukay, igaga jaadeen dheh,
 30e. *OMITTED*
- 31a,c-e. Haddaan Lays jikaarayn tolkay, Laga jiilroonaa dheh,
 31b. Laga jid roonaa dheh,
- 32a,c,d. Weligood waxa Lagu jaraa,
 32b. Abiidkood waxaa Lagu jaraa, jilibdhig duullaan dheh,
 32e. Abidkood ba waa Lagu jaraa,

- 33a,c,d. Daraawiish waa jibin dhowga iyo, jowga soo bixi dheh.
 33b. Sayidkiina waa jibin dhaw iyo, jiibka soo bixi dheh.
 33e. Daraawiish waa jibin dhaw iyo, jowga soo bixi dheh.

ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS

- 1a. You have passed away, O Corfield, and no longer remain in this
 1b-e. You, O Corfield, have passed away, world.
- 2a,e. You have been summoned to the "path," with no freedom to move about
 2b,c,d. You are driven to the "path,"
- 3a-e. O You-Who-Are-Taken-to-Hell, when you face the other world,
- 4a-e. The men who rise to Heaven, want [to hear] the news if
 God wills.
- 5a-e. When you see the Company of Heaven, and the Blessed Ones,
- 6a-e. How the Lord has tested you, answer them [truthfully].
- 7a-e. Tell them: "The Dervishes have not
 ceased to struggle with us since
 they began."
- 8a. "The English were defeated, and what struck us down was shame and
 8b-e. Tell them: "The English were defeat-
 ed, and what gun powder."
- 9a. Tell them: "The reason they attack-
 ed us, was because of religious
 passion."
- 9b. Tell them: "The reason they seized
 us by force, was because of their love for
 you."
- 9c-d. Tell them: "The reason they attack-
 ed us, was because of their passion
 for you."
- 9e. *OMITTED*

- 10a,c,d. Tell them: "With an early morning
attack, they encircled us."
- 10b,e. *IDENTICAL, BUT TRANSPOSED TO POSITION AFTER LINE 11*
- 11a-e. Tell them: "And their single-shot
guns struck me down yesterday in the Holy War."
- 12a,c,d. the bullet found its mark."
12b. Tell them: "To the side of my chest the bullet hit me."
12e. the bullet struck me."
- 13a-e. Tell them: "In fury they struck me with the blades of their
knives."
- 14a-e. Describe to them how the slicing of
the long blades sounded [on your flesh].
- 15a-e. Show them how their long daggers cut your flesh to ribbons.
- 16a-e. Tell them: "For survival's sake, I
said to them, 'O comrades, cease and
desist!'"
- 17a,c,d. a portion of my heart was
ripped out."
17b. Tell them: "Glancing from side to part of my heart was ripped
side [for mercy] out."
17e. part of my heart was ripped
from me."
- 18a-e. Tell them: "Hopefully looking for
mercy, my eyes rolled fearfully
back."
- 19a-e. Tell them: "I received no mercy for
the begging I did for my safety."

- 20a. Tell them: "Each time I uttered the slightest sound, they struck me with the butts of their canes."
- 20b-e. Tell them: "Whenever I uttered the slightest sound, they gave no ear to the least of my pleas."
- 21a. "Many times I peered around; they gave no ear to the least of my pleas."
- 21b,e. Tell them: "For many years my word was obeyed; now, no ear was given to the least of my pleas."
- 21c,d. Tell them: "Many times I peered around; they gave no ear to the least of my pleas."
- 22a-d. "Whenever I took a risk, I seriously erred "
- 22e. *OMITTED*
- 23a-e. Tell them: "Like the previous negotiations with [British] generals, mine also failed."
- 24a-e. Tell them: "The advice that the jinns led me to: I found its just rewards."
- 25a-e. "When they dragged me painfully around, and frolicked with me."
- 26a-e. Tell them: "Because of my moaning, people could not lie down and sleep."
- 27a. Tell them: "At the time my soul fled from me, they clamored and sang for joy."
- 27b-e. Tell them: "When my soul fled from me, they clamored and sang for joy."
- 28a-e. Tell them: "Wild beasts consumed my flesh, and dragged my body about."
- 29a-e. Tell them: "My flesh and my fat were swallowed by hyenas."

- 30a,c,d. Tell them: "My veins and tendons by
crows were plucked out."
- 30b. Tell them: "All my flesh and tendons
by crows were pecked out."
- 30e. *OMITTED*
- 31a,c-e. "If there be no denial of the
my kinsmen were defeated."
31b. truth, my kin were bettered [in the
war]."
- 32a-e. Tell them: "They will always be cut
down whene'er they march [to
war]."
- 33a,c-e. Tell them: "The Dervishes are the
sound of a falling star, and the ramble which is
coming."
33b. Tell them: "The Sayyid is the sound
of a falling star, and the canticle which is
coming."

SCANSION PATTERNS IN TEXT A

- | | | |
|---|--|----------------------------|
| <p>1. Adaa jiitayaan Koofiyow,</p> | | <p>dunida joogayn e,</p> |
| <p>2. Adigaa jidkii lagugu wacay,</p> | | <p>jimic la'aaneed e,</p> |
| <p>3. Jahannamo la geeyow haddaad,</p> | | <p>Aakhirow jahato,</p> |
| <p>4. Nimankii Janno u kacay war bay,</p> | | <p>jirin inshaalleeye,</p> |
| <p>*5. Jamee booyinkii iyo haddaad,</p> | | <p>jawhartii aragto,</p> |

- | | |
|--|--------------------------------|
| <p>6. Sida Eebbahay kuu jirrabay,</p> | <p>mari jawaabteeda,</p> |
| <p>7. Daraawiish jikraar nagama deyn,</p> | <p>tan iyo jeerkii dheh,</p> |
| <p>*8. Ingriis jab yoo waxa ku dhacay,</p> | <p>jac iyo baaruud e,</p> |
| <p>9. Waxay noo jajuunteen na waa,</p> | <p>jibasho diineed dheh,</p> |
| <p>10. Jigta weerar bay goor barqaa,</p> | <p>nagu jiteeyeen dheh,</p> |
| <p>11. Anigana jikrey ila heleen,</p> | <p>shalay jihaadkii dheh,</p> |
| <p>12. Jeenigaa hortiisay rasaas,</p> | <p>igaga joojeen dheh,</p> |
| <p>13. Jiidhaayaday ila dhaceen,</p> | <p>jiricafkoodii dheh,</p> |
| <p>14. Siday kuugu jeexeen magliga,</p> | <p>jararacдии sheego,</p> |
| <p>15. Billaawuhu siduu kuu jarjaray,</p> | <p>jeedhadhka u muuji,</p> |
| <p>16. Naf jaclaysigeed baan u iri,</p> | <p>jaalow iga daa dheh,</p> |
| <p>17. Jaljalleecadii baa wadnaha,</p> | <p>jeeb ka soo ruqay dheh,</p> |
| <p>18. Jeedaadadii baa indhihi,</p> | <p>kor u jillaadmeen dheh,</p> |

||||| | ||| ||||| ||||| | | ||| | ||| ||| | ||| | ||| |||
 *32. Weligood waxa Lagu jaraa, jilibdhig duullaan dheh,

||||| | ||| ||||| ||||| | | ||||| ||| ||| | ||| | ||| |||
 33. Daraawiish waa jibin dhowga iyo, jowga soo bixi dheh.

ANALYSIS OF THE VARIANTS

- line 1. The Somali pronunciation of the English surname varies, either Koofil, Kooli, or Koofil. When the Somali vocative suffix {-OW} is added to variant b, the raconteur drops the terminal vowel to produce Koolow instead of Kooliyow (compare Koofiyow in variant a), thus ruining the proper scansion of the line. Variant b thus does not scan properly. Another difference in line 1 is the suffix of variant a as opposed to variants b-e. Note also the anacrusis in this line.
- line 2. Variants a and e employ the verb *wacayaa*, 'to call/summon,' while variants b-d choose *wadayaa*, 'to drive.' The scansion pattern is not disturbed by this variation. Moreover, the tense of this verb varies, the main positive past general extensive being used in variants a and e, the infinitive future, in variants b-d. The "path" referred to is the path to the next world after death.
- line 3. There is a spelling deviation between variants a and b, which may be a reflection of regional or individual speech patterns. When the preverbal particle *u*, 'to,' is contracted with *Aakhiro*, 'hell,' the result in variant a is represented by the spelling *Aakhirow*, while variant b produces *Aakhiruu*. *Jahannamo* is one of the seven hells in Moslem theology.
- line 4. The contraction of the particle *u* with the word before it reflects a dialect or individual pronunciation difference. Three variations exist: *janno u* in variant a (Andrzejewski disconnects all contractions in his spelling convention); *jannuu* in variant b; and *jannow* in variants c, d, and e. A further dialect or pronunciation difference exists between variants a and e (*jerin*, 'to be willing/to want') and variants b, c, and d (*jirin*).
- line 5. Although all variants are identical in line 5, none of them scan properly. In the last foot, the verb *aragto*, which normally has three short vowels in colloquial Somali, fills the foot pattern of diseme-diseme-monoseme.
- line 6. The first word in this line differs in three ways. Variants a, c, and d and variant e have different case endings. Variant b contracts the word *ada*, 'like/as,' with the pronoun *uu*, 'he.' No significant scansion difference results, because through syllabula anceps rules, vowels in pronouns may be either long or short as needed.

- line 7. The spelling of the word *jikraar* in variants b, c, d, and e, and *jigraar* in variant a, may reflect a dialect or pronunciation difference or an error on the part of the transcribers. Cabdullaahi knew the word *jikraar*, 'for the sake of argument,' and did not know the meaning of *jigraar*. Note also the anacrusis in this line.
- line 8. Line 8 does not scan in variant a, but all the other variants replace the colloquial Somali pronunciation of Ingriis (vowels = short, long), 'English,' with *Ingiriis* (vowels = short, short, long), apparently in order to produce an extra syllable in the first diseme of the line to allow the line to scan properly. Perhaps Andrzejewski omitted the extra syllable in his variant to conform with normal Somali usage, as the scansion patterns were unknown at the time his book was published. It seems reasonable to assume that the reciters used poetic license here to make the line scan. Variant a also concludes with the conjunction *e*, 'and,' while the other variants conclude with *dheh*, 'tell them.' Vowels in both words are short, thus causing the line to scan properly.
- line 9. Line 9 is a good example of the characteristic of faulty memory in a tradition where verbatim memorization is the goal. Words which sound alike and which do not disturb scansion patterns by their vowel lengths, but which have different meanings that fit into the context of the line, are often a course of possible variation. In fact, this pattern is one of the two most common kinds of variation, the other being words which have roughly the same or similar meaning but sound different. In the latter case again, their vowel lengths do not disrupt scansion patterns. On line 9, variants a, c, and d employ the word *jajuunteen* (or *janjuunteen* -- presumably a dialect difference), 'they attacked,' while variant b employs *jajuubteen*, 'they seized by force.' Similarly in the second hemistich, words which sound alike but which have different meanings were chosen. In variant a, *jibasho diineed*, 'to be overcome with religious passion,' appears. In variant b we find the word *jamashadiinnii*, 'your overwhelming desire/love.' Finally, in variants c and d, *jibashadiinnii* appears, meaning 'your passion/religious ecstasy.' Grammatically, variant a is composed of a noun plus an adjective, while the other variants employ a noun and a possessive. The entire line is omitted from variant e.
- line 10. All variants are identical, but there is a transposition difference between variants a, c and d and variants b and e, the latter pair of which place this line after line 11.
- line 11. All variants are identical in line 11.
- line 12. Variation in this line is between words which sound alike in the second hemistich. Variants a, c, and d use the word *joojeen*, 'they stayed/stood/stopped,' translated liberally as 'found its mark.' Variant b employs the word *jaadeen*, 'they hit,' and variant e uses *jiideen*, 'they struck.' All three phrases scan properly, as their vowel lengths are

identical.

- line 13. This line varies only in pronunciation as near as we can determine (*jilic* and *jiric*). Cabdullaahi did not know the meaning of *jiric*.
- line 14. All variants are identical in line 14. A *magli* is a long-bladed knife from the Baydhabo region of southern Somalia.
- line 15. All variants are identical in line 15. A *bilaawe* is another style of long knife, also from Baydhabo.
- line 16. Line 16 contains some grammatical and dialect differences, none of which disrupt scansion patterns. Variants a, c, and d contain the southern pronunciation of *iri*, 'tell,' which variants b and e employ the northern pronunciation of *idhi*. There is also a variation in the pronunciation of the root of the noun (and verb) *jac*, thus *jec*, 'love.' Grammatically, variant a adds the possessive suffix *-eed*, 'her,' which all other variants end simply with the noun case suffix *ii*. Additionally, variants b and e have chosen the preverbal preposition *ku*, 'with,' while variants a, c, and d chose *u*, 'to.'
- line 17. Two differences are to be found in the variants on line 17. Variants a, c, and d use the word *jeeb*, 'pocket/portion,' while the other pair employ *jeex*, 'part,' which sounds like *jeeb* and has the same vowel length. Additionally, variant e uses the preverbal pronoun *i*, 'me,' while the others use the preposition *ka*, 'from.'
- line 18. Line 18 contains a slight variation in which variants b and e employ a contraction of the indicator particle *baa* and the subject pronoun *ay*, 'they,' thus *bay*. Variants a, c, and d simply omit the pronoun as past plural third person is indicated in the verb anyway.
- line 19. Variant a contains a scansion error and may have been mistranscribed, or the raconteur may have erred in the recitation. Cabdullaahi explained that the preposition *ka* (embedded as *-ga-* in the preverbal particle contraction *kagama*, 'with-from-negative') was necessary to the grammar of the sentence. Otherwise, the lines are identical, and variants b-e scan properly.
- line 20. Line 20 contains one of the two most common variations discussed under line 9 above, that is, two words which have almost identical meanings but do not sound alike. In this case, the words *kolka*, 'when/each time,' and *marka*, 'when/whenever,' mark the variation. The line also contains a dialect difference between the southern (*iraahdo*) and northern (*idhaahdo*) pronunciations for 'say/utter.'
- line 21. There are substantial differences between the variants in line 21, including syntactic differences and choice of words which will scan properly. First, there is a difference in choice of verbs, variant a

choosing *jalleecaa*, 'to glance/peer about' (contracted with the conjunction *e*, 'and'). Variants b and e chose *jalaadaa*, 'to shout/be heeded.' Cabdullaahi thought the verb *jalaacaa* in variants c and d might be a transcription error, as he did not know its meaning. In any case, all three words sounded alike and had identical scansion patterns. The negative particle in variant a fell in the second hemistich after the verb, thus *-in*, while in the other variants, it fell in the first half line contracted with the indicator particle (*baa + aan = baan*). The negative is intended for the verb in the second half line in all cases.

- line 22. Choice of words makes up the differences in the variants in this line, but does not disturb the scansion. Variants a, c, and d employ the conjunction *na*, 'and,' while variant b uses an emphatic, *ba*. Cabdullaahi also explained that there is a grammatical error whereby the negative particle *aan* is contracted to the verb *gafo* (thus *gafoon*) at the end of the first half line in variant b. Additionally, variant e omitted this line altogether.
- line 23. All variants are identical in line 23.
- line 24. Words with meanings so similar that only one English translation was necessary mark the differences in the variants in line 24. Variants a-d use *hor-maray*, 'to pass before/lead to,' while variant e employs *hor-kacay*, 'to stand before/lead to.'
- line 25. All variants are identical in line 25.
- line 26. Verb tenses mark the differences between variants a, c, d, and e (*baay*, past tense) and variant b (*bixi*, future). However, Cabdullaahi considered use of the future tense in this context an error.
- line 27. Variation here is the same (*kolka* and *marka*) as on line 20. The dialect variation (southern /-r-/ and northern /-dh-/) is the same as on lines 16 and 20.
- line 28. Cabdullaahi explained that free variation exists with the vowel length of the noun *jir/jiir* (*jidh/jiidh*, 'flesh'). I find this variation rather unusual in Somali, and differences here may be in transcription and/or poetic license. Another difference lies in conjunction/emphatic choice as in line 22 above. Variants c, d, and e omit both of these particles causing the line to scan improperly.
- line 29. On this line, another unusual difference for Somali can be found. For the noun *jurmi*, 'thickness/fat,' variants a, c, and d choose to classify it as feminine by adding the feminine article to it ({-T-}, rendered [-d-] intervocally). On the other hand, variants b and e classify this noun as masculine by adding the masculine article ({-K-}, rendered [-g-] intervocally). Otherwise, the lines are identical.

- line 30. A bit of poetic license is needed in order to get line 30 to scan, with the raconteur singing the first two syllables of the first word as short in place of their usual colloquial status as long vowels. The spelling variants c and d probably reflect this license, as Cabdullaahi could not ascribe a meaning to **jiljilo*. A similar sounding word, but with a different meaning, was chosen by variant b (*jidhjidho*, 'flesh,' in place of *jiljilo*, 'veins'), thus allowing the line in variant b to scan properly without poetic license. Three variations also exist for the word *seedo*, 'tendon.' Variant a (*seeda-h-ay*) represents the noun, plus the article, plus the possessive 'my.' Variants c and d omit the possessive, thus *seeda-h-a*, which is the noun, plus the article, plus the case ending. Variant b contains a contracted form, *seeda'a*, the article not being employed at all. Another difference is to be found between variant a (*tukuu*, which is *tuke*, omitting the article *-h-*, plus the case ending *-u*, causing the *-e* of *tuke* to change to *u* because of vowel harmony rules) and the others (*tukay*, which is *tuke*, plus the hidden indicator particle *baa*, plus the plural pronoun *ay*, 'they'). The omitted *-h-* and hidden *baa* are due to contractions, and the word *tuke* means 'crow.' A further difference is found in the second half line, with variants a, c, and d employing *jaadeen*, 'they were plucked out,' and variant b using *joojeen*, 'they were pecked out.' Both words sound alike and have identical vowel lengths. Finally, variant e omits the line altogether.
- line 31. Only variant b scans properly in line 31. It uses the words *jid roonnaa*, literally 'excel on the path,' while the other variants employ *jilroonnaa*, 'were defeated.' The translations here are somewhat conjectural.
- line 32. Variants a, c, and d do not scan properly on this line, as an extra short vowel, or a long one in place of a short one, is needed in the second foot. Also, variants a, c, and d employ the word *weli*, 'already/always,' while the others use *abid*, 'forever/always.' (*Abiid* is misspelled in the transcription.) I think there is also a spelling error in variant a where *waxa* should reflect the contracted indicator particle *baa*, thus *waxaa*. This would make the line scan, and the indicator particle is actually needed for the grammar of the sentence. Variant c adds the emphatic *ba* with its indicator and omits the *wax-* particle, but the line still scans properly.
- line 33. Line 33 has two differences between variants. Variants a, c, d, and e employ the word *daraawiish*, 'dervish,' to variant b's *sayid*, 'lord' (plus the article {-K-} and case ending *-ii* together with the conjunction *na*, thus *sayidkiina*). Additionally, in the second half line, words which sound alike but with very different meanings mark the difference between a, c, d, and e (*jowga*, an ideophone representing the sound of marching) and variant b (*jiibba*, 'canticle/song').