

[Editor's Note: Please note that most of this article is drawn from two chapters of the writer's book entitled Heelloo Heelleelloo: The Development of the Genre Heello in Modern Somali Poetry. The book is being published by the Research Center for the Language Sciences in Bloomington and is to appear by late summer (1972).]

#### THE FAMILY OF MINIATURE GENRES IN SOMALI ORAL POETRY<sup>1</sup>

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Much has been written about the oral poetry of the Somalis.<sup>2</sup> One group of poems, however, has not received much attention,<sup>3</sup> because it is not considered by Somalis themselves to be of high stature in their system of oral art. The modern poem in Somalia, called the heello, however, developed to a large extent from this family of miniature genres and is of primary importance to modern Somali poetry. Moreover, the lack of any detailed treatment of all these genres together will, it would be hoped, be filled by the present study.<sup>4</sup>

There are many forms of miniature poetry in the Somali system of oral expression, but the present study is limited to four genres which are all connected to each other historically. These four genres are the wiglo, the dhaanto, the hirwo, and the belwo. The names of the specific genres are Somali. The term miniature is borrowed from Andrzejewski (1967),<sup>5</sup> but the grouping of the four into one "family" is my own invention. Three characteristics lend credence to this grouping.

First of all, Somalis themselves claim that each miniature poem gave rise to the next one historically. Second, the structure of the poems in these genres not only serves to differentiate each genre from the next and from other types of Somali poetry, but it also serves to group the four together. And third, their similar use in society gives further evidence that together they constitute a larger division of Somali poetry. Let us consider these three points in more detail.

#### Origins of the Genres

There are no documents of indigenous origin to aid the scholar in uncovering the origins of these four genres, for Somalia is an oral society. Moreover, little reference has been made to them in works by foreign scholars who have concentrated most of their labor on genres with more prestige in Somali society. The conclusions here are based, therefore, on the oral history of poetic art believed to be true in Somali culture and obtained by personal interviews with prominent Somali poets and critics.<sup>6</sup>

The belwo is the only genre the origin of which is both known and agreed upon by most Somalis. Of the remaining three genres, only the origin of the hirwo can be accounted for, and not all Somalis agree on this. Some believe it to have arisen during the Ethio-Italian War of 1935/36, while others believe it to be much older. The origins of the wiglo and dhaanto are not known at all, but in the midst of this confusion, claim and counter-

claim, the most reasonable order of chronological development appears to be thus: wiglo, dhaanto, hirwo, belwo.

An important historical characteristic of these genres is their use during periods of social stress. Although its origin is not known, the most recent revival of the wiglo, for example, was during the early years of the Dervish War of the Sayyid Mahammed Cabdilla Hhasan,<sup>7</sup> who led a struggle against foreign intrusion on the Horn of Africa from 1900 to 1920. The dhaanto, with its origin also in the unknown past, was revived during the later years of this Dervish Movement. And the hirwo, if it did not actually arise during the Italian conquest of Ethiopia in which some Somali groups participated, was at least revived during this period. The belwo, arising and spreading in the social upheaval after World War II, also represents a period of storm and stress.

The belwo (also called balwo) was the innovation of the Somali poet named Cabdi Deeysi, nicknamed "Sinimo" (Cinema). Cabdi was a trade truck mechanic and driver in the former British Somaliland Protectorate and had a regular trade truck route from Zeila and Djibouti to Borama and Hargeisa. One day, sometime between 1943 and 1945, his truck broke down in the interior. Somali oral tradition debates exactly where this happened, but the results were that Cabdi could not repair the damage. Finally, after much frustrating work, he sat down and, as the Somali poet Hhasan Sheekh Muumin says, "These words escaped from his mouth":

Belwooy, belwooy, hooy belwooy,  
Wahha i baleeyay mooyaane.

Belwooy, belwooy, hooy belwooy,<sup>8</sup>  
I am unaware of what caused me to suffer.

The following version is also sometimes quoted as the first belwo by some Somalis:

Balwooy, hooy balwooy,  
Wahha i balweeyay mooyane,  
Wahha i balweeyay baabuure.

Balwooy, hooy balwooy,  
I am unaware of what caused me to suffer.  
What caused me to suffer was a truck.

When Cabdi returned to Borama after having his truck towed back to Zeila, he recited his short poem in public. It was an immediate success, which, no doubt, inspired him to compose other belwo. Moreover, other poets also began to compose in the new genre, and it began to spread rapidly.

Poetic ability is a major device for raising one's status among the Somalis, and poems always gain prestige for their composers from at least some segment of the population. So it was for Cabdi, who like so many poets of Somali history, quickly became a social magnet. By 1946 a small troupe of singers had been formed around Cabdi, including a woman named Khadiija Ciya Dharaar, soon nicknamed Khadiija "Belwo". It was Khadiija, as many Somalis claim, who popularized the belwo to a large extent, and her name has been immortalized in a poem composed by Cabdi.

Belwooy, belwooy, hooy belwooy,  
Haddii quruhdaada Layga qarshooy,  
Khadiija Belwooy, qac baan odhan.

Belwooy, belwooy, hooy belwooy,  
Oh woman, if your beauty were hidden from me,  
Oh Khadiija Belwo, I [would] break [in two].

In time, this troupe began to tour the towns of the North. Hargeisa, soon to become the focal area for the belwo (it was already the center of political development for the North at this time) was the first stop. Public performances were held in which Cabdi would recite his poetry and the women would dance. These public meetings brought prestige and money to the troupe, which toured other towns for a few years. By 1950, however, it had broken up and Cabdi returned to Djibouti where he remained until his death on 19 March 1967, during the riots there. By this time the belwo had spread to most areas in northern Somalia.

#### The Place of the Miniature Poem in Somali Society

The miniature poem does not share the exalted status of Somali classical poetry, or even of the modern poem. It is employed most often by youth in circumstances where youth are to be found. The themes, however, are not always frivolous: nor is the miniature poem always composed by youths. There are many situations in which the recitation of such poetry is considered appropriate, but the following compilation of the uses of miniature poetry is by no means definitive. It is presented only to give a general picture of where and when the miniature poem is used.

One important use of miniature poetry is with the dance. Groups of youths standing in a circle will all join in with hand clapping while one man chants the poem and (usually) two people dance. Sometimes women are included in this activity.

Somalis enjoy challenging each other to poetic duels,<sup>9</sup> and the miniature poem, like many genres of Somali poetry, is used in this verbal game. The poet of the hirwo below gave his challenge as a riddle:<sup>10</sup>

Wahhaan hadhin hawlina Kuu qabanoo,  
Hortiinana jooga, soo heda eey.<sup>11</sup>

That which will not leave you, [nor] do [anything] useful for you,  
And which remains [always] before you: find out [what it is].

and was answered by another hirwo with the same alliteration:

War wahhaan hadhin hawlina Kuu qabanoo,  
Hortaadana joogaa, waa hooseey.

Oh man, that which will not leave you, [nor] do [anything] useful  
for you,  
And which remains [always] before you, is [your] shadow.

The Sayyid Mahammed Cabdilla Hhasan, mentioned above, employed the miniature poem to attract recruits to his Dervish Movement. One of his compositions, a wiglo, was used as a recruiting poem for attracting followers:

Ninkii diinta Eebbahay dhigan e,  
 Dadaal ku dhintaa ye waa daw,  
 Ninkii dabka qaatee duulee,  
 Dagaal ku dhintaa ye waa daw,  
 Anigu dadka wahhaan la yaabaa,  
 Oo haddana doqonnimo ku saaraa,  
 Ninkii duunyo kaleeto foofsadayee,  
 Ku daaqsada doobka caanaha eey.

The man who learns the religion of God  
 And dies with hard work is honorable.  
 The man who takes up weapons<sup>12</sup> for fighting,  
 And dies in battle is honorable.  
 But [of all] people, the one who surprises me  
 And whom I accuse of foolishness  
 Is the man who cares for another's animals, and  
 Receives [only] a vessel full of milk [as his reward].<sup>13</sup>

The practice of looking after another man's livestock was done by the poor in the Sayyid's day, and it was to these people that he was appealing in his poem. The implication here is that it is foolish to have servile employment when one could become rich by looting the camels of the Dervish's enemies.

Many Somali men of religion object to the use of the miniature poem. They often quote a proverb in this context:

Sacabka haddaan hheeladi ku jirin,  
 Mahhaa habeenkii Loo tumaa?

If there is no trick in dancing and singing,  
 Then why do they do it [only] at night?

This religious objection to the miniature poem led one Islamic leader, Sheekh Caaqib Cabdullaahi Jaamac of Jigjiga to employ the dhaanto as a means of attracting the youthful ear. By speaking in their own language, as it were, he was able to deliver his serious message in the midst of a dance and to retain the attention of most of those present. Ironically, the text of this dhaanto-sermon<sup>14</sup> called for the youths to abandon the dhaanto and turn their activities toward God. Sheekh Caaqib has used the dhaanto for other religious purposes including a prayer for rain.<sup>15</sup>

In recent times, the miniature poem has also been used by truck drivers and passengers to lighten the tedium of tiresome journeys.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, this practice was important in the spacial dispersion of the miniature poem, especially the belwo.

Finally, during the lighter periods of religious festivals and national holidays, one can hear genres from this family. But at such social gatherings many other genres can also be heard.

#### Structure of the Miniature Poem

As mentioned above, the four genres classed as the family of miniature genres share a similar structure. They appear to be alike in every way except the melodies to which they are recited. The dialect of Somali in

which such poetry is composed is the same as for all northern Somali pastoralist poetry. The remaining characteristics of the miniature poem have been broken down and discussed in more detail below. Let us begin our discussion where the poem begins, with the introductory formula.

Several genres in Somali poetry are introduced by a series of syllables, usually without any remembered meaning, which serve as an introduction to the poem which follows. The miniature poem is usually introduced by the following formula:

Heellooy, heelleellooy,  
Heellooy, heelleellooy.

or by its longer version:

Heellooy, heelleellooy,  
Heellooy, heelleellooy,  
Heelleelli kalaynu leenahayeey.

Oh heello, oh heelleello,  
Oh heello, oh heelleello,  
And we sing<sup>17</sup> [yet] another heelleello.

In addition to this, the most common formula for miniature poetry, at least two other formulae exist. Most often with the wiglo, the following formula can sometimes be heard:

Hobala, hobala hobalaayoo,  
Hobali kalaynu leenahayeey.

Hobala, hobala, hobalaayoo,  
And we sing [yet] another hobala.

With the belwo, still another formula can be heard:

Belwooy, (belwooy), hooy belwooy.

And with this formula, the meaning is known. Borrowed from the Arabic balaa<sup>2</sup>, "affliction/trouble/trial", the word has a meaning in Somali which might be translated as "woe is me".

These formulae, the "heello" formula being the most common, serve at least three functions. First, the formula summons the attention of an audience to the poet who then goes on to recite his poem. Second, it serves to focus the listeners' attention on the poet's verse so that the first line of the poem itself is not missed. Otherwise, the point may be lost, for in many cases the first line represents 50% of the entire poem. The third purpose might be described as a sort of signature tune. If the formula does not designate the specific genre to follow, it at least designates the type of genre. "Heellooy, heelleellooy" heralds a light poem, often to be used with the dance, more often still with a theme centered around love.

Poetic devices used in the miniature poem do not differ drastically from several other genres of Somali poetry. The method of alliteration, one sound per poem (either one consonant or all the vowels collectively), is

the same as for most traditional poetry. Furthermore, the imagery of the miniature poem, as in most genres, is closely tied to the pastoralist way of life. A few modern images inevitably come into the more recent poems. Another device of poetic diction common to most genres is the hidden message.<sup>18</sup> Lovers send messages to each other of secret rendezvous in poetic codes. Thieves tell each other what to steal through concealed messages in poems. The colonial administration as well as the Somali government of today have been criticized thus.

Two devices, however, are unique to the miniature poem, concise language and panegyric naming. The size of the miniature poem understandably influences its language, making necessary the most concise method of expressing a complete thought. The panegyric naming of women, although it occurs in a few other genres, is most fully developed in the miniature family.

Alliteration needs no further elucidation, but the other devices outlined above demand clear examples for understanding.

The images illustrated in the poems below are of common occurrence in the poems in my collection. Understandably not as many wiglo, dhaanto, and hirwo are remembered as belwo. For this reason I was able to collect many more belwo than poems of the other three genres.

During the long dry season in Somalia water is so scarce that domesticated animals often die. Indeed men have been known to die of thirst during this harsh time of year. The earth can become so dry that in places it resembles a vast ocean of potato chips. Only a few trees offer solace and shade from the scorching, glaring sun, and the northern plain visibly supports only the yellow grass of jiilaal, the dry season. When rain finally arrives, it is not just a necessary substance for the renewal of life on the desert. It becomes a symbol for that life. Indeed it becomes the mother of all positive symbols in Somali poetry as metaphoric extension expands its semantic sphere. It becomes "the source of all virtue",<sup>19</sup> victory in strife, happiness, and many other things as well.

Without rain, there is no milk, for the camels literally dry up. Milk, along with rain, is a symbol for life, for it satisfies hunger as well as thirst. When the poet of the following wiglo sings of milk, he is speaking of much more than its physical substance:

Hadday Dhudi caano ii dhibtooy,  
Intaan dhama sow ma dhaafeen?

If Dhudi<sup>20</sup> gives me milk, and  
I drink [thereof], how can I leave her?

She has given him much more than milk; she has given him life itself.

When poets sing of their love, unlike the poem above, they more commonly equate it with illness. Love is a sickness, a malady not as serious as death, but still an affliction. This poet speaks of illness in his wiglo, but the Somali audience knows he speaks of love:

Markaan bukay way bariidin jirtee,  
Badbaado u geeya, Beer-Nugul.

When I was ill, she used to wish me well;  
[Now] take [my] blessing<sup>21</sup> on to her, to Gentle-Heart.<sup>22</sup>

The poet is saying that his lover always returned his love, even before she fell in love with him. He loved her (was ill) for a while before she learned to love him (fell ill and came in need of his blessing). Many belwo poets also viewed the condition of love negatively. The following poets saw it as a disease:

Cishqigu maaha cuud La dhaqdee,  
Waa cudur ka bilaabma curuqyada.

Love is not incense to be used sparingly;  
'Tis a disease which begins in the joints.

Or an illness:

Anigoo buka baahidaada iyo,  
Ku baal-maray beerku may gozay?

Whilst I was ill with the need of you,  
I passed you by; did [my] liver break?<sup>23</sup>

Some poets saw love as a special sort of insanity, as in this belwo:

Maankiyo maddahaa i kala maqanoo,  
Idinna waygu maadsanaysaan.

My mind and my heart are apart,  
And all of you make fun of me!

The tree is one of several images in Somali poetry which has more than one possible interpretation. Sometimes it is a metaphor for a woman's beauty, for it is tall and straight, as are young Somali women. At other times, it is a symbol for Somali customary law (hheer), for it is in the shade of a tree that elders meet to hold court. At still other times, the tree is used in an individualistic manner and must be interpreted in the context of the poem, as in the following wiglo:

Adduunyadu was ul geed sudhane,  
Abaal ma u dhigtay aakhiro eey.

The world is a dead branch<sup>24</sup> hanging on a tree:  
Have you put anything for yourself in the next world?

In this poem, the tree is a precarious foundation for the world. At any moment the wind or some other disaster could topple the world into oblivion. The poet asks the listener if he is prepared for death. In the following belwo, the tree represents the ever present image of the poet's loved one in his mind:

Sidii bahhrasaaf ku yaalla bustaan,  
Ayuun baad hadba ii bidhdaantaa.

Like a Eucalyptus tree growing in a garden,  
You always appear to me from a distant place.

The contrast between the dry and wet seasons on the Horn of Africa is quite significant. When the rains come, the apparently dead bush comes suddenly to life and clumps of yellow grass turn green. This change in the bush brought about by rain is used to symbolize the beauty of women, as in this belwo:

Cagaarka ka bahhay, caleen-weyniyo,  
Cosobaan cidi daaqin baad tahay.

The growing buds and leaves mature,  
The fresh and ungrazed grass are you.

And with the rain come the flowers of the desert, another source of metaphor for beauty among the belwo poets:

Haddaad ubahh tahay, mid aad u urtoo,  
Udgoon badan baad ahaan layd.

Were you a blossom: one that smelled so [sweet],  
You'd be [a bloom] that had abundant scents.

Along with specific objects, Somalis use situations as images, and they often choose a situation from the nomadic way of life, as in the following hirwo:

Sidii reer degoon, dab Loo dhidin,  
Hhalaan dilaalyoodayeey.

I -- [who am] like the family which has just encamped and  
for whom a fire has not [yet] been lit --  
Felt the cold of last night.

When a family group (reer) finishes the move (geeddi), everyone is hungry, cold and exhausted. The poet compares himself to a camp (or family head of that camp) at the end of a move. To be without his lover is to be cold and at the end of his nerves.

The ocean is an area some Somalis know quite well, for many have been sailors in the world's merchant marines. Somalis have sailed the seas for longer than anyone can remember.<sup>25</sup> Accordingly the ship is also used as an image in poetry, as in this wiglo:

Sidii markab maanyo soo marayeey,  
Wahh baa iiga muuqday meel-dheerey.

Like a ship passing over the sea,  
Someone appeared to me in a far distant place.

The sailor-poet who was visiting a foreign land, caught a passing vision of his love like a ship passing from afar.

There are other non-nomadic images in Somali poems, some quite new to the Somali scene. Two have been chosen here to illustrate how imported or foreign machines have made their way into the imagery of the miniature poem. In connection with this, light, the traditional image for truth, wisdom and, more recently, education, is united with the automobile to



symbolize the wisdom of a woman who lights up the path in the midst of darkness in this hirwo:

Fatoorad La fuulay fiidkiyoo,  
Faynuus fanka Loo sudhaad tahay.

A car being driven in the early evening  
With a lamp hanging from its front, are you.

It might appear that, because the imagery in Somali poetry can be so easily classified, variation in this poetry is greatly limited. This, however, is not the case, but in approaching the problem of variation, the key lies not in the addition of new imagery, but in how the poet employs the set stock of imagery available to him. The manipulation of imagery, rather than in new additions, is how variation in this poetry is most often accomplished. New images were not, however, banned from the belwo. A few made their way into the new genre, as did the tractor in the following poem:

Billaahi cagafyahay caawaan Ku baryayey,  
Cagtaadan ballaadhan e culusiyo,  
Codkaagu mahhay daweeyaan?

Oh tractor [mine], tonight I beg of you, in the name of God!  
This wide and heavy tire of yours,  
And your [chugging] voice: what use are they to me?!

Here the poet expresses impatience with his vehicle which he found too slow to take him to his lover.

And finally, Somalis have been exposed to writing from Arabia as well as from the British and Italians. Having no apparent affect on the composition of poetry, writing did nevertheless, enter poetry as an image, as can be seen in this verse:

Haddii aan qor is adhi,  
Qaraamka i galay,  
Kitaab Lagu qoro,  
Ma qaadeen.

If I say to myself: "Write [about]  
The love which entered me,"  
The book which could be written  
Would not contain it [all].

And in this one:

Baddoo qad ah iyo dhirtoo qalimmo ah,  
Caleenta qoyan oo qardaas Laga dhigo,  
Haddii Lagu qoto qaraamka i galay,  
Malaa ways qalliqli lahaayeen.

[If all] the sea be ink, and [all] the trees be pens,  
[If all] the leaves so green be changed to paper [thin],  
If thus the love which entered me, be writ' with [all these things],  
Perhaps there would be [just] enough [to write my thoughts of love  
for thee].

Imagery in the miniature poem is usually universally understood in Somalia (like rain and drought) or can be determined from context. Sometimes, however, it can carry a double or hidden meaning. This device is common enough in Somali poetry to be treated separately.

Veiled speech is a device in Somali oral literature not unique to the miniature family. Indeed it is not unique to the poetry for it can be found in folktales, as well. As the name of this device implies, what is involved is the passing of a message from one person (or group) to another in such a way that a third party cannot understand or does not suspect. To accomplish this the poet must employ images which seem to imply one point to the third party but which pass the oral message to the person for whom it was intended. This is no easy task and the less universal the metaphors or the less unified they are in the poem, the more suspect is the poet.

The hidden message is used in a variety of situations and for a number of reasons. Lovers "speak" to each other using this device. Sometimes the third party is a husband, as we shall see in the example below; sometimes it is the girl's father. But often it is merely the community in general from whose gossip the lovers wish to conceal their feelings. In later poetic developments, the hidden message was employed to conceal political messages. Poets often addressed the entire Somali nation, the third party being the colonial administration.

But there is yet another function of the hidden message which might be described as the aesthetic enjoyment of the Somali audience. Poems with veiled speech are often recited inside folktales. Whether or not such tales are true or apocryphal is really irrelevant to the Somali audience, <sup>26</sup> for their purpose is to entertain. We shall illustrate such a tale below.

It is said that a man once loved a woman who was already married. One night he arranged a rendezvous with her. Waiting for a long time at the appointed place, the man became restless when she failed to appear. So he went to a place near her compound and recited this wiglo to her:

Caweeya, Cawooy, Caweeya, Bullooy,  
Ciddiinuu caweysiin dheeraayey.

Oh Caweeya, [my] Cawo, oh Caweeya, [my] Bullo, <sup>27</sup>  
Oh how long is the rest period <sup>28</sup> of your people?

Hearing her beloved chant this message, she chanted another wiglo to him, pretending to sing to her cow -- a clever act to the Somali audience, for it is with poems addressed to domesticated animals that panegyric naming also occurs. -- The woman was actually addressing herself.

Dabeeti libaahhle Dhiin-Gorayow,  
Ninkii dhaqay dhayda Loo badiyay.

Oh Dhiin-Gorayo <sup>29</sup> which has the tail of a lion,  
[Your] plentiful fresh milk is for the man who raised you.

The man who raised the cow, the woman's husband, had returned unexpectedly to the compound and now overheard both wiglo. Suspecting the truth, the husband countered with yet a third wiglo:

War belaaayo rag baan u baalidayoo,  
Birtay nimay gaadhdhay baan ma lahee!

Oh man, I am experienced in the conflicts of noble men;  
There is no treatment for the man whom my steel reaches!

The woman's lover then departed from her compound and perhaps from her life.

The hidden message delivers the maximum amount of information with the minimal amount of words, since those involved can fill in between the lines and make inferences as to the true meaning of the verse. This use of concise language is, in a broader sense, common to all miniature poems and is a general characteristic of their diction.

In longer poems, poets are capable of developing a theme to a much greater extent than in the miniature poem. The diction of the genres in the miniature family is influenced by the size of the poem, for a complete thought must be expressed in only a few words. What B. W. Andrzejewski says of the belwo seems to me to apply to all the genres in this family.<sup>30</sup>

...in two lines, or even one, the poet had to work out a complete and rounded utterance which would please a discriminating public used to the appreciation of poetry and delighting in the deciphering of the poet's message.

In some cases the poet is able to "lengthen" his poem by what is implied rather than by what is said in the text. In the following hirwo this can be clearly observed:

Hadduu cirku cuurcuuraayoo,  
Caashaay ma calaama roob baa ye?

When the sky is overcast:  
Oh Caasha, is this a sign of rain?

Clouds sometimes bring rain and sometimes blot out the sun. The poet here employs both meanings and implies in the second line: 1) Oh Caasha (girl's name), does this mean that you love me? (bring rain), or 2) Oh Caasha, are you (the sun, light, truth) cut off from me? Sometimes the connection between the lines of a miniature poem is not clearly observable upon first hearing them. One is forced to connect them by thinking beyond the words of the verse, thus lengthening the poem in a sense. The above poem is of this sort.

The use of concise language is more dramatically demonstrated with the poetic challenge including the form in which a riddle is included. In the case of the challenge or the riddle, the vague language must be understood and answered in yet another poem. The best answer to a challenge is, moreover, delivered with the same alliteration.

Another device which shares at least one point with concise language is that of panegyric naming. In this case the praising of women with an elaborate name expands the implications of the poem beyond the mere words of the text.

Panegyric naming (praise names) is used in miniature poetry to praise women. Although it occurs in other genres of traditional poetry, this device is most fully developed for the praise of women in the miniature family. Panegyric naming is used for other purposes, however. Camels and other domesticated animals are given elaborate names in other genres. Infants are also endowed with praise names by mothers who often prefer to keep these special names for their children secret. But it is in miniature poetry that the praise of women is most fully developed.

There are two main functions of praise names for women. First, they praise some attribute the poet wishes to bestow upon his love. Second, they conceal the identity of the poet's lover, so that angry kinsmen are not given cause for pursuing the poet. In reality the poet does not always have a specific woman in mind every time he composes a poem. Some panegyric names are merely chosen for their alliterative sounds; but others, as the one in the poem on page 94 (top) and in the following dhaanto, are chosen because they bear a relationship to the imagery of the poem:

Intaan Dahabooy, Ku daawan lahaa,  
Miyuu dayihhi daruur galay?

Oh Dahabo, [once] when I would have enjoyed the sight of you,  
Did the moon [not] go behind<sup>31</sup> a cloud?

Dahabo is a panegyric name which means "the Golden One", a color often assumed by the moon, especially when near the horizon. The poet implies by the second line: "Are you (Dahabo) taken from my sight (perhaps by your family)?" Dahabo, like many panegyric names, is also a girl's name in society. It, like many regular names, functions as a panegyric name as well, but many praise names are found only in verse. The following is a list of examples taken from miniature poems:

1. Beer-Nugul. "Gentle-Heart", or "The Tender/Sensitive One" (i.e. She-Whose-Bosom-Is-Tender/Sensitive).
2. Caweeya. "She-Who-Was-Born-In-The-Calm-Of-The-Rest-Period." This is the part of the late evening before the animals are milked and everyone goes to bed.
3. Cawo. "The Lucky One."
4. Bullo. "She-Who-Is-Of-The-Color-Of-The-Best-Of-Horses." Horses are the most prized of all animals among the traditional Somalis. The Sayyid Mahammed Cabdilla Hasan even entombed one of his favorite horses at his fort in Taleehh in northeastern Somalia when it died. Horses are prized even above the camel, which is considered the wealth of the nomad, while sheep and goats are considered subsistence. The color referred to is chocolate (or red, as Somalis see it), the skin color most praised in Somali aesthetics.
5. Dhudi. "The Tall-And-Slender-Tree". This is a metaphor for beauty, for tallness and straightness of body are considered very beautiful.

6. Indha-Yar. "Little-Eyes."
7. Rubbo. "The Coin." From the Indian coin (rupee), the first currency used by the British in the Somaliland Protectorate.
8. Geelo. "The Wealthy One." From the Somali word geel, "camel." Camels are considered wealth by the nomad.
9. Hani. "The One-Who-Deserves-Praise."
10. Macaan. "The Sweet One."
11. Qaahha-Yar. "The One-With-The-Small-Neck."
12. Qoor-Dheer. "The One-With-The-Long-Neck."
13. Liqanyo (or Laqanyo). "The One-Who-Saturates-Those-About-Her."
14. Asli. "The Original One", or "The One-Of-Ancient-Descent." (From Arabic asl, "origin/root/source/cause/lineage.")
15. Maandeeq. "The One-Who-Satisfied-The-Mind."

Finally we come to the key characteristic which both joins the four genres into one group and differentiates each specific genre from the next: the melodies to which they are sung. There are two points to be clarified here. First, there are a limited number of melodies to which a poem in any given genre can be recited. Any wiglo, for example, can be sung to any of the melodies set aside for its genre, but not to any of the other melodies used for the dhaanto, hirwo, or belwo. This leads to the second point. It is the melody to which the poem is sung which denotes the genre. It appears to be a characteristic melody, then, and not any linguistic or prosodic rule which differentiates the genres within the family.<sup>32</sup>

To illustrate this point, if one heard a Somali whistle a melody from the Family of miniature genres, the genre alone could be identified, but not the specific poem itself. This being the hypothesis, it should then hold that any one poem -- despite its original melody (i.e. genre classification) -- could be sung to the melodies of the other three genres. This is precisely the experiment I carried out successfully. The prominent Somali poet Hhasan Sheekh Muumin was able to take one miniature poem (originally a hirwo) and demonstrate with it the characteristic melodies of all of the four genres.<sup>33</sup>

#### Recent Developments

The major modern poem in Somalia today is called the heello, a name derived from the introductory formula for the miniature poem. A description of the full development of this genre is out of the scope of the present study, but it is interesting to note that the first form of the heello was developed in large part from the family of miniature genres. Although other elements, both foreign and indigenous, contributed to the final form of the heello, it might be said that the original heello was the fifth miniature poem to develop.

The original form of the heello developed soon after Cabdi Sinimo had conceived the belwo, and we shall term this form the "mega-miniature poem," if so paradoxical a neologism may be employed. The new form was still in most ways well within the definition of a miniature poem. It was characterized by a "tacking on" of many belwo, sometimes as many as 15 or 20,<sup>34</sup> into one long poem. Each stanza, then, was a separate belwo, composed by an individual poet, who was not influenced by the other stanzas (belwo)

of the poem, for the combining of the stanzas would be done after their composition. For this reason, the original heello was not a unified composition in its theme, although each belwo usually dealt with the subject of love. Furthermore, the influences of length in miniature poetry were exerted on the imagery and diction of each stanza. In the mega-miniature poem there was a sequence of unconnected images, while in the later development of the heello there was often a masterful blending of images and symbolism. Again, for the same reasons, the alliteration, though unified in each stanza, was not uniform throughout the entire poem. An example of this form of poem is given below:

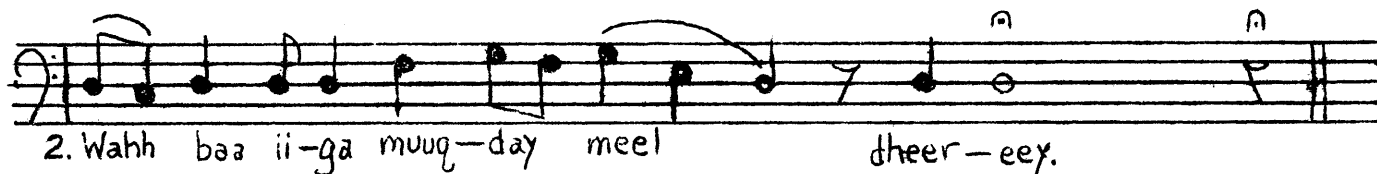
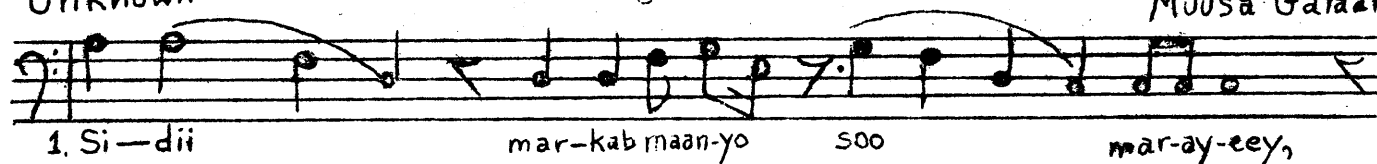
- I. 1. Aaa, adigaa hudhudyow hawada lalaayee, ]- (2)  
2. Haweeya hadal mayga gaadhsiine, ]
- II. 5. Aaa, Maryama Muhhubooy madheedka Wareey, ]- (2)  
6. Midhihi ka bislaaday baad tahayeey, ]
- III. 9. Aaa, sidii cir ku hooray meel cosobloo, ]- (2)  
10. Cadceeddii u soo bahhadad tahayeey, ]
- IV. 13. Aaa, Gaaroodoo roobleh geedihii ka bahhiyo, ]- (2)  
14. Guudkeeda maLa mooday gammaan faras, ]
- V. 17. Aaa, sidii aan godob qabo hurdada ma gamzee, ]- (2)  
18. Mahhaa Layga goonayaan galayee, ]
- VI. 21. Aaa, hhabaal nin galaa hhaq weeyaane, ]- (2)  
22. Illayn hhubi baan hhagrabaw dhicine, ]
- VII. 25. Aaa, barbaartii horiyo banaad sidiiyeey, ]- (2)  
26. Ha baadhbaadhin beri samaadkii, ]
- VIII. 29. Aaa, magaalada geed ku yaal Muhhubooy, ]- (2)  
30. Ayaad midabkiisa leedahayeey, ]
- IX. 33. Aaa, sidii doonni dufsata duufaaneey, ]- (2)  
34. Cidlaan hadba sii dabayshanayaayeey. ]
- \*\*\*\*\*
- I. 1. Ah, hoopoe bird hey! You are flying [around in] the air; ]- (2)  
2. Will you carry a message [of love] to Haweeyo<sup>35</sup> for me? ]
- II. 5. Ah, oh Beloved Maryan, the berry bush<sup>36</sup> of War:<sup>37</sup> ]- (2)  
6. You are its ripened fruit. ]
- III. 9. Ah, like the heavens dropping rain in a place where fresh ]  
grass [grows], ]- (2)
10. And the sun, which rises on it, are you. ]
- IV. 13. Ah, the Gaaroodi Plain<sup>38</sup> [is she], where rain [abounds] ]  
and green grass grows; ]- (2)
14. Does it [not] seem that her [luxuriant] hair<sup>39</sup> is like ]  
that of the young horse? ]
- V. 17. Ah, like a guilty man, I do not sleep so well; ]- (2)  
18. What have I done to be persecuted?<sup>40</sup> ]
- VI. 21. Ah, entering the grave is right for man; ]- (2)  
22. Indeed love does not fall to any side.<sup>41</sup> ]
- VII. 25. Ah, like the young men and girls of olden times, ]- (2)  
26. Do not postpone the good times till tomorrow! ]
- VIII. 29. Ah, oh Beloved, the tree in the village: ]- (2)  
30. You possess its [most beautiful] color. ]
- IX. 33. Ah, like a ship carried [off by] a storm  
34. To a desolate place, every time I am blown [off my course]- (2)  
by love]. ]

As mentioned above, the heello went on to develop in different forms, for the art of oral composition is far from extinct on the Horn of Africa. The original form of the heello, like each of the miniature genres, was a link

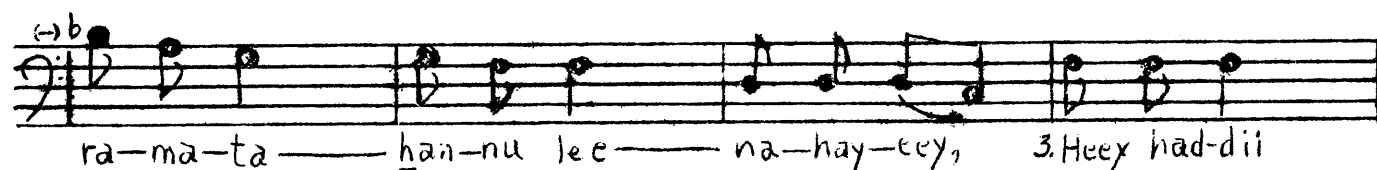
in the chain of development which was to bring about the modern form of the heello, for "...a work of art is not simply the embodiment of experience but the latest work of art in a series of such works; it is...a poem 'determined' so far as it is determined at all, by literary tradition and convention."<sup>42</sup>

Composer  
Unknown

## Wiglo in 'M'

As sung by  
Muusa GalaalComposer  
Unknown

## Dhaanto in 'R'

As sung by  
Muusa Galaal



## Hirwo in 'L'

Composer  
UnknownAs sung by  
Muusa Galaal

1. Heel-leel-lo-hoy heel-looy heel-leel-looy,

2. Heel-le-hel-li ka-lo-hoy — nu lee — na-hay-eey,

3. Naa Lu-laay an ba le-heyl — ha-been ma le-do e,

4. Si — dee baad u la-ham — men-dood — daa — ye?

## Belwo in 'S'

Composer  
UnknownAs sung by  
Hhasan Sh. Muumin

1. Heel-looy heel-looy heel-leel-looy, 2. Heel-

-la-da mar-i ha Loo ha Loo sii-yay-ey, 3. Soolu-

-lu-lo si-da laa-ma gay — dha lo — hoo, 4. Laaf-y-

gu-ruth rag-ga laab — ta soo saar — eey.

## NOTES

1. I should like to begin this study by expressing my gratitude to Dr. Anthony King of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. Dr. King kindly transcribed the musical scores of the four poems at the end of this article. ~~Without~~ his assistance, this part of the article would have been impossible to present. I should, however, like to stress that if there are any errors in copying Dr. King's transcriptions for this article, they are mine alone.
2. For a complete bibliography on this subject until 1969, see John William Johnson, "A Bibliography of the Somali Language and Literature," African Language Review 8 (1969), 279-97.
3. Treatment of some of these poems has been done in B. W. Andrzejewski and I. M. Lewis, Somali Poetry (London: Oxford University Press, 1964). One genre, the belwo, received detailed ~~attention~~ in B. W. Andrzejewski, "The Art of the Miniature in Somali Poetry," African Language Review 6 (1967), 5-16.
4. Research into these genres was carried out in Somalia from 1966 to 1969 and at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, from 1969 to 1971.
5. See Note 3 above.
6. These interviews and other material such as radio programs and newspaper articles on Somali poetry are available for public perusal in a bound volume entitled Source Materials Relating to the Development of Modern Somali Poetry. Two copies were made. One is in the Department of Africa at the School of Oriental and African Studies. The other is in my private possession, and I may be contacted through the Folklore Institute at Indiana University.
7. Somali national hero who was a religious leader, poet and warrior. For a good summary of the Sayyid's career, see Robert L. Hess, "The Poor Man of God -- Muhammed Abdullah Hassan," in Leadership in Eastern Africa: Six Political Biographies, ed. Norman R. Bennett (Boston: Boston University Press, 1968), pp. 63-108.
8. An introductory formula. See below. It should be pointed out that the transcription used throughout this study is not a phonetic one per se, though it is remarkably close to one. It is an alphabet devised for Somali which employs symbols from the Latin alphabet for which there are no Somali equivalents in order to express Somali sounds for which there are no English equivalents. Most of the symbols represent sounds, however, which are the same or similar in English and Somali. One of the reasons for employing this type of transcription in Somalia is that it can be used on the already large numbers of English and Italian typewriters in the country. This alphabet was devised and perfected over a period of about fifteen years by the Somali scholar Muusa Hhaaji Ismaaciil Galaal and is employed here because if a Latin script is chosen as the official orthography by the Somali government, this one is very likely to be the one chosen. This transcription is fully explained in Muusa's book The Terminology and

Practice of Somali Weather Lore, Astronomy and Astrology, published by him in Mogadishu in 1968 and reviewed by Phil Peek in the Folklore Forum 1:4, November, 1968. A copy of this book may be found in the Archives of the Folklore Institute. One exception to this transcription as used in this article is the character "z" which I use to represent the glottal stop.

9. For a good example of such a duel, see B. W. Andrzejewski and Muusa Hh. I. Galaal, "A Somali Poetic Combat," Journal of African Languages 2 (1963), part 1, 15-28; part 2, 93-100; part 3, 190-205.
10. In order to save space and because it is the same each time, the introductory formula has been omitted before the rest of the poems in this study.
11. It should be pointed out that line division in the poems in this study is based on the musical delivery of the poems. Odd lines in each poem will have the same musical delivery as will the even lines.
12. Dabka. "Weapons"; literally, "fire".
13. The practice of looking after another man's livestock was usually paid with one animal per year's work, plus the daily sustenance of the laborer.
14. The text of this poem can be found in the volume mentioned in Note 6 above.
15. See B. W. Andrzejewski, "The Roobdoon of Sheikh Aqib Abdullahi Jama: A Somali Prayer for Rain," African Language Studies 8 (1969), 21-34.
16. See Andrzejewski, "The Art of the Miniature in Somali Poetry," p. 12.
17. Leenahay. "Sing/chant," literally, "say/possess."
18. For an article on this subject, see B. W. Andrzejewski and Muusa Hh. I. Galaal, "The Art of the Verbal Message in Somali Society," Hamburger Beiträge zur Afrika-Kunde 5 (1966), 29-39.
19. Muusa Hh. I. Galaal, Terminology and Practice of Somali Weather Lore, p. 14.
20. Dhudi. Panegyric name, see no. 5, p. 90.
21. Badbaado. "Blessing"; literally, "safety."
22. Beer-Nugul. Panegyric name, see no. 1, p. 90.
23. i.e. "Was my heart broken?" The liver is one of the several seats of emotion in Somali poetry.
24. Ul. "Dead branch", literally, "stick."
25. There are many communities of Somalis, mostly made up of sailors, in several areas of the world. Cardiff in Wales, for example, supports a population of around 3,000 Somalis.

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26. It should be pointed out that the story which is given in the text is paraphrased and is not the transcription of a properly collected folk-tale. This is because the poems were presented to me by my informant and then translated; after this, the story was related to me in English. I understand that the usual method of delivery is for the reciter to tell the story as I have done here, with the poems inside the tale.
27. Panegyric names, see nos. 2, 3, and 4, p. 90.
28. Note the connection between the panegyric name of the woman and the text of the poem. See p. 90, no. 2 for an explanation of the rest period.
29. Dhiin-Gorayo. Panegyric name. Dhiin is the reddish-purple color of a cow. Gorayo is an ostrich. The feeling for this color is the same as for the panegyric name Bullo (see no. 4, p. 90. The ostrich is prized for its soft feathers which at one time were sought on the world market. The use here refers to the softness of the woman's hair.
30. See Andrzejewski, "The Art of the Miniature in Somali Poetry," p. 7.
31. Gal. "Go behind"; literally, "enter."
32. For a general description on how genres are differentiated in Somali poetry, see B. W. Andrzejewski and I. M. Lewis, Somali Poetry, p. 46.
33. To further illustrate the modes of delivery, I have included musical scores of one representative melody for each genre at the end of this article. Please note that pitch values in the Somali system do not always correspond exactly with those in western notation. Using Dr. King's suggestion, the symbol "(-)" has been employed when a Somali pitch is between two western values. It is also interesting to note here that, although I was not aware of it at the time of my experiment, B. W. Andrzejewski had carried out the same experiment about fifteen years earlier with another informant and had come to the same conclusions.
34. Margaret Laurance, A Tree For Poverty: Somali Poetry and Prose (Nairobi: The Eagle Press, 1954), p. 7.
35. Haweeyo. Panegyric name, meaning "The Best-One-Of-All."
36. Madheedh. A berry bush, either cordia gharaf or cordia ovalis.
37. War. Name of a Somali settlement in the Hawd in Ethiopia.
38. The Gaaroodi Plain. A plain south of Burco in northern Somalia.
39. Guud. "Hair"; literally, "top."
40. i.e. By the affliction of love.
41. i.e. One cannot escape the clutches of love any more than one can escape the grave.
42. René Wellek and Austin Warren, Theory of Literature (London: Jonathan Cape, 1949), p. 72.