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**Tradition, anomaly and the wave for the future: Somali oral
literature, Nuruddin Farah and written Somali prose fiction**

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University of California, Los Angeles, 1989

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Los Angeles

**Tradition, Anomaly and the Wave for the Future:
Somali Oral Literature, Nuruddin Farah and
Written Somali Prose Fiction**

**A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in Comparative Literature**

by

Ali Jimale Ahmed

1989

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DEDICATION

To my mother, Halima, and my brother Mohamud "Faradar", who did not live long enough to rejoice in the harvest they had sown. Faradar's vision of four "doctors" in the Jimale Ahmed family has stayed with me and my younger brother, Ahmed.

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In an interesting novel in Amharic, *Aliwolladimm*, by Ethiopia's Abbe' Gubegna, an unborn child proves its stubbornness by refusing to be born. It conducts a dialogue from the womb with its mother. The latter tells the unborn of the inclement environment outside. Naturally, the unborn prefers the coziness of the womb to the harsh realities of the outside world. Reflecting on how long this dissertation took me to complete--4 years--, I cannot but understand why it refused to be 'born'. The succor I got from friends and relatives was too comforting to make me want to part with.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Tradition, Anomaly and the Wave for the Future: Somali Oral Literature, Nuruddin Farah and Written Somali Prose Fiction

by

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Professor John F. Povey, Chair.

This dissertation examines the close affinity that written Somali prose fiction and the first two novels of Nuruddin Farah have with Somali pre-colonial literary tradition. The latter produces a bifurcated development: the transmuted group of writers and the first period of Farah. There is a close resemblance between the early period of Farah and the transmuters. Both conform to narrative structure found in Somali oral literature. Works by transmuters, however, are umbilically closer to tradition. They incorporate aspects of Somali oral literature. These aspects include poetry, proverbs, elements of narrative structure such as plot (journey motif) and characterization, and intervention of dialogue. It is through this kinship that works by transmuters retain their quasi-national characteristic both in terms of content and style. The illustration of the repetition of some of the characteristics of Somali oral literature in the new written literature forms the core of this study.

The close resemblance of Farah's first novel to Somali oral literature fades away with his second book. This novel is a product of the second period of Farah. In it, Farah experiments with a stream of consciousness writing which closely resembles James Joyce's technique in *Ulysses*. While the transmuted give way to a new wave of writers, the growth of the novel writing in English starts and has so far ended with Farah. This apparent stunting of the development of the novel genre in English explains the anomalous situation of Farah in Somali prose fiction writing. This study attempts to give reasons for such a phenomenon.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

NATURE AND BACKGROUND OF SOMALI LITERATURE

A modern literary, not sociological, theory divides the literature of a country into three periods: colonial, cosmopolitan and national. In the first period, the country, in a literary sense, is a colony dependent on its metropolis. In the second period, it simultaneously assimilates elements of various foreign literatures. In the third period, it shapes and expresses its own personality and feelings.

Although this theory of literature does not go any farther, it is broad enough for our purpose.¹

José Carlos Maria'tegui "Literature on Trial"

THE AIM OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to discern some salient features in the structure and theme of Somali oral literature, and then trace these features as they are found in the new written form of the novel. It is my contention, that some of the characteristics of oral literature repeat themselves in the new written Somali literature. This is especially true of the early novels written between 1973 and 1977. It is thus important to study the diachronic relationship that some aspects of written Somali literature have with the most characteristic features of oral literature. The study in this sense, presents some of the main features of Somali literature in order to show the relation between oral

poetry and narratives, and contemporary written Somali literature. To accomplish its goal in the broadest sense possible, the study is broken into six chapters.

Chapter one introduces the main historical features of Somali literature (poetry and prose). Chapter two discusses some specific examples of Somali oral literature. In chapter three, the study traces the genesis of Somali written fiction. Written prose fiction comes from the secular section of, to borrow a Bulhan phrase, the "indigenous intelligentsia."² The works of transitional authors and their affinity to tradition is the subject of analysis in Chapter four. The chapter discusses three stories, Xuseen Sheekh Axmed "Kaddare's" *Waasuge Iyo Warsame*, Faarax M. Cawl's *Aqoon Darro Waa U Nacab Jacayl* and Shire Jaamac Axmed's *Rooxaan* (in a briefer fashion). I intend to prove through these works that Somali novels show a marked kinship to Somali pre-colonial literary tradition. It is through this kinship that these works retain their quasi-national characteristic both in terms of content and style.

Nuruiddin Farah's oeuvre which forms the basis for Chapter five traces its existence to a cosmopolitan literature which has its anchor in a foreign model, and which, because of its medium of transmission, aims more at a foreign audience. True to its nature, Farah's cosmopolitan literature borrows a plethora of epithets from colonial repertoire to describe the native. In Farah's works especially *A Naked Needle* and beyond, the Somali is situated in colonial discourse. The Somalis, for example, are said to resemble "Epsom salt, which spurts, foams and settles to the bottom in the time it takes to bat your eyelids.

This is what he ["An Englishman in the colonial days"] said... I suppose he was right, for we are a people that need constant changes in government, in leadership. We rise, we revolt against any power and eventually tend to accept it as our fate."³ In these words, Farah's seems to accentuate the so-called anarchic tendencies of the Somali. It will become clear during the course of our discussion that the perpetuation of the image of an anarchy-prone Somali really needs a rigorous re-evaluation. However, Farah need not be the 'strawman'.

The conclusion while summarizing what has been argued in preceding chapters also discusses the role of those who belong to the wave of the future. This new wave of writers, being relatively young and somewhat more educated than their predecessors imbue into Somali novel-writing a host of narrative techniques which shows affinities with the rise of the novel genre. This group, it appears, affects the fate of novel writing in European languages for two reasons. First, the language barrier which the work of a cosmopolitan author such as Farah inherently constructs to protect itself from being read by a majority of the Somali people is avoided in the works of those who write in Somali. Secondly, works in the Somali language give the feeling of a continuity to Somali pre-colonial literary tradition. The latter becomes "a backcloth," to borrow from Wole Soyinka, for both the oral literature and the written genre.⁴ The blame for the absence of such a backcloth in the works of Farah, aside from the author's idiosyncratic sensibilities and the role of the novel as a critique of collective consciousness, could be traced to foreign publishers whose business interest lies in the successful commodotization of the work of

art. The demand for such a work mostly comes from a foreign market.

To discount Farah's work for that reason alone nonetheless simplifies a complex issue. For some of the works in Somali are also compelled to take the commodotization factor of a work of art into account. In this respect, there are works in Somali which beautify the backcloth almost to a Negritudunist proportion. In this sense, the beautification of the backcloth is perhaps necessitated by the need, on the part of the author, to please the aesthetic sensibilities of his readers. Readers, on the other hand, expect from the author "[to] recover the reality that they do not know or that has been kept from them." Thus emerges the unenviable situation of the writer in an indigenous language. The use of an African language runs the risk of generating semi-official literature since the bulk of works produced in African languages are published through sponsorships by state printing agencies. There would be nothing wrong with such a sponsoring had the nation-state in Africa drawn its power from a consensual democracy. In a traditional setting, there are a performer/narrator, an audience and a tradition from which the first two take their cue. The performer/narrator and audience perform as a kind of check and balance on each other. Distortions by the narrators are challenged from the "floor". These members of the audience do not take issue with artistic embellishments unless they become unnecessary digressions. Rather, the audience ensures a commitment to the underlying mores of the community.

In a written literature, there is a writer, an impersonal reading public and a nation-state which purportedly fills in for the role of

tradition. There is no meeting ground for the three. The powers that be who control the state apparatus do not allow a discussion as to what is in the best interest of the people. The hegemonic powers of the state blur the perspicacity of the paternalism involved. This paternalistic posture by those in power attempts in vain to cloak the class nature of the nation-state. Yet, no book is published in Somali, for example, without an imprimatur by the state. A process of self-censoring, therefore, installs itself consciously or unconsciously in the mind of the writer in a national language. It is through the effects this self-censoring might have on a work of art that one might be tempted to compare the working of the two networks which sponsor the publication of books. No decision by any publishing group whether it is governmental or entrepreneurial is value-free. The heavily didactic pronouncements by writers in Somali, and the marked break of some of Farah's work with tradition in this study can perhaps be interpreted as autochthonous ideas.

ORAL VERSUS WRITTEN LITERATURES

All literatures balance extremes: the original structure that the new form violates and wants to surpass, yet also draws upon it, and the new form that it endeavours to create. Two words in the preceding sentence "surpass" and "create" are important. They explain that the process of literacy within the Somali populace is far from over. This fact clearly indicates that orature in the Somali context is prevalent in the transition novels, and is retained in recent books.

The Somalis are still an oral people. This statement does not

favor oral over written literature. To contrast the two, as if competitively, does not produce positive results. Both oral and written should be studied in light of their basic functions. Both are mechanisms employed to record, store, and transmit human thought and experience. The means and methods each one uses to disseminate human experience can be as different as are their influences upon each other. Writing, therefore, in itself is not a new activity, but only a newer medium which like orality preserves the wisdom of the ancestors for posterity. A description of the function of the two literary forms is best understood by tracing the term "text" to its etymology. The term, as Bongasu Kishani explains, originates from the Latin "texere" (to weave),⁵ but to be able to weave something i.e. cloth, (not Kishani's image, but mine), one has to have two things in hand, string and a loom. The analogy becomes clear when one considers a child playing cat's cradle who has to have a piece of string in order to form different designs, otherwise the configurations in his mind will remain abstract. The child's mental configurations concretize and convey meaning, with the help of other things (this time a piece of string) outside the mind.

In a similar fashion, human thought needs an artifact to be transmitted across time and space. Such a medium could be the spoken or written word. But what is crucial to remember is that neither stand for the messages i.e., the content or the essence of what is said. It is the content which embodies the wisdom of the message. Put in another way, writing and orality as such do not improve the quality of the message if what is written or narrated is devoid of meaning.

This disposition, if agreed upon, will challenge any inclination which arises as a result of what Walter Ong refers to as a "cultural squint".⁶ A prevalent form of cultural squint is the belief that oral societies stunt originality.⁷ Evidence shows that there is originality in an oral society. Whether it is immediately noticeable to its members is beside the point. In Somali society, for example, poetry flourishes because of the dialectic relationship between an individual poet's creative power to see things differently and the maneuvering ground provided by society.⁸ The Somali poet, as will be clarified in the pages that follow, possesses a special knowledge which exonerates him from mundane limits. The imagery, symbolism, metaphor, inter alia, which the poet employs to deliver his message play a crucial role in removing poetry from the "real" arena. The elliptic form of poetry is what makes it a double-edged knife which in turn shows the malleability of the word. The Somalis equate this elastic quality of the word to sinew with all its flexibility, but, as Norrman and Haarberg show: "Malleability is one half of the dual nature of language--the half that permits us to use language the way a sculptor uses wet clay making of it whatever you wish."⁹ But even "stability", the other half of the dual nature of language does not restrict the lability of the word, spoken or written, since it entails a kind of "shopping in a linguistic supermarket, where the user of language chooses from the shelves, among stable linguistic elements, the particular one that will suit his communicative need at the moment."¹⁰ Somali poets working through this dual nature of language have succeeded in initiating original ideas to respond to particular aspects of new challenges.

Poets are not the only creative persons to have utilized the dual nature of language. Authors of prose fiction in Somali have succeeded in the short span of time since the introduction of Somali script (1972) to transform the linguistic aspect of the language in such a way that Somali enables not only the development of the written forms, but also the discussion of new themes. The accommodation of urban themes in traditional narrative modes bears a clear testimony to the virility of Somali Language. It is a virility which in its unique way ensures some form of cohesion and continuity with tradition. The narratives under discussion in this study will shed some light on the successful adaptation of theme, structure and sometimes technique by the written fiction. Such an adaptation of traditional narrative structure by the written forms will show that the requirements which have marked the African novel in European languages in certain countries might not be necessary in Somalia.

Two reasons account for this. The absence from the Somali scene of what Ali Mazrui calls "a vertical cultural dualism"¹¹ vis-a-vis European languages is all the more strengthened by a deeply-rooted monolingualism which does not view proficiency in a foreign language as a form of knowledge. Resentment of the influence of a foreign language does not in and of itself augment an indigenous language to captivate the hearts and minds of its speakers. Thus, the importance of the second reason which accounts for the lure the Somali language has for its speakers. The malleability factor mentioned above is couched with options and possibilities which allow the Somali author to manipulate the language in such a way that it can carry the weight and

subtlety of his/her meaning.

"TRADITION AND INDIVIDUAL TALENT"

The authors and their works in this study reveal the existence of two types of fiction writers in Somali. The first group, to use Andrzejewski's term, "transmuters",¹² focuses on the forming of a synthesis between tradition and contemporary realities. The group is umbilically close to tradition. The second group, "innovators",¹³ another Andrzejewskian term, develop the line by utilizing narrative structures which are commensurate with the new written forms. It is in the novels of this last group that 'tradition and individual talent',¹⁴ to borrow T.S. Eliot's phrase, coalesce to form a single entity with its own internal laws. The amalgamation of talent and tradition can also attest to the fact that the written and oral forms can live contiguously with each other as had been the case for centuries. In the case of Somali literature, the narrative is replete with alien/foreign words alluding to a close affinity between the oral and written. The existence of a people who have not heard of literacy is probably non-existent, and as Jack Goody explains,

At least during the past 2000 years, the vast majority of the peoples of the world (most Eurasia and much of Africa) have lived... in cultures which were influenced in some degrees by the circulation of the written word, by the presence of groups or individuals who could read or write.... It is clear that even if one's attention is centered only upon village life, there are large areas of the world where the fact of writing and existence of the book has to be taken into account, even in discussing "traditional" societies.¹⁵

No place attests to the truth of that statement more than Somalia where the people are all Moslems. It is therefore hard to imagine that there is a Somali who has not seen or heard of the Holy Book of Islam, the Qur'aan. Yet the Somalis have remained illiterate over the centuries. Most Somali sheikhs can read and write Arabic, the language of the Qur'aan, yet with the exception of a few who transcribed their poetry in Arabic characters, no sheikh has ever endeavored to create a writing system for transcribing Somali oral literature. The reluctance of the Sheikhs to devise a script for Somali does not only lie in the orality of the people of the area, as suggested by John Johnson in his *Heellooy*, but in the nature of the sheikh toward the laity.¹⁶ The 'wadaad' in Somali tradition is a keeper of the "word": and as such has a tendency to monopolize his possession. He, in short, does not want to expand the base of the tree of knowledge. This is not unique to Somali peripatetic religious men, but it is characteristic of men in robes spanning time and space. In Christianity most priests preached in Latin, a language most of their congregation could not understand. This was coupled with the fact that most of the clerics were illiterate themselves. Characteristically, religious men share this presumption with those who possess arcane knowledge.

The poet also built a fortress to avert any imminent incursions on the part of the majority, the non-poets, to the sacrosanct terrain of his field. A rigid form of alliteration, coupled with the use of archaic language, stifles the ambitions of many a man to become a poet. Many Somali scholars have written piles of articles decrying the rigidity of the form. They all called for a change of rules so that future poets

could compose in free verse. Unfortunately, none of these scholars came forward with any plausible way of combining theory with practice. The lack of any meaningful praxis has put an end to the discussion advocating free verse for poetry composition in Somalia. In fact, a similar crusade to prosify Somali plays has suffered a similar fate.¹⁷ In sum, the existence of an esoteric class/ group presupposes a tug of war contrived to prevent any attempt on the part of the laity to infiltrate the precincts of an esoteric class which in turn resists any 'dilutions'. Put in an other way, poets and sheikhs were unwilling to educate people in their different domains lest their control over the people slipped away.

Poet-sheikhs like Sheikh Moxamed Cabdulle Xasan, Sheikh Axmed Gabyow, were not confident that there would be a better dissemination of their poetry if written in script. Most of the people roaming for pasture and water would find the written word an inappropriate form for reaching a large public. The nomadic way of living necessitates the orality of Somali poetry. The poet wanting to be heard in places far away from his homestead craves a spatial extension. He finds justification in the Somali proverb "dhagax meel dhow ayow ku dhacaa, dhawaqna meelfog." (sound travels further than a stone, [when it is thrown]) The implication is that the poet wishes to escape the limitation of the disc thrower whose disc can not travel much further than its initial point of contact with the ground. A word of mouth, goes the reasoning, covers ground away from its place of origin. The exigencies of the nomadic life favors the oral form of transmission.

In the riverine areas of Somalia, where life is relatively sedentary, Sheikh Uweys Xaaji Maxamed wrote poetry in Arabic script, but only examination by a student interested in the sociology of literature can determine, if the peasant background of his audience really increased his readership and encouraged his use of Arabic script. Most Somalis, peasants or pastoralists, are sent to Koranic schools to memorize the Koran, but the Somalis are not speakers of Arabic. They only revere the language of the holy book.

One important change that any student has to expect is, as Bongasu Kishani explains, "Literacy translates both the mind and orality."¹⁸ Translations have never been without their casualty, especially if the objective was "to commit to writing what is left of survivals", i.e., supposing that oral literature is part of a "fast-perishing relic".¹⁹ As Havelock points out in relation to Homeric Greece, one of the earliest victims of such a casualty was oral art of the time which "suffered because the linguistic brains of the community were being drained off by the scribal centers."²⁰ The transcription of oral literature with a view to preserving it from extinction tampers with the vitality of the spoken word. This is true of what Andrzejewski calls the 'preserver' group in Somalia.²¹ The close affinity between performer and audience is lost when literacy assumes the role of delivery. It takes magic from it, that magic which is embedded in the performance of the word. Much has been written on the inability of newly written languages to generate comparable words to replace onomatopoeic terms employed in oral literature.²² This absence is what probably enraged the old woman who was the source for several of the ballads

in Sir Walter Scott's *Minstrels of the Scottish Border* when she lamented.

There war never ane O'ma sangs prentit till ye prentit them yoursel', an'ye hae spoilt them awthgither. They were made for singing an'no for reading, but ye hae broken the charm now, an' they'll never be sung mair.²³

The old woman's lamentation can also be interpreted in a different level: The deep fear embedded in some oral societies, especially the guardians of tradition, that with literacy comes death. Their prominent roles in society become obsolete for, as Kevin Maxwell argues, "literacy short-circuits seniority as the way to wisdom".²⁴ Yet the reactions of these people are couched in terms which, at surface level, interpret the concern, anxiety and consternation of the other members of the community. Oral peoples have their suspicions about literacy and especially about the way and enthusiasm some zealous literate members in the community fight for its implementation. In contrast upholders of oral traditions rarely accord great respect for literacy campaigns waged by indigenous governments. Their focal point is not to develop another tool for recording experiences. These indigenous governments are pre-occupied with finding ways and means of catapulting their citizens to modernity. The guardians of the traditions are not without their own subterfuges to dissuade people from becoming literate. One such stratagem by the famous Somali Oralist Moxamed Xaji Xussein "Sheeko Xariir" succinctly states the tradition's reluctance to resort to writing thus: "Haashi dowr, haafid ma noqdo" 'He who looks at a

paper never becomes a memorizer".²⁵ The implication here is the literate person becomes dependent upon, almost a slave to the paper, i.e., the written word. Dependency here is explained in terms of aid sought outside the person's means of remembrances. Such an aid, so goes the rationale of the upholders of tradition, entails fear fostered by the fabric of the written word. Written materials can get lost, stolen or burnt, while the oral word is engraved in a person's memory. (That the memorizer himself could die is ignored by them.) The reasoning becomes meaningful when one considers the raids recorded in history which were aimed at either dumping books into the river or burning them completely. The burning of books was not only a symbolic act of defeat, but one way of ensuring the final demise of a society. To advocates of tradition, the danger becomes less imminent when the wisdom of the society is stored in the memory of its elders who in turn ensure that experience and knowledge accumulated through the ages are bequeathed to posterity by word of mouth.

THE RISE OF SOMALI WRITTEN PROSE FICTION

Yet, Somali written literature has come of age. The burgeoning towns of Somalia necessitated the coming together of people with different backgrounds. The nature of the town environment precludes the telling of stories at a particular time when people, for example, can gather under one roof (or around a campfire as has been the case in the countryside). This new development gives birth to the written forms which in turn renders ineffective the erstwhile division of labor whereby men rarely told or listened to fictional narratives. Men told or

listened to real historical narratives. The change is compelled by the written medium. This explains why men are more literate than women. More boys are sent to school than girls.

Despite the assumption of the role of novel writing by men, tradition is still important in the novels. Traditional narrative elements of oral literature such as the incorporation of poetry and proverbs play important roles in the novels in Somali. The use of proverbs, for example, enhances the didacticism of the stories. Also, the role of the omniscient narrator in the written fiction is similar to that of his/her counterpart in oral literature. Such an adherence to tradition does not imply stasis on the part of the new form. Rather cohering to tradition attests to the existence of two balancing forces at work in the novels: centripetal and centrifugal. The first force ensures the existence of the continuum to tradition, while the second generates a yearning for a qualitative leap enhanced and given shape by the dictates of individual talent.²⁶

The two groups of writers, the transmuters and the innovators mentioned above, represent these two trends. The transmuter group adapts elements of tradition to novel writing. Through individual talent, the innovators usher in a new era of novel writing in Somali. The ground covered by this group in the short time of written Somali is immense. The reasons for this improvement are many, but three deserve special mention. First is the increase in the literacy rate of the country. This came about as extensive literacy campaigns were launched in all corners of the Republic. Secondly, the number of people literate in foreign languages was, in comparison to other

African countries, small. Competition from other publishing sources was therefore negligible or non-existent. Lastly, college students who wanted to establish their names and reap some material benefits joined the bandwagon of writing in Somali. Besides the relative unimportance of foreign languages in the Somali context, it is the emergence of this new wave of writers which virtually initiates Somali novel writing.

The emergence of the new wave of writers adversely affects prose fiction written in European languages. It is with the proliferation of works by this group that Nuruddin Farah, Somalia's only novelist in a European language, becomes a class unto and by himself. The general trend which is assumed to occur in the African novel in English, for example, does not become a pre-requisite for the novel genre in the Somali language. This analysis attempts to account for the absence in Somali prose fiction writing of a trend similar to that found in other African literatures, especially in Yoruba. In the latter, as ably demonstrated by Abiola Irele, one can discern an underlying thread which attests to a linear progression in its development.²⁷ One can trace the emergence of the Yoruba novel from Fagunwa's works in Yoruba through Tutuola's ghost stories in broken English to Soyinka's novel. In the Somali case, tradition gives birth to a bifurcated development: the transmuted group of writers and Somalia's best known novelist, Nuruddin Farah. This is the early period of Farah as represented by his first book, *From a Crooked Rib*. The second period of Farah as evidenced by *A Naked Needle* shows a marked divergence from Somali tradition both in terms of content and style. While the

transmuted give way to a new wave of writers, the growth of novel writing in English starts and has so far ended with Farah. This apparent stunting of the development of the novel genre in English explains the anomalous situation of Farah in Somali prose fiction writing. This study attempts to give reasons for such a phenomenon.

1 José Carlos Mariátegui, "Literature on Trial" in his *Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality*, Trans. Marjory Uriquidi (Austin, Tx.: University of Texas Press, 1971), p. 191.

2 Hussein A. Bulhan, "The Captive Intelligentsia of Somalia", *Horn Of Africa*, 3, 1 (1980a): 28.

3 Nuruddin Farah, *A Naked Needle* (London: Heinemann, 1976), p. 21.

4 Wole Soyinka, "From a Common Backcloth: A Reassessment of the African Literary Image," in Biodun Jeyifo (ed.) *Wole Soyinka: Art, Dialogue and Outrage: Essays on Literature and Culture* (Ibadan, Nigeria: New Horn Press, 1988) pp. 7-14. Biodun Jeyifo defines the backcloth in the Introduction: "We might define this 'backcloth' as proposed by Soyinka as the roots of African literary creativity and cultural sensibility in the peculiarities of traditions and modes of thought and feeling which characterize the 'African world' in its interaction with modern, contemporary experience."

5 Bongasu Tanla Kishani, "The Comparative Role of Orality and Writing," *Presence' Africaine* 136 (1985):72.

6 Walter J. Ong, *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History* (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1967), p. 20.

7 Kevin B. Maxwell, *Bemba Myth and Ritual: The Impact of Literacy on an Oral Culture* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc, 1983), p. 8.

8 Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Poetry: Its Nature, Significance and Social Context* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 213.

9 Ralf Norrman and John Haarberg, *Nature and Language: A Semiotic Study of Cucurbits in Literature* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), p. 6.

10 *Ibid.*

11 Ali A. Mazrui, "The anatomy of Violence in Contemporary Black Africa," in Helen Kitchen (ed.), *Africa From Mystery to Maze* (Lexington, Ma: D. C. Heath and Company, 1976), p. 49.

12 B. W. Andrzejewski, "The Rise of Written Somali Literature," *African Research and Documentation* 8, 9 (1975):7.

13 *Ibid.*

14 T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," in John Hayward (ed), *Selected Prose* (London, 1950).

15 Quoted in Ruth Finnegan, *op cit.*, p. 161. Finnegan's own words in the same book are germane to this discussion. She writes, "The idea of pure and uncontaminated 'oral culture' as the primary reference point for the discussion of oral poetry is a myth." (p. 24.)

¹⁶ John W. Johnson, *Heellooy Heelleellooy: The Development of the Genre Heello in Modern Somali Poetry* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1974), p. 12.

¹⁷ Somali novelist and critic Mohamed Dahir Afrah discusses in the Arabic Monthly, *Al-Hikma*, the endeavors of one of the best Somali Poets of the century to compose in free verse. See *Al-Hikma*, 135 (Feb. 1987):44-50. The debate of writing in free verse raged on in the late 70's in the pages of *Xiddigta Oktoobar* [October Star], and *Heegan* [Vigilance], Weekly English Newspaper in Somalia.

¹⁸ Bongasu Kishani, op. cit., p. 68.

¹⁹ Finnegan, op. cit., p. 35.

²⁰ Eric A. Havelock, *The Literate Revolution in Greece and Its Cultural Consequences* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), p. 168.

²¹ Andrzejewski, op. cit., p. 7.

²² See the works of Daniel P. Kunene, especially his "Problems in Creating Creative Writing: The Example of Southern Africa," *Review of National Literatures* 2 (Fall, 1971), 2.

²³ Quoted in Finnegan, op. cit., p. 160.

²⁴ Maxwell, op. cit., p. XVIII.

²⁵ Said S. Samatar, *Oral Poetry and Somali Nationalism* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 33.

²⁶ David Craig, "Towards Laws of Literary Development," in Craig (ed.), *Marxists on Literature: An Anthology* (London: Penguin Books, 1975), p. 134.

²⁷ Abiola Irele, "Tradition and the Yoruba Writers: D. O. Fagunwa, Amos Tutuola and Wole Soyinka", in Abiola Irele (ed), *The African Experience in Literature and Ideology* (London: Heinemann, 1981), pp. 174-197.

CHAPTER II

PROVIDING THE LINK: SOMALI ORATURE, WRITTEN PROSE FICTION AND NURUDDIN FARAH

EXPERIENCE IN THE BARDIC MEMORY

There is a wealth of these hitherto undetected stylistic features in the literature written in the African languages of South Africa, and maybe beyond. And it is our duty as critical readers to uncover them and formulate their underlying principles. It appears that by involving ourselves in this investigation, we should, in the process, also uncover some interesting areas where written prose fiction, oral narrative, and heroic poetry, share common sources of inspiration and methods of execution.

Daniel P. Kunene

Somali tradition, like any other oral tradition, extols the virtues of memory as explained in preceding pages, and poetry has historically been best suited for memorization. Therefore, one of the first things that comes to mind when people discuss Somali literature is its oral poetry. In fact, so many foreign scholars and/or travellers to this ancient land of Punt have, in one way or an other, touched upon this point. Poetry has become a term of reference for Somalis. It becomes no surprise to come across phrases calling them a "nation of bards".¹ The salient role of poetry in Somali literature is attributed to the fact that their poetry is structured in alliteration which is known for its mnemonic qualities. This is a quality which is pivotal for Somali tradition, since a great deal of Somali experience is kept in the bardic memory. This storing of experience in the bardic memory presupposes

two things: the existence of a pool of memorizers and secondly, a constant repetition of "the word" for its survival.² The dissemination of the written word rests on the number of times a book is published and the number of copies it sells. In oral cultures, children are taught about their traditions by word of mouth. Each generation in the process preserves its wisdom and that of preceding generations for posterity. Oral literatures, therefore, apart from their aesthetic quality and their epistemological nature, ensure the survival of the tradition in the minds of the young.

To sustain their culture, and transmit its various forms, the Somalis have relied heavily on poetry. And poetry has become associated with almost divine powers so that poets are accorded a status equivalent to that given to *Wadaads* (religious men). The Somali religious man is feared for his powers to cast a curse, referred to as "*asmo*", on his enemies. This form of curse is the ultimate weapon in the arsenal of the religious man and is to be used only under strict conditions as when the *Wadaad's* or his clan's existence is at stake. The curse, like any ultimate weapon, can bring untold misery to both user and the one it is directed against. Because of its potential to boomerang the curse is used with prudence. The availability of such a potent curse at the finger tips of the *Wadaad* gives the religious man unbridled power to command awe among the Somalis. The heavens, purportedly, take up the *Wadaad's* case swiftly, and Allah punishes the transgressor. Similar powers are associated with poets who can cast another form of curse, "*yu'asho*", on every mortal who troubles them. Yet none of their powers emanate from the usual source of power—the

sword. The source of their strength lies in "the power of the spoken word [which] can effect reality in the consciousness of oral peoples."³ It is because of this direct association between the spoken word and the result it can occasion in its hearer that Somalis avoid vituperative persons at "*cir-gaduud*" the time of dusk or before dawn. But the two have also a constructive role to play in society as they can mediate between warring factions. Naturally, the dual nature of their roles (constructive and destructive) gives them a great deal of power to reckon with.

The poet aware of his status in society utilizes it to the utmost, and at times he too begins to believe in the extraordinary powers of poetry. Indeed, one poet, Qamaan Bulxan, attributes the swift dissemination of poetry to supernatural powers when he claims:

Caliyow dabuub taada gabay, daayinkaa wadaye Dabaylaha
Xagaagii bafliyo, daafigaa sidaye [O Cali, the Everlasting
One has driven on the words of your poem
The rustling winds of summer have carried them] 4

Hussein A. Bulhan in his essay, "The Captive Intelligentsia of Somalia" interprets a contemporary poet's words which sound very much like Qammaan's in the early part of the twentieth century. Hussein's poet claims: "The clouds await my lyrics/Never raining a drop without my song".⁵ No one can challenge this statement, as the poet has established in advance his kinship with the sun and the other stars, in short, the heavens. Such powerful words, which the poet believes can precipitate the clouds to rain, can with relative ease induce

in a human being a mental condition whereby all physical pain dissipates. The poet believes in the efficacy of his poetry to bring rain and cure pain. His contention here reveals one of the sources of intense rivalry between him and the sheikh: their competition for intercessionary powers. During droughts, the Somali Sheikh leads a procession of rain-seeking ritual. The poet's insistence that clouds await his lyrics does not only de-fetishize the rain-seeking ritual, but, it also empowers him by mystifying his trade—poetry-making. Once he challenged the sheikh on one front, the poet rushes to the next with elan. He feels at ease to lay claim on the domain of healing. The sheikh is considered to be a healer in his capacity to administer amulets and Koranic potions to the sick. On the basis of their claims, the poet-sheikh duo believe to be in possession of divine powers. The source of their power, the word, can perform many miracles. The pronunciation of the word in the form of a curse can kill; while its pronunciation in the form of a prayer can heal. The two share not only the efficacy of their curse but the form in which it is delivered.

The connection between Somali poetry and Islam goes beyond this poet/Sheikh juxtaposition. Rhyming helps to structure the Koran while Somali poetry uses alliteration as a structuring device. In short, the same mnemonic devices are in operation. Both share a need for rote memorization. One can not help but speculate on a correlation between reciting verses of the Koran and reciting a poem. It becomes apparent that recitation runs deep in Somali oral tradition. It is not, therefore, a sacreligious endeavor to examine the Koran in light of Somali poetry, especially when one considers the remarks of the

second President of the First Republic who claimed Somali culture was firmly based on a dual structure: the Holy Koran and Somali poetry.⁶ For the president to equate the two indicates the value the Somalis attach to their poetry. Islam is a unifying force in Somali society. It cuts across clan lines. So is the role of poetry. This is apparent when one considers that much of Somali tradition is kept in the bardic memory.

FORMS OF MEMORIZATION

The above discussion illustrates that poetry is an important medium of artistic expression in Somalia, but is not the only medium through which the people express their feelings, fears, and happiness. To underline this is important, because many scholars, both foreign and indigenous, dwell on the poetry of the nomad to fashion similarities between the Germanic Beowulf and Somali poetry, thus producing what John Johnson calls Somali "Prussianism".⁷ The inadequacy of such a theory shows itself in the fact that it totally ignores the ubiquity of prose narratives in Somali literature. It also ignores the vast material art of the Somali people.

The symbiotic relationship between oral prose narratives and oral poetry is somehow lost on these scholars. Yet, no poet or reciter will perform without first explaining in the exordium the circumstances behind the creation of his poems. Poetry occupies a central role in prose narratives where an elder narrates the tribulations and victories of an ancestor of a clan. The elder/narrator quotes from

poems which were reportedly composed by the protagonist/or antagonist involved in the story. These quotations enhance the authenticity of the story as they act as "a proof or illustration of the reciter's version of the story".⁸ They are based on the assumption that such poetry, based on alliteration, could not have been tampered with. Oral poetry in this instance has "the rather prosaic function of preserving cultural information".⁹ Such a form of poetry, explains Andrzejewski, is conserved/preserved by a mode of memorization which as far as Somalis are concerned, is immune to change:

a verbatim rendering of the memorized text--supported by mnemonic mechanism which utilizes, alliteration, rhythmic patterns, rhyme, etc. It is open to question whether everything is preserved in such a memorization, or if verbatim memorization only conserves the socially relevant by censoring from memory "inconvenient" episodes in a "structural amnesia".¹⁰

The censoring can be necessitated by a self-defense mechanism on the part of a certain society which wipes out all painful episodes, derogatory remarks directed against the audience of a particular poem. A reciter with a selective memory may try to fill in the gaps of expunged versions of a poem. In such an instance, change is occasioned by the composition of an audience. A reciter either changes or deletes stanzas of a poem which lambasts an intended audience. The process of deleting stanzas of a poem is not that easy. Nor is it easy for any poet to change the original composition of a poem. The alliteration within a certain poem makes it difficult to tamper with the original version.

There is also another form of memorization which is common to both prose and poetry--content memorization. The narrator is not obliged to quote everything to the "letter". This form of content memorization is more appropriate to be used for prose narratives. However,

"we may find poems in which each version has a different wording except for some verbatim memorized 'inserts' or 'formulae', such formulae are very common also in content memorized prose narrative, and stories, which end with a proverb or a well-known set phrase, fall into this category".¹¹

These two modes of memorization roughly offer the basis for dividing Somali oral literature into two streams: a time-bound stream and a time-free one. B. W. Andrzejewski states:

The first consists of all those items which can in some way be placed on the time-scale, and the second of those which cannot. Thus a historical narrative, a poem connected with some known event, or even a love poem known to have been recited originally by a real person in particular, known circumstances are examples of the time-bound stream, while an animal fable, a fictional narrative describing event, not set in any specific period of time or a poem used in a work song are examples of the time-free stream.¹²

The classification is not unique to Somali literature. For instance, Emile Magel shows in his *Folktales from the Gambia*, Wolof literature has a somewhat similar classification. Magel writes:

Although *leb* [fictional narratives] have a direct relationship to reality, they are spoken of primarily as

fiction. This distinguishes them from *chosen* [historical narratives], which are considered by Wolof to be true and realistic [that is placeable on the time-scale]

Leb contain elements adapted directly from reality, combined and blended with entirely fictitious characters and situations.

Within them *rab*, animals, *doma*, witches, *pica*, birds, and *konderong*, deformed, magical creatures, interact with *nit*, human beings in the universal struggle for self actualization.¹³

The classification of Somali literature in these two streams does not, however, contradict the general dictum that literature is a time-art. Structured around this dictum, the time-free stream portion of Somali literature does not break out of the tyranny of time dimension. Even oral narratives and narrative poetry in the time-free stream have obeyed some of the constraints of time; have fallen within the purview of one fictional era or another. Characters in these narratives almost always follow a linear pattern of narration conforming to classical methods of telling tales: birth, maturity, death. Poets and story tellers in the time-free stream do not worry about the constraint of time, in the degree and magnitude one finds in the stream of consciousness group of authors, such as James Joyce [*Ulysses*], or Virginia Woolf [*Mrs. Dailoway*] who attempt "to arrest time in order to focus on and isolate a single individual consciousness."¹⁴

Put in another form, Somali story tellers and poets have, more often than not, followed a linear pattern in narration, a process which does not dwell on 'a contemplative stasis' in the hope of arresting time and defying a chronological order of events. After all, it is an open secret that human consciousness, to a certain extent, is manumitted

from the yoke of time. Perhaps the need which has called for a stream of consciousness technique in English literature has not yet shown itself in Somali literature. It is worth remembering that the stream of consciousness technique came about as a result of a necessity. It arose as a consequence of post-Victorian disintegration of the superstructure of the period. Disintegration here heralds the creation of a vacuum. The ensuing chaos to fill the gap entails the working out of contradictions by different groups within society. In the Post-Victorian era, the nascent bourgeoisie was strong and agile enough to fill the gap. But there was a time lapse between the class coming to power and the time it established itself culturally. It is in this interim period, the transition, so to say, that the writer in the post-Victorian era had no access to the kind of 'public truth' which provide[s] the artist with his means of communication."¹⁵ In the absence of a "public truth" which binds different sections of a community, a writer is forced to either forsake writing until a time of resurrection of the public truth comes about or to improvise a technique which would redeem his art and enable him or her to communicate with a cross-section of his community.

The Nigerian civil war of the late 60's, for example, forced Chinua Achebe, Africa's foremost novelist, to stop writing for twenty years and contemplate the emergence of a new phenomenon in Nigerian social and political arena. A full scale war with all the modern implements of violence broke out between ethnic groups within the same polity. The devastation wrought by the civil war was a new experience hitherto unknown in Nigeria. It was an experience

strong enough to disturb the "equilibrium" between Achebe, his medium, and the society he endeavored to communicate with. Explaining the reasons for the silencing, Achebe stated :

I found the experiences of the civil war in Nigeria so horrendous that for me *the history of Africa that I was attempting to interpret fictionally changed overnight, and I was no longer certain that I knew what had happened to us*. What I was trying to interpret did not seem to me to make any sense anymore.

Our history changed and since I am basically a historical novelist--although some people may not accept that definition--what happened to our ancestors and forefathers is the raw material with which I work.

When this history was under that kind of pressure, I had to *stop and re-examine* what had happened.¹⁶ [emphasis added]

It took Achebe twenty years to come to terms with what went wrong. His ability to break the long silence with the publication of *Anthills of the Savannah* does not necessarily mean that he has "found an answer to what happened." Achebe confirms this by elaborating on it:

I have found a way of dealing with it--but that does not mean that I am satisfied or that I have found an answer to what happened. I have come to an arrangement with my history and I can keep working now, but if anything as horrendous should happen again, I really cannot guarantee that I would then just go on writing.

For me the relationship between the writer and his society and what he is saying is very delicate and if this balance was disturbed again, I really don't know how I would be able to work it out. It may not work out in the same way again--we may have another big experience.¹⁷

For Somali novelists writing in Somali no comparable "big experience" has knocked on their doors. It is a characteristic which they share with the traditional Somali storyteller who, perhaps quite accurately believes that more or less a common link still binds the community together. In a traditional society communal values structure the rhythm of life. Society sanctions certain values which it considers as the sine qua non of the community. Individual members are expected to observe the sanctity of these values. Non-conformism is dealt with severely by existing customary laws. These laws are enforced through filial, familial and group affiliations. At this stage of development, contradictions within the community have not either sharpened as to warrant a divergence in interests or they have been obscured by overriding group interest vis-a-vis other groups.¹⁸

The absence of an acute sense of individualism all the more suppresses a divergence in interests. Individual members see themselves as the embodiment of society. The evil practices of one person transcends the perpetrator and affects the society as a whole. So, value-judgement terms such as good/bad apply to both the individual member, the doer of an action, and to the larger group to which he/she belongs. Mention be made, however, that as much as society attempts in blunting the perspicacity of any form of contradiction, the dialectical nature of reality unfolds, albeit subtly, the working out of contradictions within the community. Also, one cannot overrule the emergence of individual consciousness which is bound to question the logic of communal values. This will be fully analyzed in chapter five, where some of Farah's books will form the basis of analysis.

FARAH AND THE CRITIQUE OF COMMON CONSCIOUSNESS

Farah outrightly denies the existence of any such binding which holds the Somali oral community together. To prove his point, Farah quotes from Arthur Miller's *After the Fall*: "Why do I ever think/ Of things falling apart/ Were they ever whole?" Despite the fact that the quote is a direct allusion to Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (that is with the advent of colonialism, came the demise of African traditions), it is also very clearly questioning whether Somali nomadic life was ever really the idyllic existence purported to exist in traditional literature. And with that suggestion, Farah, as any good writer, challenges the very base of our people's perception of their own way of living.

But Farah is an urban writer. The town as a place for contact among people of different backgrounds renders the public truth shared in rural Somalia functionless. This becomes obvious when one considers the paucity of materials dealing with liberation struggles in Somalia. There is no consensus on those struggles. There is no one blue print to follow. There are so many fragmented truths about who fought for what. The dilemma is made sharper by the absence of an armed struggle in the fashion of the Mau Mau or the Algerian War of Independence where a guerilla war marks the departure of the colonizer. This is not to say that Somali independence was served on a silver platter. Many Somalis lost their lives. This sort of analysis reveals that the Somali struggle for independence, starting from the inception of the SYL and SNL parties was mostly won in the political arena. Negotiations between colonizer and colonized shaped the form

of Somali independence. This point will further be explained in the next chapter. Suffice to say that with the absence of, to borrow a phrase from Barthes, a 'shared code of reference'¹⁹ emerges a need for the writer to confine "his world to the limits of an individual mind and assessing value solely in terms of the consciousness of that mind."²⁰ Farah's second novel, *A Naked Needle*, utilizes this technique in an attempt to render social, political and historical analyses of Somali society. Opposing views within modern Somali society are assessed in terms of the consciousness of Koschin, the protagonist of the novel. By utilizing this technique Farah falls back on a technique he has acquired from schools and not directly from his culture. A world thus analyzed cannot be claimed to represent a cross-section of the people and their communities.²¹

On the contrary, in Somali oral literature the individual embodies his/her society. Sharp contradictions have not yet overshadowed a relative uniformity of interests. Oral narratives teach that uniformity. Both protagonist and antagonist contribute to our understanding of what it entails to protect the teachings of these oral narratives. The sense of group cohesiveness generates a belief in the members of the community that there is a collective way to discovering truth. For this reason Somali literature on both ends of the spectrum conforms with the hegemonic aspect of time. One must bear in mind that our observations are related to oral literature narrated by a community of elders. The truth we are referring to is a verisimilitude towards that tradition. This does not mean that there was a complete conformity to any one "truth," but rather it bespeaks a

culture around which different interpretations could be structured-- while at the center there was to a certain extent one agreeable mass.

FACT AND FICTION IN SOMALI ORAL NARRATIVES

The classification of time in Somali literature shows the existence of a clear distinction between narratives which are perceived to be true, that is those which have an historical basis, because of their depiction of a real character or a true event in Somali history, on the one hand, and narratives which are in a fictionalized form, which are meant to entertain and or to impart a moral lesson. This is not to suggest that the first form does not also impart a moral lesson. The distinction lies in the seriousness of the story told. The distinction also carries with it a value judgement of its own. Somali historical narratives, by virtue of their definition as "real" accounts of "real" people, are accorded a higher status. Thus, children and adults are expected to memorize these accounts in verbatim.

Somali male adults rarely "waste" their time in either listening or telling fictional narratives. Thus the existence of a job description which pushes storytelling to the domain of women. Women in successive generations had to store and transmit the wisdom of the past to posterity. Somali men, like their Xhosa counterparts in the southern part of the continent, thought storytelling was more of women's trade than men. The major reason for this arrangement among the Somalis was livestock herding, especially of camels with all its attendant hardships which kept men away from the homestead for

long periods of time. During such times, the women were left with the children and had ample time to narrate to their children stories which would simultaneously give the kids entertainment and food for thought.

The dominance of patriarchy is discernable in this arrangement. A Somali man, the spearman [breadwinner of the family], will not fritter away some of his valuable time in "sheeko carruureed" [child lore], or women's "stories" which are associated with the creation of fabulous narratives, somewhat removed from practical life. Yet the Somali male will fall back on the child lore which he dismisses as being unrealistic to prove a point during discussions or debates. It is not unusual to hear a Somali male alluding to, or narrating a story in the fictional narrative to make a point persuasively. The story becomes a means to an end. This is a means which strengthens his case in two ways.

In a society where oratorical competence is showered with a great deal of encomium, the individual who quotes from the vast repertoire of Somali lore a suitable narrative to augment his argument is considered more of a wise person. It shows the audience [jurors] the wit of the teller. Secondly, the story convinces the jurors that there has been an antecedent to what he has to tell in the traditions of the people. This strengthens his case in the sense that the antecedent to which he alludes was favorable to the case of someone in a similar predicament. For this reason oral narratives "For [Somali] adults were viewed as illustrations of accumulated experience rather than as expressions of the artistic imagination."²² Beyond any shadow

of doubt, such reasoning has its roots in the psychology of the Somali, proverbially known for his utilitarian ideas. Nothing is painted in black and white. What was wrong in time past, could be justified as being right in time present. To illustrate this point, the double edgedness of the practical Somali male, the case of a notorious judge comes to mind:

It is said that a farmer, whose farm was devastated by herds of cattle, took his case to the judge of the village. The judge heard both the plaintiff and defendants. He reached a verdict and ordered the owners of the cattle to fill a stick held upright with maize which was the original crop their animals devoured. One of the defendants reminded the Judge that his cattle also took part in the eating of the farmer's crop. The judge murmured and then sighed, "La jiiifiyaana bannan" [it is permissible to put the stick in a horizontal position]. Therewith it became easier for the defendants including the Judge to fill a horizontal stick with maize than a perpendicular one, which needs a mound of maize to cover it.

The moral of this parable is the mighty can always find a loophole around the law. But it also proves that the whole spectrum of Somali life contains all contradictions: despotic, benevolent, the kind and the ruthless. Society contains all the binary pairs possible in a person—this indeed negates the widely held view of unadulterated nomadic egalitarianism in Somali society. The egalitarian aspect of the nomad is preserved in much the same ideals that Pierre Bourdieu was able to detect in Algerian political culture: "The condemnation of cupidity and of the love of wealth; the encouragement given to the

virtues of hospitality, mutual aid and politeness (abad); and the feeling of belonging to a religious fraternity that is of an economic or social basis."²³ But that these ideals stand the test of time does not imply a total uniformity towards their implementation in society. The judge in the parable is the antithesis of the ideal. But the existence of the antithesis is what sharpens the fight for the implementation of the ideal. The antithesis, in essence, reminds society of what hurdles it needs to overcome.

POETRY AND PROVERBS IN SOMALI ORAL NARRATIVES

As we have seen earlier, the historical narrative enjoys a higher status based on believability than fictional narratives, whether of realistic or fabulous nature. One salient feature of Somali oral narratives is their ability to incorporate poetry and proverbs. One hears a lot of stories laden with poetic inserts and many proverbs. The poetry and proverbs are spoken by the characters in the stories. In relation to this, two factors are important in understanding literature in Somali society. It is very possible for a character to be a poet or converse in poetry. This in turn falls within the purview of period authenticity and location authenticity.²⁴ It is difficult to accept the authenticity of an old narrative set in most parts of the Somali interior at a particular time in history which is devoid of poetic insertions. Poetic duels and combats were more frequent in times past. Poets were spokesmen of the clan in inter-and intra-clan affairs. Insults which later became part of history were hurled at one another partly or wholly in poetry. Clan

accords were sealed in poetry. A major reason for this is the mnemonic factor mentioned above. Accords drawn in poetical language stood the test of time. In the same vein, it becomes somewhat absurd for a story teller whose story setting is in a town in the 20th century to indulge in poetic combat. This is so because, as Emmanuel Ngara explains, "People [in towns] do not normally speak in poetry, and so dialogue in a [story] should approximate to the language of every day life, which is characteristically prosaic".²⁵ Put in another way, poetic insertions in any story should add credence to the authenticity and intensity of the real characters and events in it. Needless to say that these insertions demonstrate poor showmanship if they are used just to embellish the story.

Along with poetic insertions, Somali oral narratives are always pregnant with proverbs. Proverbs and poetry share one characteristic, viz., the alliterative technique. Such an alliterative technique gives both proverb and poetry a strong anchor in the traditions from which a storyteller, a poet and an audience take their cue. Through the use of proverbs, the narrator depicts a bond which holds the communalist ethos of the society together. It is for this reason that proverbs furnish "a grammar of values' by which the deeds of a hero [or heroine] can be measured and evaluated."²⁶ In addition to providing a frame of reference for the deeds of a hero, proverbs are also "used to sound and reiterate major themes, to sharpen characterization, to clarify conflict and to focus on the values of the society . . . [the story teller] is portraying".²⁷

Somali oral narratives, especially didactic tales, utilize a proverb as a core-cliche' and as a structural device. The proverb which is the whole story in a nutshell comes at the end for two main reasons: the one who quotes it has built an edifice whose foundation runs deep into the traditions of the community; secondly those who conform to such traditions have to accept the deductions of its user. A proverb appropriately used functions as, and brings about similar effects to what Taban Lo Liyong hoped to achieve in his book, *The Last Word*.²⁸ Indeed, being a pondeictic as it is, a proverb cuts short all discussions on any subject. It is like the evidence a clever expert uses to prove his point; an evidence after which no argument is allowed. The narrative, in this case as Emmanuel Obiechina argues, is "designed to instruct as well as entertain, hence the need to draw or imply the moral at the end."²⁹ Somali proverbs which are structured in verse, function as mnemonic device and this in turn helps a listener to remember the moral of the story. The moral, more often than not, "insists that the good should be rewarded and the wicked punished".³⁰ But punishment takes different forms in different stories. In some it psychologically helps the villain, who is immersed in an ocean of illusions, to peel off the masks of chicanery behind which he attempts to hide. This form of punishment brings the villain back to his senses and helps him desist from doing his villainy. The criterion for measuring what actions are villainous is drawn from the values the teller considers as the sine qua non of his community. The narrator's use of these values, as a pool of common resource for his community, attests to his/her role as a mediator between the social ideal and the

actual actions of his characters. The narrator is mostly a guardian of the status quo; and in his capacity as a guardian, he attempts to preserve traditions. In this sense, both the hero and the villain fulfil a social ideal in their own right. The hero strives for the perseverance of the ideal, thus encouraging others to follow suit, while the villain in his role as a negative influence "Contribute[s] part of the didactic purpose of the story"³¹ by revealing his behavior which is in conflict with the norms of the society. Almost all forms of punishment conform to what Donatius Nwoga calls "the graph of African morality" in which art performs the function of integration.³² This function is an outcome that art shares with the rite of passage paradigm. There is an initial "stable" situation in both instances. The child who will undergo a passage of rite is initially part of a society. So too is the character of a would-be culprit in the community of adults. The child, to grow and be accepted as an adult, has to go through an ordeal, albeit an ordeal which is socially sanctioned. The villainous character, on the other hand, also undergoes an ordeal which, though he/she may not necessarily be physically removed from the community at least keeps them at a distance.

The religious charlatan in one of the stories under discussion in chapter four does not easily mingle with the rest of the community. As is mostly true of people with arcane knowledge, he keeps the "commoner" at bay. And herein lies a significant difference between the two. The child's absence from a community of people is hinged upon two hopes: that he will become a grown-up; and that as a result a useful adult will soon swell their ranks. The successful child will be re-

incorporated after the separation. The charlatan's integration ensues only after he atones for his villainy. In both cases, a successful experience brings about the re-establishment of an initial equilibrium. The re-establishment of an initial equilibrium by means of one form of cleansing effect or another will in some cases be retained as the plot/pattern of novelists writing in Somali.

The wrong-doer is rarely put to death, instead, he is either banished for a time for his evil deeds or he is rehabilitated after a cleansing effect brought about by the uncovering of his sins. He expiates for his deeds and mends his old ways by doing things that are judged acceptable by the community. These last two forms of punishment are "only a transition to the rehabilitation of the offender. . .[who] is hardly ever left in a state of permanent disgrace and deprivation. He has to suffer, even suffer severely, but then he is rescued and restored, much chastened and refined by his punishment."³³ The motif of punishment is woven into the fabric of the villain's dishonest practices and one assumes or rather anticipates his downfall. Yet, most narratives, end on "a rising note of optimism".³⁴

This note of optimism emanates from a belief which people have in themselves: an amelioration of their existence is always and squarely in their own hands. While it is naive to argue that pessimism is unheard of in African traditions, one can with justification state that African traditions are replete with cosmic optimism. It is in this sense of optimism that African oral narratives conform to a kind of justice in which the arrow fits the wound. The meting out of justice, therefore,

corrects an imbalance by reversing a disequilibrium which temporarily disrupts the pace of life of the community; the reversal process restores an initial equilibrium rendered in-effective by the villain's actions. The establishment of the old equilibrium represents, as Emile Magel shows, "the final proof of the narrative argument against the anti-social behaviors/attitudes in question because it is a verification of the logical consequence which result from them."³⁵

DISSENT AND THE SUPERSTRUCTURE

But not all who challenge the status quo or who defy aspects of the social ideal are wrong-doers deserving punishment. Nor are all conclusions a rehabilitation of the old order in its entirety. This [giving of a leeway to some dissent] is important because the social ideal is what all members of the community aspire and strive to uphold. But there is no single way of knowing that ideal. Thus our ideas become our attitudes to the social ideal, hence the inevitable structuring of different interpretations around the same ideal. This fact is so important that Somali literature on either side of the time spectrum takes it into consideration.

That Somali literature takes opposing views into consideration is a healthy sign, indicative of the superstructure's willingness to compromise on certain issues. Needless to say, such issues are those which do not jeopardize the essence of the system's existence. All it means is that the system acknowledges the different views of its different components. In Somali traditional system, the person is an

embodiment of his society; he/she does not live in a vacuum or in an ivory tower which seals him from the rest of the community. Likewise, the society gives some form of prominence to the individual so that he/she could establish his/her individuality. This assertion of his individuality, however, operates within certain parameters defined by logic and prudence; it does not involve the infringement upon the rights of others. Thus, the truth of Ruth Benedict's statement:

No culture yet observed has been able to eradicate the differences in the temperaments of the persons who compose it. It is always a give and take. The problem of the individual is not clarified by stressing the antagonism between culture and the individual, but by stressing their mutual re-inforcement. Thus their relation to individual psychology.³⁶

Through the logic of "give and take", the individual enriches the experience the society accumulates and in the process avails himself of the total sum of that experience. The logic also always helps the society to deal reasonably with dissent by providing a forum for opposing views. This could be a tactic rather than strategy, but Somali culture is laden with oral narratives which show the degree of its tolerance towards dissent. To illustrate and perhaps explicate the nature of the accommodating characteristics of Somali culture, one has to only remember a Somali oral narrative entitled "Kaba Calaf iyo Huryo Ugaas".³⁷

Huyo Ugaas was an exceptional beauty and very intelligent. Many a bachelor wanted her to become his wife. Besides her intelligence, she was also the daughter of a king. One day, a young

man called Hersi (the son of a king himself) decided to marry Huryo. He asked his friend Kaba Calaf to accompany him to her village. The latter was an eloquent orator who knew how to woo women.

Huryo and Hersi agreed to elope. Then they began their journey towards Hersi's village where they planned to get married. They walked and walked until the next day when, feeling tired, they sat under a shade tree. After sitting there for some time, Huryo said, "Let's get some rest." Hersi was so surprised that, unable to decipher the riddle, he exclaimed, "may your soul depart you. What is it that we are doing now?" Then Kaba'alof, the friend of the suitor, unravels the riddle by saying, "She means let us take our shoes off." In an effort to further test Hersi's intelligence, Huryo said, "By God, there are people close by." Hersi, who could see no human settlement anywhere near was confused and responded, "This is an isolated place where no man or animal ever lives." Again Kaba Calaf unravelled the riddle: "Perhaps she has seen *"xuunsho"* (A bird that eats excretion and lives close to human settlements). While Hersi was still trying to understand what was going on, Huryo unleashes a third riddle: "Why does not one of you quench our hunger?"

Hersi had enough of it, "May you never eat!" he retorted. "Do you have something to eat with you?" Then Kaba Calaf said, "She means let one of you get for us some tooth brushes from trees nearby." The riddles expose two character flaws on Hersi's part. First, his ignorance of Somali tradition symbolized by his inability to recognize the significance of ideas with cultural connotations; the second, closely related to the first flaw, his ignorance indicates a lack of intelligence.

After a short recess, they continued their journey. All along Huryo was thinking intensely; she was having second thoughts about Hersi. Once they reached Hersi's homestead, Huryo asked for the elders of the village. When the elders came to see her, she said, "Gentlemen, it is up to you to choose between two things: first, to marry me to Kaba Calaf or second, return me to my family". It was a dilemma.

At last the elders came to a conclusion. The girl would not be returned to her family, nor would she be forced against her will to marry Hersi. Fortunately, Hersi decided that a woman like Huryo could not become his wife. He realized that "intelligent" women were very difficult to deal with. Then the elders blessed Huryo's marriage to Kaba Calaf who gave his horse to Hersi as a *"Xaal"* (Somali word for retribution).

This story gives women, a marginal group in Somali culture, the ability to put man's intelligence to the test. In so doing, they hold authority over men, who are their superiors in patriarchal societies; and by doing so, a social reality crumbles to pieces. This is so because intelligent women, according to traditional patriarchy, are rare to find and deserve to be treated accordingly. The woman in this story expects her prospective husband to unravel the meaning of her riddles. The social position of Huryo is elevated above the ordinary, and whoever wants to marry her should possess a corresponding intelligence. Hersi does not have that intelligence. Kaba Calaf is the one who has so there must be a reversal of positions. The real suitor has minimal ability for a woman with such a high intelligence. It is only through chiasmus,

i.e., inverted relationship in which the woman marries the ideal man, that the discrepancy gets corrected

Prince/suitor	Friend
Wisdom/intelligence	less intelligent

Hersi does not object to the new arrangement and in so doing "the fictional plot conforms to a social ideal": Kaba Calaf, the wise, marries the intelligent and beautiful woman. The new arrangement attests to the new twist the storyteller creates to correct an imbalance. The society gets credit for allowing such an arrangement to be possible. Thus, a safety valve to contain dissent quenches the thirst for freedom, and in the process the mutual reinforcement of the social ideal is undertaken by both Huryo and the elders of the community representing Somali tradition. Huryo, of course, asserts herself beyond what is allowed for a woman in her society, but then the final decision on who she could or could not marry was outside her domain. She could only suggest.

But "to suggest", to speak your mind, is an improvement over acquiescence, as it implies someone who has some control over his/her destiny. It is in this capacity that the oral narrative instills some sense of confidence in the audience in general, and the female portion in particular. Some lively discussions follow a session of Somali storytelling, and it can be fairly assumed that this oral narrative conforms to a general objective. As Hawkes, paraphrasing Brecht, says regarding art, "the revolutionary goal of making the audience aware that the institutions and social formula which they inherit are not

external and natural, but are man made and thus subject to change through human endeavor."³⁸ But Huryo does know better than to become complacent with her victory. In traditional society, women become docile after marriage. The confidence and self-assertiveness of some women before marriage fades away after matrimony. Thus one could argue that women become obedient to their husbands as a result of expropriation of language. They are not, for instance, allowed to contradict their husbands. Such an expropriation of language entails the loss of their independence. In the case of Huryo, it becomes ironic that she asserts her independence through language, the absence of which will in the long run guarantee her loyalty to her new husband.

NARRATIVE STRUCTURE IN SOMALI ORAL/WRITTEN FORMS

While poetry and proverbs are two important features, not only in their separate forms but also in their occurrence in oral narratives, both historical and fictional, other elements also characterize Somali literature, especially oral narratives. Most of the Somali narratives fall within the range of didacticism. This in turn affects many aspects of the narrative such as characterization, point of view etc. Any corpus of narratives examined will show that a primary aspect of Somali literature is sapiential, "One of its functions being to pass on the bitter wisdom, even if its lessons may stand in conflict with the accepted norms."³⁹ To partake in this endeavor of passing on wisdom, story tellers utilize a viewpoint which gives them sufficient freedom to manipulate their narrative stories. This viewpoint is usually a third

person omniscient. The narrator vaguely conceals his subjectivity; indeed he makes both subtle and overt remarks about both the behavior/attitude and actions of his characters. He does not minimize scathing criticism of those characters who deviate from the social ideal. Such characters become subject to ridicule and, at times, even humiliation. To further humiliate non-conformity he sometimes lets another character who conforms to his version of the ideal pass judgement on the one deemed to be a villain. The narrator sometimes presents his unfavorable character "in terms of his physical appearance, his dress, his impact on onlookers, and even his potential worth were he up for sale."⁴⁰

In one of the stories under discussion, a charlatan is decribed through his physical appearance and by the kind of clothes he is wearing. Sheikh Muxsin, as the charlatan medium is called, has two wives. Two of his front teeth have gold fillings. His hands are soft and his face is always anointed with an oily substance. Knowing these physical descriptions about his person will make it easier for us to understand the mental state of the medium. The glamorous and extravagant life led by the medium, uncovers his parasitic existence on society. The anointing of face and body with butter is an indication of one's opulence in Somali tradition. Yet in the same tradition, wealth supposedly comes through toil and sweat. The fact that the Sheikh's callousless hands are mentioned suggests the nature of his ill-gotten wealth. The Sheikh's dislike for manual labor, however, does not reflect a corresponding lack of intelligence. The trade which the quack practises, like that of the hustler or swindler, invites only those with an

inclination to explore and exploit the underlying social problems which beset many a transitional figure in urban Somalia. As Bohannon Curtin states, "Divination is one of the specialties most likely to attract the person with an intellectual bent. Diviners must have an excellent intuitive knowledge of the society in which they live..."⁴¹

The craft used above to describe characters is tradition bound. Even though the stories are written this time, stylistic devices such as the external approach to characterization emanate from a tradition which upholds the supremacy of action in narratives. In the stories under discussion, character is subservient to action and a character trait only provokes an immediate action. The protagonist in one of the stories is inquisitive, therefore he asks questions; and when his questions are not answered by prominent people in the community he goes to Mogadishu, the Somali capital, in search of answers. Inquisitiveness which is a character trait provokes the act of asking questions, his unanswered queries breed dissatisfaction. Dissatisfaction is a character trait and it provokes the act of going to Mogadishu.⁴² In short, the events are externalized and motivation is less deeply psychological.

As a result of the externalization of events, the narrator rarely lets us see the character through interior monologue. Rather, he uses physical correlatives to describe mental states. Here, the narrator gives his audience a good description of the character's ambience, for "environments, especially domestic interior, may be viewed as metonymic, or metaphoric, expressions of character."⁴³

THE JOURNEY MOTIF IN SOMALI LITERATURE

The geographical movement of the narratives in discussion is from known to the unknown and then back to the known. One is indeed tempted to believe that the narratives are paradigmatic of the rite of passage narratives, for indeed there is the separation-trial-reincorporation element in them. But against this background exists the fact that there is "no formal initiation for Somalis from boyhood to manhood."⁴⁴ Circumcision sometimes seems to be a stage of initiation for both boys and girls, but even "this is not an occasion for esoteric instruction, and is usually performed without much ceremony".⁴⁵ Therefore, the movement from a rural setting to an urban one and then back to a rural setting does not involve a rite of passage in its limited sense.

In its broader meaning, however, the protagonist who leaves his place of origin, a village in the interior for example, to an urban area is apt to pass through some form of a "rite of passage". Not only his movement but his actions in the town fulfill the requirements for the above model. Once in town, the protagonist passes through an ordeal, perhaps no less painful than that involved in a rite of passage. To survive, he/she has to be ingenious. On his return trip, the protagonist is welcomed not as a prodigal son, but as someone with experience and a lot of yarns to spin. In this vein, the protagonist is more of the hero type who sets out in a quest involving perilous attempts to bring a "boon" to his community. The boon does not necessarily have to be material gain or wealth, it could rather be a new

idea which sheds some light on an earlier misconception about other communities, for example, belonging to a different sub-culture. This correction of an earlier misconception, "the refutation stage" as Magel puts it, "provides images which contradict the error of judgement . . . expressed by the antagonist in the initial [stage]".⁴⁶ The refutation stage comes in after the ideas in the initial stage are tried and put to test. In the case of "Kaba Calaf" one can assume that there had been some sort of courtship in the past that has allowed them to elope. But that could have been insufficient grounds for the girl to really understand the "would-be" groom as she should have. So comes a second stage—journeying through the interior of the country and away from settlements.

The journey motif which as Belsey states is "among the commonest sources of disorder at the level of plot"⁴⁷ fulfills a prerequisite for knowing a person in Somali culture.⁴⁸ It is assumed that one cannot really claim to know the true character of another person unless and until one has taken a journey with him/her. The journey into the Somali interior entails travelling on foot through an unfriendly environment. Characteristics such as cowardice and stinginess reveal themselves after a few days walk in the harsh Somali terrain. Engaging in an intellectual discussion through riddle-solving, Huryo attempts to find out the depth of the suitor's intellect. Dissatisfied with his lack of intelligence, she opts for the one who unravels her riddles, i.e. her suitor's friend and their travel companion.

Also on a different level, the initial stage is wrapped in the statement which assumes a lot because of what Barthes calls a shared "code of reference" as a result of a certain homogeneity in the audience. The opening part of "Kaba Calaf iyo Huryo" is a case in point. The narrator expects much from his audience by not elaborating on the "elopement" factor in the story: "they [Huryo and Hersi] began their journey towards Hersi's village where they planned to get married." The narrator and his audience taking their cue from the same pool of facts waste no time in comprehending the narrative in its correct perspective- a narrative involving elopement. In Somali culture, a prospective husband delegates relatives to meet with parents of his intended wife. After an agreement is reached, the couple are given the blessings of their two respective parents/guardians. Then the wedding ceremony usually held at the wife's parents' home follows. The fact that in "Kaba Calaf iyo Huryo" there is no wedding ceremony taking place at her homestead is a clear indication that something is amiss. The narrator does not spell it out, but one can only assume that the reason for the elopement is necessitated by one traditional source of difficulty or another. Such a difficulty could emanate from some kind of feud based on clan or "class" differences between their two respective families. Whatever the source of difficulty in this narrative, the journey towards Hersi's village ushers in the refutation stage in which Huryo's apparent change of heart completely negates her initial agreement to elope with Hersi.

The journey motif plays a vital role in Somali written fiction, especially in the works of the transmuted (early novelists). In one of

the Somali-language novels in Chapter four, the journey motif brings about a new era of understanding between the two eponymous protagonists and their respective communities in the story. Each protagonist avails himself of the opportunity to visit the other's community. The two communities represent different sub-cultures. The understanding of these two communities could not have materialized without the actual journey undertaken by two of their respected members. By utilizing this motif as plot device, the author takes into consideration an important aspect of Somali traditional society. Travelling entails new experiences. As a Somali proverb states "nin aan dhul marin dhaayo maleh" (a man who has not travelled does not have eyes).⁴⁹ The journey motif is also used in Somali-language works to sharpen characterization. The frustration and resolve of a character in a story becomes acute when he/she is uprooted from their natural abode. At first, each character does not budge from his/her opinion but, their stubbornness gives way to reason as the absence of communal support in the background necessitates an understanding of what the "other" stands for.

WRITTEN FICTION AND THE SALIENT FEATURES OF SOMALI ORATURE

In the written works, one comes across almost all the elements described about oral literature in the preceding pages. These include the incorporation of poetry and proverbs in the works; the didacticism of the stories and the conformity of this narrative structure to the general description made about plot and characterization. The

resemblance is due to the existence of some measure of cohesion and continuity to tradition within the structure of the works of the transmuters. This cohesion is sustained by the sociological and psychological continuation of the concepts which mould the transitional characters in a transitional society. It is also quite natural to argue that, because the era of the transmuters is umbilically closer to tradition, their works suffer the limitations of the tradition to successfully strike a transition from the oral art to the written one. Most writers, whether of short stories or novels, at the beginning of Somali-language writing had to contend with the uneasy task of devising and innovating new descriptive words to replace onomatopoeic/ideophonic words which a performer/narrator has in his/her disposal. This difficulty is one aspect that the Somali experience in creative fiction writing especially the early novels shares with that "produced in Southern African languages". In relation to the latter, Daniel P. Kunene explains:

This is largely because exceptional ability is needed for a writer to successfully effect the transition from the techniques and procedures proper to oral art to those inherent in the written medium.

As has been pointed out, the use of dialogue as it is practiced in written prose fiction may be considered to be an impoverished dramatic presentation--improverished in the sense that, while lacking the extraverbal semantic props of stage acting, it has made no serious effort to compensate for this lack through verbal descriptions. We, therefore conclude, in this respect, by referring once again to the writer's need to adjust himself consciously to the written medium, remembering that paper, ink and letters of the alphabet are all dead things, and that a wealth of

words far more precise in their sensory suggestiveness is needed to make up, at least partially, for the lost vitality of a narrator-audience situation .50

A conscious adjustment of the author to the written medium has already started in Somalia with the emergence of a new crop of writers on the scene. These writers are on different levels, with some representing a transition of a sort between them and the transmuters. The different writers in Somalia will form the basis of discussion for Chapter Four. The most important of the new crop of writers has broken new grounds with Maxamed Daahir Afrax's first novel, *Maana Fay*. The limitations discussed above in relation to the old group of novelists are mostly overcome in this novel. The setting is the town. Some major characters in *Maana Fay*, though still transitional brought to towns by the influx of rural people in search of a better life, are also shaped by the emergence of the petty-bourgeoisie with its own set of morals. The moral characteristics of the petty-bourgeoisie are not in tandem with tradition. Antagonism of groups sets in as a result of the two different sets of morals. The state as an arbitrator of disputes between groups and among individuals creates its own apparatus to enforce its laws. [By "creates its own apparatus" is not meant the function and role of the state in society is neutral.]⁵¹ The functionaries in charge of the state are not expected to implement customary laws, but on the contrary to enforce state laws.

The development of new themes, necessitates a new way of characterization. Corruption, for example, is a new theme that is mostly discussed in the novels of the innovators. For the author to

describe the corrupted who, say, embezzles money with the stroke of a pen is to go deep into the character's psyche. The guilt which eats his/her consciousness is best captured in these books. Here one finds the malleability of the Somali language to accommodate the development of new themes. This aspect of the language shows a successful adaptation on the part of Somali. And it is because of this adaptation that cohesion and continuity to pre-colonial literary tradition will continue developing albeit with different options and possibilities.

¹Richard Burton, *First Footsteps in East Africa*, 2 vols., (London: Tylston and Edwards, 1894); Margaret Laurence, *A Tree for Poverty* (Nairobi: Eagle Press, 1954); B. W. Andrzejewski and I. M. Lewis, *Somali Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964).

²Walter Ong, *The Presence of the Word*, p. 22.

³Maxwell, *Bemba Myth and Ritual*, p. 2. The efficacy of the spoken word to 'effect reality in the consciousness of oral peoples' is best explained by the Somali proverb "Abeeso haku cunto, Afka uma roona" [It is not good to utter "may a snake bite you." From Nigeria, we have the following words from Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God* to convey a similar meaning:

Edogo's mind was in pain over the child. Some people were already saying that perhaps he was none other than the first one. But Edogo and Amoge never talked about it; the woman especially was afraid. Such utterance had power to change fear into living truth they dared not speak before they had to. [p.112].

This passage is also quoted in Achebe, "Thoughts on the African Novel," in Achebe, *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays 1965-1987* (London: Heinemann, 1988), p. 62.

⁴B. W. Andrzejewski, "Somali Literature", in Andrzejewski et al., *Literatures in African Languages* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1985) p. 62.

⁵Hussein A. Bulhan, "The Captive Intelligentsia of Somalia", p. 28.

⁶Said S. Samatar, *Oral Poetry and Somali Nationalism*, p. 8.

⁷John W. Johnson, "Introduction" in Katheryne S. Loughran, et. al. (eds.), *Somalia in Word and Image* (Washington D C.: Foundation for Cross Cultural Understanding, 1986) p. 14.

⁸John Johnson, *Heellooy*, p. 11.

⁹Maxwell, op. cit., p. 57.

¹⁰ Andrzejewski, "Oral Literature", in Andrzejewski, et al., p. 36.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid, p. 338f.

¹³Emile A. Magel, *Folktales From the Gambia: Wolof Fictional Narratives* (Washington D C: Three Continents Press, 1984), p. 15.

¹⁴David Daiches, *The Novel and the Modern World* (Chicago: The University of

Chicago Press, 1940), p. 9.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 5.

¹⁶Chinua Achebe, "Interview," *African Concord* 161(8th Oct. 1987):17.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸E. Chambulikazi, "An Enquiry into the Sense of Drama"; Tololwa Marti Mollé, "African Theatre and the Colonial Legacy: Review of the East African Scene," *Utafiti* 7,1 (1985).

¹⁹Roland Barthes, *S/z*, trans Richard Miller (London: Cape, 1975), p. 18.

²⁰Daiches, op. cit., p. 9.

²¹It is not my intention here to suggest that the novel should represent a cross-section of the views of a community. Indeed, the mere fact that I have delineated the urban ambience as bereft of a shared code of reference is enough to exonerate Farah of any guilt.

²²Andrzejewski, op. cit., p. 339.

²³Pierre Bourdieu, *The Emergence of Class in Algeria* (Boulder, Co.: Westview Press, 1976), p. 27.

²⁴B. W. Andrzejewski, "Introduction," Faarax M. J. Cawl, trans. Andrzejewski, *Ignorance Is the Enemy of Love*, (London: Zed Press, 1982), p. Xiii.

²⁵Emmanuel Ngara, *Stylistic Criticism and the African Novel*, (London: Heinemann, 1982), p. 24.

²⁶M. J. Herskovits, *Dahomean Narrative*, quoted in Bernth Lindfors, "The Palm-Oil with which Achebe's Words are Eaten", in C. L. Innes and Bernth Lindfors (eds.), *Critical Perspectives on Chinua Achebe* (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1978), p. 50f.

²⁷Ibid., p. 64.

²⁸Taban Lo Liyong, *The Last Word*, (Nairobi: EAPH, 1969).

²⁹Emmanuel Obiechina, *An African Popular Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), p. 103.

³⁰Ibid., p. 104.

³¹Daniel P. Kunene, "Writer, Reader, and Character in African Language Literatures," in Bernth Lindfors and Ulla Schild (eds.), *Neo-African Literature and Culture* (Wiesbaden: B. Hyemann Verlag, 1976), p. 244.

³²Quoted in Obiechina, *An African Popular Literature*, p. 106.

³³Ibid., p. 105.

³⁴Ibid., p. 106.

³⁵Magel, op. cit., p. 14.

³⁶Ruth Benedict, *Patterns of Culture* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1959) p. 183.

³⁷Aamina X. Aadan, *Suugaanta Dhallaanka* [Children's Lore], (Mugdishu: Madbacadda Qaranka, n.d.), pp. 41-3 My translation of the oral narrative comes from a rendition in *Xiddigta Oktoobar*, by Yuusuf M. Xayd.

³⁸Terence Hawkes, *Structuralism and Semiotics* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977), p. 63.

³⁹Andrzejewski, op. cit. p. 38.

⁴⁰Chinweizu et al, *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature* (Washington DC: Howard University Press, 1983), p. 272.

⁴¹Paul Bohannon, *Africa and Africans*, (Garden City, New York: Natural History

Press, 1964), p. 180.

42Tzvetan Todorov, *The Poetics of Prose*, trans. Richard Howard, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1984), p. 67. Todorov explains that such action which is more important than character is 'transitive'. He compares his findings with Henry James' *The Art of Fiction*. James gives importance to character over action-intransitive, that is.

43Rene' Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1949), p. 19f.

44Andrzejewski and Lewis, *Somali Poetry*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964) p. 19f.

45Ibid.

46Magel, op. cit., p. 12.

47Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice* (New York: Methuen and CO, 1980), p. 70.

48The journey motif is important for knowing more about a person.

In one of the novels under discussion in Chapter IV, it sharpens characterization and makes the ending of the novel more plausible. The journey motif in Somali oral literature hinges on the following adage: "jid ma la martay, Jabad Mala degtay, jeeni mala cuntay" [The implication is one can only claim to know someone else if he/she has travelled with one or if he/she has shared food with one].

49(cf) "When someone goes on a trip, he has something to tell about, goes the German saying, and people imagine the story teller as someone who has come from afar." Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller : Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov," in Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn; Hanna Arendt (ed) (New York: Schocken Books, 1969) p. 84.

50Daniel P. Kunene, "Problems in Creating Creative Writing: The example of Southern Africa," *Review of National Literatures* 2(Fall, 1971), 2:100.

51Such a topic has had its share of polemics and it is not my intention here to join the fray. For anyone interested in the subject, however, can read inter alia, "Communist Manifesto"; Marx's *Civil War in France; The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*; Engle's *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, and Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*.

CHAPTER III

GENESIS OF SOMALI WRITTEN FICTION

In this chapter, I trace the origin of the written fiction in Somalia. The use of 'genesis' in the title, to invoke a scriptural aura, is intentional in order to explain the importance of the emergence of written Somali fiction. As was explained in preceding chapters, the Somali literary scene has been characterized by the dominance of poetry. To initiate a written prose fiction in a society which elevates real accounts of real people in the form of the time-bound stream over non-historical narrative (time-free stream), was, therefore, no easy feat. The Somali clergy (Ulama), the most literate in society, wrote their poetry and occasional prose in Arabic. Their works did not deal with fiction. It is quite natural, therefore, that written fiction is started by the secular section of the indigenous intelligentsia.

THE ROLE OF ULAMA

As is evident from the second chapter, Somali literature is and has been for the most part an oral literature. Written Somali literature, before the advent of colonialism, was the exclusive monopoly of the Ulama [Islamic clergy]. These sheikhs wrote their poetry in Arabic script. The intention of writing in such a script was not to propagate written materials among the laity, but meant for private consumption, mostly aimed at the immediate family of the sheikh/poet and other

religious figures. Sometimes the poetry of a particular sheikh enjoyed a wider audience as it spread through the hands of a peripatetic sheikh who deemed the content of such poetry important for the propagation of the Faith. Usually one of the Sheikh's sons became guardian of the written material. He, the son, or any other loyal disciple were later to recite some relevant poems commemorating important occasions. These poems were either religious or historical in nature. The poems were sung by supporters of the concerned sheikh as part of established celebrations.

The appearance of colonialism did not change the practice. The new situation, however, introduced a necessity on the part of the sheikh to deal with the new realities. As the laity could not wholly grasp the new reality in its correct perspective, it became incumbent upon sheikhs, owners of arcane knowledge, to render some explanations as to what went wrong. The ensuing confusion was exacerbated by the mushrooming of a legion of religious and semi-religious accounts which interpreted colonial occupation of Somalia as befitting prophesy to the propinquity of the armagedon. To revive the spirit of the people, some enlightened sheikhs rose up to the occasion. They formulated their own ideas in which they explained the importance of Jihad wars. Some sheikhs organized both farmers and nomads by creating efficient networks in combating colonial occupation. These sheikhs utilized all means and methods closer to the hearts of the people. Poetry was one such means. The sheikh composed his poem and taught a disciple to memorize. Yet most sheikhs transcribed their poetry in Arabic script for posterity.

These written materials by the sheikhs illustrate the dominance of poetry in Somali literature. For reasons explained earlier, poetry is best suited to persuade Somalis. Three reasons account for the power of poetical persuasion in Somali society. First, poetry is in itself a form of knowledge; secondly, it conserves and passes on to posterity what knowledge there is in society; and lastly, Somali poetry is structured in alliteration which is known for its mnemonic quality. For the same reasons the Ulama utilized the poetic form. Yet, written poetry was read, understood and analyzed by a few people, notably other sheikhs. This explains the esoteric nature of these early written poetry forms. The sheikhs focused in their poetry on religious and semi-religious topics. Subject matter of these topics fell in the domain of the realistic. The sheikhs shared with the rest of society a disdain for fabulous and unrealistic narratives whether in prose or poetry. It was not to be expected that the sheikh/poet would write prose fiction. If written prose fiction was to flourish on Somali soil, it had to come from the secular section of the indigenous intelligentsia.

"THE ERA OF THE LUTE"

The earliest published prose fiction in Somali literature is said to have its roots in what is referred to as "the era of the lute". This era covers roughly 25 years (1944-69). The socio-politico-economic importance of this era can not be lost on anyone who has kept track of Somali literature. Professor Andrzejewski writes:

Towards the end of the Second World War various social and political changes were set in motion in the Somali speaking territories which led to a gradual departure, for some sections of the population, from the traditional Somali way of life.¹

There was an influx of people into newly established or enlarged towns. The gathering of people with different backgrounds within the walls of a single town was in itself a new experience. People from pastoral or peasant origin came into contact. With that kind of contact came the meeting of different sub-cultures. I take sub-culture to mean a way of perceiving reality with the eyes of a closely knit group like the clans of Somalia. Belonging to a sub-culture, therefore, entails belonging to two sets of beliefs: the primary set [the nation] and the sub-set [the clan]. Within each sub-set, there are things like historical events which are explicated or interpreted differently than by other sub-sets. That is why a poet might expurgate parts of a poem according to the composition of an intended audience. That is also why fictional characters in later Somali language novels might give conflicting views on a particular historical event. While one can argue that perceptual and ideological differences between authors can account for some conflicting views in their books, one can not ignore the influence and role of the contending sets mentioned above. Each author's perception of the social reality surrounding him/her transcends their idiosyncratic, subjective understanding of that reality. No author can with success locate himself outside historical forces which shape the world-view of his/her epoch. The reality of clan differences in Somalia, or even ethnic differences in the rest of the third world for

that matter, is best understood if state control and ownership of the resources of the country is taken into consideration. If one could make a case for the notion that "class difference [in Africa] is at a very early stage",² then one might be hardpressed to deduce, that clan/ethnic differences are only another manifestation of "class" competition. "In the final analysis", Mao Tse-tung said in a 1963 speech, "National struggle is a matter of class struggle."³

Sub-cultures based on clan or ethnic differences account for discernable variations in some myths which exploit the trials and tribulations of a group ancestor. Because of the inclement environment of the Somali interior, psychological wars are fought over which ancestor came when and from where. Myths invariably become the trusted vehicle for such wars. It is for this reason that clans embellish myths surrounding the origins of their real or imagined progenitors. Here we are not interested in passing judgments on any particular myth.⁴ Rather our interest lies in illuminating what is meant by sub-culture as used in the pages of this study. People from different sub-cultures do, however, have a common inherited culture which hinges upon a shared language and a common, genealogical tree, assumed or real. The sub-culture, in short, caters to and interprets reality from the view point of a particular group in a particular locale. The existence of a putative ancestor of all who share Somaliness is not called into question. The new meeting ground, the urban center, not claimed by any single group, was to be a place for all. This meant that no "single" code of reference was to be observed. Rather, the town as a "melting pot", had to accommodate all the diverse subcultures of those

within its precincts. A new code of reference, therefore, had, by necessity, to be created by those in the burgeoning towns.

Now with the absence of a complete conformity to a single culture or even sub-culture, a gap emerged as to how people could entertain themselves. Poets were not relegated to a back seat; rather their importance grew with a new fervor. The question of time, however, made it impossible for people to listen to long poems. The town, unlike the traditional setting (the hamlet or the peasant village), did not give its dwellers a uniform time to leave work. In the traditional setting, all members of the community were more or less able to attend a village story teller's session at the end of the day's work.⁵ The absence of a uniform time set aside for story telling in urban areas was compounded by yet another problem: the fact that one could not expect to be living in propinquity of others with whom one shared a similar sub-culture. The fact that people from different sub-cultures lived in the same section of town made it imperative for a lot of people to devise ways of creating other popular forms of entertainment. The newly created popular form of entertainment had to appeal to the aesthetic taste of all those living in a particular section of town. It is no wonder, then, that the emergence of theater in Somali culture is attributed to this particular period, the era of the lute. The period also witnessed the emergence of a new genre of love poetry, which incidentally, gives the whole era of the "lute", its name, and which was originated by truck drivers criss-crossing the country. This new genre had attraction for townspeople for two reasons. First, it was brief and secondly, it interpreted reality from the standpoint of the

towndwellers. It was easy for the town dweller to identify with the imagery of the songs which, even though still nomadic or rural, espoused themes relevant to and depictive of the *modus vivendi* of the urban dweller. It was songs of this genre which made their debut with the establishing of radio transmissions. At first, shunned by popular poets and religious men as a sign of a doggerel and infidelism, respectively, songs in this genre proved to be a tool against colonialism and later against corrupt indigenous governments.

Here, it is important to bear in mind that the new genre of love poetry and the kind of theatre we are referring to, and also other forms of popular entertainment are all oral art forms. The reasons for their orality are many, but aside from the fact that Western-type schools with written script came to Somalia after the 1940's, two points deserve special mention. First was the lack of a script for transcribing Somali. While analysis and explanation for the reasons of that absence do not fall within the purview of this study, blame must be placed on internal discord coupled with and exacerbated by external meddling in Somali politics by various countries with a stake in the development of a Somali orthography. Among the different scripts proposed, three stood out above the others because of the influence and number of their supporters. These were a "Latin" script, Osmania and Arabic characters. The adoption of Latin script for Somali was favored by most educated Somalis, who argued that the "adoption of a Latin script would make it possible to acquire modern printing equipment at moderate prices."⁶ Their proposal, they said, was based on logic, economy and efficiency. Their case gained momentum when in the

South, "the language issue flared again during the 10-year Italian Trust Administration."⁷ Professor M.M. Moreno, who later published two Somali grammars using Latin script, urged the authorities to realize that the speedy adoption of an alphabet was an indispensable step in the preparations for independence. "But when the proposal was put to the first Somali legislature, the Consiglio Territoriale, because of its political implications the deputies decided to table the question until it could be resolved without pressure or interference from the outside."⁸ In fact until 1972 no Somali government could dare to adopt Latin script for fear of "opposition from the conservative Moslems who considered the Latin "Christian" script unsuitable for a Moslem State.

As to Osmania, named after its creator Osman Keenadiid, there was increasing suspicion that its advocates did not have the national interest as their objective. It did not appeal to a cross-section of the people as it was associated rightly or wrongly with parochial regionalism, since the script's creator was from the Bari region of Somalia. Advocates of Osmania did not view their script as representative of any particular region. The alleged provincialism associated with it, they claimed, was a stratagem for clanish minded people to discount the importance of the script. To its supporters, Osmania stood for Somali dignity, a proposition their opponents did not share. Some opponents even went to the extent of claiming that Osmania orthography contained some letters "which resembled those in Amharic alphabet."⁹ Viewed within the historical context of the Horn of Africa, the allusion to Amharic resemblance was far from being a compliment. Both groups on either side of the Osmania issue

formed sub-cultural associations aimed more at winning the hearts of the silent majority. The formation of these associations was, in short, a political explanation of a script problem.

Chances seemed to favor a third group which advocated Arabic characters. The dominant voice of that group consisted of Somalis who had had their schooling in the Arab world, especially Egypt. They capitalized on the "Arab" element in Somali history. They also made much publicity of a Semitic element in the Somali language "Exemplified in the guttural and aspirate sounds, which correspond to Arabic letters Gahin, Ain, and Ha; and in the form and concord of plural nouns which largely resemble the Arabic broken plurals."¹⁰ These advocates, on the other hand, played down the fact that it is impossible to use Arabic characters to represent all Somali sounds. For one thing "the list of Arabic consonants is too elaborate", and for another "The three vowel signs are insufficient"¹¹ to accommodate the great variety of vowel sounds characteristic of the Somali language. The important thing here is to note that the three vowel signs of Arabic are too small to accommodate the many Somali vowels and their eight diphthongs.

The absence of an alphabet/orthography for Somali precluded in part the development of a written tradition.

The second reason for the orality of the Somali art form of popular entertainment developed in burgeoning towns was marked by the absence of what Ali Mazuri calls 'a vertical cultural dualism'¹² in the social fabric of the Somali. Italian and English languages were seen as only a mere medium of communication. In fact, the Somali pride in

his language is proverbial. This condition is best understood when the Somali case is juxtaposed against some other African countries where the relationship of Western culture vis-a-vis the African was one of domination and conversion. I do not say that other Africans had lesser pride in their languages, but the absence of homogeneity in most African countries carved by colonialism for their own interests, of which the sowing of discord among Africans was a prime target, played a significant role in discouraging people from using an indigenous language as a lingua franca. Such an absence of an African lingua franca, gave European languages added recognition. The Somalis, however with one language, have been Moslems for more than a thousand years.

The absence of a complete colonial domination and conversion in the Somali context did not, however, produce a corresponding absence of Western system of education, Westernized urban dwellings and the introduction of cash-nexus economy.¹³ As mentioned above, the establishment of Western type towns necessitates a need for the emergence of a kind of cultural art form which can satisfy the aesthetic taste of town dwellers in terms of its availability. As Craig states, "The art form is inseparable from the circumstance of the age".¹⁴ The proliferation of newspapers is what fulfilled partially the preceding requirements.

The emergence of newspapers is commonly believed to have spearheaded the creation of a forum which could cover the need the town dweller has for information and entertainment. Newspapers act as a substitute form for the traditional method of telling oral narratives

in urban centers. And it is for this reason that newspapers play an integrating role in nation building. The paper becomes a vehicle for one from one sub-culture to aim at and reach an audience different from one's cultural background. People exposed to different ideas which emanate from diverse sub-cultures will be in a better position to deal with the reality of the outside world, a world which is not limited to one view. In this way papers play a vital role in forging a historical national consciousness among the populace. Furthermore, such a medium does not make it necessary for people to gather at a particular place (the village hut of the story teller, around the campfire of the elderly narrator, etc.) or at a particular time (after the day's work preferably in the evening). The newspaper can easily be read in one's private house at one's own leisure. Such an act of reading has its advantages and disadvantages. Its advantages include a broadening of the reader's consciousness by the mere act of reading. In contrast there is clear disadvantage in reading symbolized by the written word. It is a frozen form of communication. There is no one, for example, to ask for explanation when the need arises. This is why performer-audience interaction can generate a wholly different response in the listener. The nature of orality, is such that it effects immediate response in the hearer. Such an interaction is lost in the written medium.

The disadvantages of the written medium symbolized by newspapers do not end there. As mentioned above, the written poetry of the sheikhs remained esoteric because of the absence of a reading public. The town dwellers were not all literate enough to read a newspaper. In Somalia, the absence of the vertical cultural dualism

precluded the spread of the written word in European languages. Western educated Somalis were the only ones who could decipher the mystery of the written word in European languages. Their contributions therefore were reduced to a minimal effect since the bulk of people could not read. This was the reason for the relative unimportance of newspapers in Somalia. The absence of a substantive creative works in Somali newspapers does not illustrate a paucity of creative persons in that society. What it shows is the limitations to use foreign languages especially European ones. It is arguable that had there been a common script for Somali language, the situation would have been different.

In addition to the absence of fiction written in European languages, there is also a conspicuous absence of nationalist leaders publishing political or philosophical works. The Somali political landscape did not, for example, produce political leaders who formulated their agendas on pieces of paper. This could be explained by the oral character of the Somali people. Post-independence political leaders were themselves transitional figures. However the absence of published political materials by Somali pundits does not mean the absence of written materials in all sorts of foreign scripts. It does mean that for Somalis the spoken word shows itself to be a more viable medium than the written word.

The inappropriateness of using a foreign language in propagating ideas among the Somalis does not, however, negate the occasional appearance of a work of fiction, a short story for example, in one or another newspaper. The first such short story was published in

Horseed, "Vanguard" by Xaange in 1967.¹⁵ "Qowdhan iyo Qoran" is a story of elopement. This is the story of the eponymous protagonists who fell in love with each other, but had to elope to marry since the heroine's parents did not approve their marriage. Their first trial ends in failure, but Qoran encouraged by the experiences of an old Dervish warrior who had a similar fate, succeeds in his second attempt. This short story was the first of its kind written in Somali and published in a local newspaper. Thus, its historical importance outweighs its intrinsic value.

THREE GROUPS OF WRITERS

As was explained above, the absence of the written art in the Somali language did not preclude the emergence of writers utilizing all kinds of scripts—Arabic characters, Osmania or Latin script. The kind of writers we refer to here are those whose works encompass prose fiction. Three groups of writers come to mind, which can be distinguished as: Preservers; Transmuters; and Innovators.¹⁶ The preservers started their work long before the adoption of official Somali script. Each collector utilized whatever script he felt comfortable with. They believed they had to work against the clock. Old people, repositories of tradition were in danger of extinction. The tradition itself was in competition with some pernicious agents of modernization. Works of the transmuter and innovator groups utilize the official Somali script, adopted in 1972. The transmuter novels form the transition stage between the preservers and the innovators. It is in

this sense of bridge-forming that their novels should be read. Their novels reveal the amalgam of techniques unique to oral art and those of the written medium. It is the innovator group who try to break new grounds of novel-writing techniques in Somali. These writers consciously blend some aspects of modern novel writing with those inherited from tradition.

THE PRESERVERS

The first group, true to their name, attempt to preserve the vast verbal art of the Somali for posterity. Their main concern is to collect and conserve, "perishable" oral literature from extinction. Their endeavors derive inspiration from the old maxim that with the death of an elderly person perishes a whole library, which is impossible to retrieve. Motivated by this sense of urgency, these writers go to great length to locate literary figures in failing health or in old age. Their findings were either published with the help of outside institutions and persons or remained in the possession of private collectors. Prominent among this group are Muuse H. I. Galaal whose *Hikmad Soomaali*, "Somali Wisdom", was published in 1956 by Oxford University Press. Professor B. W. Andrzejewski of the School of Oriental and African languages edited the book with grammatical introduction and notes. This book "Somali Wisdom" addresses itself to "the older works of Somali oral literature [which] unless something is done about them quickly, are in danger of dying together with the wise old men who have stored these treasures in their memories".¹⁷

The book, besides the grammatical introduction and notes, contains twenty-three oral narratives. The notes in the back are deemed necessary by the editor, for "those who may undertake the task of collecting Somali literature must bear in mind that it is important to make explanatory notes on obsolescent words and idioms, on persons and on the events of local history."¹⁸ Galaal's contribution to the preservation of Somali oral literature transcends the publication of *Hikmad*. He published many articles and mimeographs on Somali oral literature and culture, and he remains a Goliath among Somali men of letters. Shire Jaamac Axmed's literary journal *Iftiinka Aqoonta* also contributed to the collection and preservation of Somali oral heritage. Shire's contributions, unlike some of Galaal's oral narratives, fit in the time bound stream of Somali oral literature. His short stories were mostly on known figures in Somali history. Nonetheless, Shire shares with Galaal one pre-occupation, the need to preserve Somali oral literature. Besides these two, there are collectors who spent their lifetimes ensuring the preservation of the Somali tradition through the ages. Most of them did not publish their collections, but kept them in writing. Others started publishing some of their collections after the adoption of the Latin script for the writing of the Somali language. These include religious sheikhs and literary scholars. Sheikh Jaamac Cumar Ciise, Xussein Sheikh Axmed Kaddare and Cumar Aw Nuux are only three among stalwarts in this field.

TRANSMUTERS

This group of writers are not pre-occupied with the preservation of Somalia's oral heritage as were members of the first group. The transmuters, as their name attests, attempt to revitalize the present with the past, and viseversa. According to Professor Andrzejewski who coined the term, "transmuters", writers in this group, "transmute what belonged to the oral literature and adapt it to the needs of written literature."¹⁹ Their pre-occupation is not only to preserve what is already there, but to create new forms. The creation of new forms demand both talent and knowledge in existing traditions. The aggregate of any tradition consists of two equally important parts: Sequences which bear the mark of continuity to tradition, and change over time. The transmuters were in the best position to have pioneered that change since they in their own different ways had managed to master the linguistic and stylistic necessity to adapt the oral narrative into the novel genre. The result of this experimentation is a breed of writing which incorporates poetry into works of prose fiction. The different elements of oral heritage coalesce in this form.

Another characteristic of this form of writing is that it is laden with expressions from oral narratives. Transitions between passages are clearly demarcated. Dialogues between characters are sometimes sprinkled with words such as he/she said", "then Xsaid", etc. Characterization in these novels basically conform to that which is found in oral literature. The character is presented to us by the narrator and we rarely come across him or her having an inner debate,

as is found in some of the later novels. The character is at the mercy of the narrator who is always structured as a third person omniscient. Characters in these situations are close to tradition. Indeed, characters in the books by the transmuter group reflect a close affinity the individual has with tradition—a reflection which arguably transcends the fictional characters and describes the relationship the authors themselves have with their tradition. It is the innovators who further develop the techniques of novel-writing in Somali. Themes in the transmuter novels focused on dualities within Somali tradition, while those explored by the innovator authors concentrate mainly on the dynamics inherent in society.

INNOVATORS

This group of writers, as well as the preceding ones, belong to the post post-revolutionary era, an era some might prefer to call the aftermath of the 1969 Coup d'etat. Our terminology here does not try to comprehend the vast literature devoted to polemic discourse on revolution vs reformism.²⁰ With the advent of the military on to the political scene came the destruction of a multitude of negative characteristics which had previously shaped the policy of the Somali civilian government prior to 1969. These had included the absence of order, internecine war among clans and the unenviable soubriquet for the country as an international graveyard. The early years of the military rule displayed a sincere effort on the part of the new leadership to put an end to such characteristics. That most of those

attempts were, in later years, to end in ignominious failure does not minimize the initial enthusiasm of the twenty-five member Supreme Revolutionary Council to inject new blood into the Somali body-politic. While the reasons for that failure are to be discovered in the composition of the Supreme Revolutionary Council and/or the character of its leadership, one fact is indisputable: much was implemented in so short a time.

The adoption of a Somali orthography is itself a product of this new era. The writing of the Somali language was high on the agenda of the Council. An article in the first charter of the October 21, 1969 "revolution" was indicative of the Supreme Revolutionary Council's commitment to the writing of the language: "To constitute with appropriate and adequate measures, the basic development of the writing of the Somali language." A Commission to devise a script for Somali was appointed in January 2, 1970. The old bickering and animosity among the many contending parties as to which script was to be adopted had no place in the composition of this new commission. By July 1972, the commission presented its recommendations to the SRC. On the third anniversary of the Supreme Revolutionary Council, its chairman announced to the public the adoption of a modified version of Latin script for the writing of the Somali language. Literacy campaigns were launched in both rural and urban areas. Schools were closed for a whole year, and students dispatched to participate in the literacy campaigns. The rate of literacy soared especially in urban centers. The new crop of literate people constituted a demand for reading materials. Government commissions entrusted with

publications could not cope with the new demand. The emergence of literacy was enough to encourage creative persons within the society to write in Somali. The first few years were characterized by an unstructured output of creative works. What mattered most was the production of any literate item. Both transmuters and innovators gained from the new development of written Somali, as it meant an increase in the ranks of readership. The innovators, unlike the transmuter group, attempted to and at times succeeded in becoming pace setters, precursors in short. The pace-setting experimentation of the innovators is necessitated by the scope and general concern of their themes. They mostly grapple with urban themes.

Urban centers as was explained earlier, bring together people with different backgrounds. The new themes which the innovators explore reflect these differences. Differences such as dialectic variations of Standard Somali are brilliantly and convincingly handled in some novels of the innovators. The treatment of dialectic variations no doubt affects the claim the narrative can have on verisimilitude. In *Maana Fay*, the eponymous heroine is from a Xamari sub-culture, Xamar being the local name for Mogadishu, the capital of Somalia. The author deftly weaves the heroine's dialect into the plot of the narrative. The relevance of any sub-cultural item or dialectic variations in a story harken the "laws" governing poetry incorporation into the plot of Somali-language novels. The author must take into consideration such factors as the setting of the story and the fictional period it purports to cover. These factors "determine the linguistic choices open to the writer".²¹ The different registers of language can

also sharpen characterization by allowing each character to travel within certain parameters marked by sub-cultural and educational backgrounds. In addition to narrative analyses and physical correlatives for depicting characters, *Maana Fay* also utilizes registers of language for characterization purposes. Poetry like prose-fiction is also affected by event shaping a particular period. Poets in this group started formulating their particular outlook of the world in their work. This does not however, mean the absence of a world-outlook in the poetry of other poets in Post-1969 era. What this explains is the emergence of poets and/or song writers who blended aesthetic conscience with social consciousness which transcended the national borders of the Somalis: the introduction and utilization of imagery previously unheralded in Somali literature. Cabdi Muxumad's Somali version of "The Internationale" and Dr. Raafi's "Beesha Hanti Wadagga" [The Socialist Community] were indicative of the shape Somali literature was taking.

Prose fiction writers of the innovators have one major characteristic which distinguishes them from the transmuters, viz., age. Most of the transmuters were erstwhile preservers. This fact puts them in a different age bracket than the innovators who are relatively younger. Most members of this group have at least a high school diploma to their name. In contrast, most of the transmuters are self-educated. This educational background is important as it accounts for the introduction of new elements of novel writing into Somali prose-fiction. Authors in this group utilize characteristic features of the novel genre in the language of their schooling. Most of them had one

European language or another as their medium of instruction. In short they studied European novels at school.

Yet, the innovators can not be lumped together as a single coherent and cohesive group. Individual members hail from different backgrounds in terms of education and their ability to master the technique of the modern novel. This diversity shows itself in different levels of sophistication found among the innovators. There are some writers who qualify to be grouped under the innovators but who share some principle characteristics with the transmuters. Cabdullaahi Sheikh Xussein's *Ayaan daran*, his only novel thus far, demonstrates the lack of exceptional ability which Daniel Kunene has specified earlier in connection with a successful transition from "the techniques and procedures proper to oral art to those inherent in the written medium."²² The use of such transitional phrases as "he said", then X said in this novel "to introduce quoted speeches" reveal the absence of a successful transition from the oral art to the written medium. Yet Cabdullaahi's novel explores an urban theme with the rigor and at times dexterity employed by the author of *Maana Fay*. The latter novel will briefly be compared and contrasted to the works of Somalia's most famous novelist in English, Nuruddin Farah in chapter VI.

The stories under discussion in this study, however, are mostly written by transmuters. The choice is deliberate. As the category of this group illustrates, they form a bridge between the other two groups, preservers and innovators. In a similar vein, the works of the transmuters belong to the transition period, thus forming a bridge

between orality and literacy. Also it is to be expected that the kind of characters dwelling in a world belonging to such a transition period are themselves "transitionals". A transitional, in this sense, is someone who is at threshold of two eras, not necessarily exclusive or dialectically opposed to each other.²³ The contiguity of such eras can be symbolized by the existence of oral poetry in the prose fiction of the transmuters extolling, of all things, the virtue of literacy. The transitional character in the works of the transmuters is mostly an illiterate or semi-literate, but one who has a grasp, albeit in a superficial manner, of the ways of the literate world. Because of their nature, works by transmuters are fertile ground to prove our stated thesis, that in Somali language prose fiction, there is a continuity to tradition which goes intandem with a corresponding qualitative leap.

Faarax M. J. Cawl's *Aqoondarro waa u Nacab Jacayl (Ignorance is the Enemy of Love)*; Shire J. Axmed's *Rooxaan (The Spirits)*; Xuseen Sheekh Axmed "Kaddare" 's *Waasuge iyo Warsame (Waasuge and Warsame)* are examples of this genre. The choice is not accidental. Cawl and Kaddare can be grouped under 'transmuters'. They "transmute what belonged to the oral literature and adapt it to the new needs of written literature."²⁴ Kaddare uses texts, while Cawl uses texts and themes "derived from oral sources as important ingredients of their works, which however, belong a genre alien to Somali oral literature: the novel..."²⁵ The three stories are held together by a similarity in their themes. We discern in these stories a replica of a perennial problem: town life versus country life. But the dichotomous nature of the rural and urban life is not the only theme

discussed in these stories. Contradictions within a particular mode of living, such as pastoralism, also become subjects of interest for the transmuters. Perhaps it is important here to delineate the different themes that the transmuters or even the innovators present.

THEMES IN SOMALI WRITTEN PROSE FICTION

Professor Andrzejewski in his essay "Somali Prose Fiction Writing: 1967-1981", pinpoints ten themes in the written prose fiction under his scrutiny.²⁶ We will go through the list in a sequential fashion and touch upon all points discussed in the original essay. Family life plays a pivotal role in the Somali tradition and it is quite natural to see in these stories the close adherence of art to life. This theme appears in different forms in different stories, but almost all narratives touch upon married life. In relation to this mode of living, the present essay illuminates the following three themes: getting married, married life and illicit liasons, a topic that is tangential to married life. In the case of the transmuters whose works form a transition between the strictly traditional and the new ways of townlife, the above themes are predominant. In Cawl's *Aqoon Darro waa Unacab Jacayl*, marriage, especially arranged marriage, is a leading theme around which the whole story revolves. Arranged marriages are deprecated in this novel. In Kaddare's *Waasuge iyo Warsame*, married life is not the dominant themes of the novel, but it is, without doubt, a sub-theme, which no critic can ignore.

"Chivalry", the fourth theme, is also dispersed in Somali prose fiction of this particular era. The notion of the warrior, the spear man, the antithesis of the Sheikh, is prevalent in Somali oral literature. The constructive type of warrior who saves a victim from all forms of affliction is also found in the written fiction (in Somali). The male protagonist in *Aqoon Darro* is a case in point. Calimaax saves Cawrala, the heroine, from danger after their ship wrecks in high seas. The chivalrous character with good intentions saves a victim under adverse conditions, but for his character to appear, the chivalrous need to have the conditions necessary for adversity. Wars, the fifth theme, therefore, shape the manichean world of the benevolent rescuer; because of the inherent viciousness of warfare, opportunity is created for his honorable deeds.

"Crime and corruption," "wasted opportunities" and "troubled minds" are three more themes Andrzejewski locates in the written prose fiction. These three themes occur mostly in "urban" novels. M. D. Afrax's *Maana Fay*, the most developed novel thus far in the Somali language, in terms of technique, is an urban novel which utilizes all three themes. The emergence of the nation state in Africa has brought with it a legion of ailments on a scale unknown in Africa before. By acting as a catalyst, it has helped precipitate the rapid maturity of some forms of social maladies. The intention here is not to romanticize the African past, much less deny the dialectical progression of history. To argue that all of Africa's present problems emanate from colonialism is to fall into a trap of romanticization of the African past, and thus paint a static picture of African history. The nature and scope of these

problems would have been different, had the traumatic experience of colonialism been avoided, but such a line of reasoning does not negate the emergence of similar problems in Africa in time as a result of the contradictory motion inherent in its own nature and society.²⁷ The nature of the nation state is such that it removes any forums through which the wronged individual can get redress. In traditional society, a plaintiff took his case to a group of jurors who assembled under a tree. The tree referred to is the *Geedka Xeerka* where *Xeerbeegti*, men adept in customary laws, hand out justice. These jurors owe their allegiance to the whole community and not to any specific privileged member. The trust which the community places on the integrity of these men is succinctly described in the words of one Somali elder:

Two things are out of character with the *heerbeegti*: to take a bribe and to be partial. The *heerbeegti* suspected to have taken a bribe finds himself disgraced and fall into the status of 'he whose daughter would not be married because of his bad name' (*'gabadaa guurwaa'*)²⁸

The formation of the nation state proves to be the nemesis of this traditional system of dispensing justice. The members of community within the new nation state can no longer assemble under one large tree to dispense justice. Under such conditions the dispensing of justice is entrusted to a few who owe their allegiance to those who appoint them rather than to the public at large. In such instances, therefore, a verisimilitude of justice is all that one can hope for. The complexities of the nation state, in short, breed the mushrooming of diverse organs under whose aegis justice can be

tampered with and some times made victim. Corruption and crime flourish under such conditions. The novels of the innovators often deal with this issue.

The problem of the "been-to" syndrome in African literature in European languages has attracted the attention of many critics of this literature. Many brilliant minds have been lost to the contradictions which shape the "been-to's" character as a result of his wavering between his real world, i.e. the realities of his country and the one in which he lived as a sojourner. The doom of the "been-to", attempting to straddle two horses, is too well-known to need mention. The theme of "wasted opportunities" revolves around the character whose actual life is less elevated than his potentiality. In *Wasuge iyo Warsame* we meet a "been-to" in the character of Muuse who schemes to find an exit from Somalia to live in Italy with his Italian wife. Here is the case of one who turns out ungrateful.

The last two themes discussed in Andrzejewski's article are "suffering of childhood and youth" and the dichotomy between town and country life. In *Rooxaan*, the protagonist's mental and physical sufferings form the core of the narrative structure of the book. The Koranic teacher beats him while a fraudulent sheikh swindles him of his money. The sheikh's victims are mostly women and youth who fall for his chicanery.

All three transmuted books under discussion share the tenth and last theme, town versus country. The ubiquity of this theme in most novels in Somali attests to the importance and the sense of urgency attached to the process of urbanization in Somalia. Almost all novels

in every period have something or another to say about this theme, but it gets gentle care in the hands of the transmuters who are at their technical best when they describe the dualism inherent in the two worlds which the two modes of living symbolize. The two worlds are coterminous as the process of urbanization is an on-going one. Yet, we should not forget the fact that transitionals in these novels are mobile characters whose movements are marked by a two-way traffic which produces people who have one foot in each world. Also captured in the pages of these novels are the initial worlds which had shaped the transitional's personal and collective traits. It can be said with good reason that "in these novels, history and literature merge into a literary unit within which society is represented through event, characters, and scenes taken from real life."²⁹

THE INTER-RELATEDNESS OF AFRICAN LITERATURES

Juxtaposed against the salient themes in other African literatures whether in national languages or in European ones, the ten themes in Somali literature can be contracted to four major themes. These four major themes, therefore, reveal the inter-relatedness of African literatures in general. Such a relationship is not, in part, necessarily the creation of the colonial experience common to most African countries. It is hardly a secret that all African countries with the rest of the nations on the Southern hemisphere are on the periphery of the existing world economy. This situation reduces most African countries to "consumer society" status. Such societies always trail on the heels of

those who set the pace, in this case the industrialized world. On another level, the dichotomy of the center and the periphery also breed a vicious division between town and village in the developing world. This division is characterized by an influx of rural people into towns. The burgeoning towns in Africa lure the hopes of many people in the country side. For some transitionals, the material wealth which the town flaunts can be compared to the wild fox of the forest which opens up its anus for birds to peck, only to find, when it is too late, that they are pecking for the last time. It is with good reason that transitional characters do not view the town as man's best creation. The frustrations, sometimes the death throes, of these characters are captured in the pages by creative authors.

The influx of people from the rural areas to the urban centers of the nation states in Africa is a pet theme for most African writers whatever language they use. The classical helplessness of which newcomers to the town experience is seen through characters like Guhaad in *Roosaan*, Beydan in *Maana Fay*, Beatrice in Ekwensi's *People of the City*, or the stubborn one in Kezilahabi's Kiswahili novel, *Kichwa Maji*. The ordeal these characters go through depicts the general convulsions their respective societies are undergoing.

The second popular theme with African authors of prose fiction is the return of the "been to". The disappointments of the society with the "been to" and in return the been to's disenchantment with the way things are in his society culminate in the latter's prayer for a 'second death'. Obi Okonwo in *No Longer at Ease* and Muuse in *Waasuge iyo Warsame* are cases in point.

The construction and re-enactment of past history in light of a 'correct perspective', i.e. from the African point of view, forms the core of the third theme. Here, African authors attempt to re-construct history in order to combat parallel, mostly negative, re-constructions of the same history by people with ulterior motives. This historical reconstruction in literary form with the express purpose of teaching Africans the positive aspects of their past is, to borrow from Achebe, a case of 'applied art'.³⁰ The principles of such an art include the teaching of Africans that "they did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans; that their societies were not mindless but frequently had a philosophy of great depth and value and beauty, that they had poetry and, above all, they had dignity."³¹ Foremost on books which reflect Achebe's definition of applied art is his own novel *Things Fall Apart*. Achebe's treatment of the subject both in terms of content and style demonstrates his craftsmanship in handling such a complex issue as the falling apart of African traditions. He presents an objective analysis of the confrontation between Europe and Africa while at the same time not glossing over his community's weaknesses. In Somali language prose fiction, Cawl attempts to particularize the topic in *Garbaduubkii Gumeysiga* by replacing European colonialism with his perception of Ethiopian subjugation of ethnic Somalis living in the Western part of the de facto border between the two countries.³² The novel was of a topical interest since it came out during the final days of the Somali-Ethiopian war of 1977-78. The author laments the paucity of written materials dealing with the Somali experience of colonialism. His interest, as is stated in the preface, is to teach Somalis the effects of

the colonial onslaught on their own territory. The publication of the book is also meant to set the records straight. The novelist is not satisfied with non-fictional books on the subject of colonialism by foreign authors for two reasons. First, most of these books were authored by people who were in the service of the colonial administration. Secondly, even on the rare occasion when some writers took a sympathetic line, their works were missing the real, authentic feeling of the colonized.³³ Thus, the inadequacy of books on this subject to exhaust the problem and/or present it in its correct perspective. Cawl's *Garbaduubkii Gumeysiga* ("Shakles of Colonialism") and Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons* attempt to pick up from where Achebe left off the topic. These last two try to analyze how in the case of Cawl, for example, Western Somalia was "colonized" by Ethiopia, and in Armah's case how Africa was victimised by both predators (Arabs) and destroyers (Europeans).³⁴ This theme exploits the colonization of Africa by foreign powers, mostly European.

The fourth theme in African literature deals with the problems of post-independent Africa, i.e. the neo-colonial state where dashed hopes, unrealized dreams, rampant corruption mark the landscape. Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* perhaps epitomizes novels in this category.³⁵ The closest novel in Somali which lambasts the pervasive nature of corruption in the nation state is *Maana Faay*.

The above four themes discernable in African literature in general, are more or less representative of the ten themes, Professor Andrzejewski was able to detect in Somali literature in the indigenous

language. The three transmuted novels which form the base for discussion in this study attest to the existence of these themes in Somali written prose fiction. In addition, the novels of the transmuted show the close affinity written prose fiction has with tradition. A textual analysis of these novels will reveal that they incorporate poetry and proverbs into their narrative structure. The novels also utilize the journey motif to enhance Magel's "refutation stage", discussed earlier, which corrects an initial misconception or imbalance. We now turn to a textual analysis of the novels under discussion. These are Xuseen Sheikh Axmed "Kaddare's" *Waasugue Iyo Warsame*, Faarax M. J. Cawl's *Aqoondarro Waa U Nacab Jacayl*, and Shire Jaamac Axmed's *Rooxaan*.

¹B. W. Andrzejewski, "Somali Literature," in Andrzejewski et al, p. 358f.

²James Booth, *Writers and Politics in Nigeria* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1981), p. 6.

³Stuart R. Schram (ed.), *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-Tung* (New York: Bantam Books, 1967), p. 6.

⁴Northrop Frye's definition of 'myth' is important here: "A narrative in which some characters are superhuman beings who do things that 'happen only in stories', hence a conventional or stylized narrative not fully adapted to plausibility or 'realism'". Quoted in John J. White, *Mythology in the Modern Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 43.

⁵For an excellent analysis of this—problems of storytelling in the town—see Obiechina's first two chapters in his *Culture, Tradition and Society in the West African Novel*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), pp. 3-41.

⁶Jeanne Contini, "The Somalis: A Nation of Poets in Search of an Alphabet" in Helen Kitchen (ed.) *A Handbook of African Affairs*, (New York: Praeger, 1964), p. 311.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid., p. 310.

⁹I. M. Lewis, "Literacy in a Nomadic Society: The Somali Case," in Jack Goody (ed.) *Literacy in Traditional Societies*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), p. 268.

¹⁰J. W. C. Kirk, *A Grammar of the Somali Language*, (Cambridge: The University Press, 1905), p. 1.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²All Mazrui, "The Anatomy of Violence in Contemporary Black Africa," p. 49.

¹³Obiechina, op. cit., p. 5.

¹⁴Allan Rodway, *The Romantic Conflict*, (p. 4) quoted in David Craig, "Towards Laws of Literary Development," in Craig (ed.) *Marxists on Literature: An Anthology* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1975), p. 145.

¹⁵Andrzejewski, "Somali Literature," p. 372; Andrzejewski, "Somali Prose Fiction Writing," in Thomas Labahn (ed.), *Proceedings of the Second International Congress of Somali Studies*, V. 1 (Hamburg: Helmut Buske Verlag, 1983), p. 383.

¹⁶B. W. Andrzejewski, "The Rise of Written Somali Literature," *African Research And Documentation* 8, 9 (1975):7.

¹⁷Muuse Haaji Ismaa'iil Galaal, *Hikmad Soomaali*, edited with grammatical introduction and notes by B. W. Andrzejewski, (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. VI.

¹⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁹Andrzejewski, "The Rise of Written Somali Literature," p. 9.

²⁰On the question of whether there was a 'revolution' or 'coup' in Somalia, the writings of four writers come to the fore: Basil Davidson, "Somalia: Towards Socialism", *Race and Class* XVII, 1 (1975): 20-37; Luigi Pestalozza, *The Somalian Revolution*, trans. Peter Glendening (Bari: Dedale Libri, 1974); Abdi Samatar, "The State, Peasants and Pastoralists: Agrarian Change and Rural Development in Northern Somalia, 1884-1984", PhD Dissertation, U C Berkeley, 1985; Ahmed Samatar, "Self Reliance in Theory and Practice", PhD. Dissertation, University of Denver, 1984. Davidson supports the 'revolution' thesis; so is Pestalozza who calls the 'Somalian revolution' a 'popular socialist revolution'. The Samatars are of the 'coup' thesis supporters. Ahmed Samatar in "Self Reliance"... argues that "the early period" (1969-73) was shaped by acute power strife within the military council. "The emergence of Siyaad's clique consequently led to the gradual evaporation of whatever popular base the regime had" (p. 207). Yet, to argue that Siyaad de-railed the 'revolution' is one thing; to state that there was no such thing as 'revolution' is quite another matter. It is here that one has to define his terms.

In Somalia, there was a revolutionary situation. The military was the only organized group that could undertake the burden of overthrowing the second republic. Abdi Samatar in "The State, Peasants and Pastoralists..." repeats the accomplishments of the regime: the 1974-75 drought (note that Abdi's assessment of 'the early period' goes to 1975), the literacy campaign, and 'expansion of social services.' I agree with Abdi Samatar that, at times, the Council's policies stifled creativity on the part of the peasant/ pastoralist majority to respond "to the crisis of the rural economy" (p. 208) Yet, one must bear in mind that regimes, in most places, depend on the urban population for their survival. Thus, their "ideological state apparatuses" are geared to the containment and contentment of the town dweller.

²¹Emmanuel Ngara, *Stylistic Criticism and the African Novel* (London: Heinemann, 1982), p. 19.

²²Daniel P. Kunene, "Problems in Creating Creative Writing: The Example of Southern Africa", p. 100.

²³(cf.) David Riesman, "Introduction" to Daniel Lerner, *The Passing of Traditional Society* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1958). Riesman writes "[a transitional] is defined as one who attends to the mass media, but cannot read", p. 14.

²⁴Andrzejewski, "The Rise of Written Somali Literature," p. 9.

²⁵*Ibid.*

²⁶Andrzejewski, "Somali Prose Fiction Writing: 1967-81", pp. 382-404.

²⁷Perhaps what Africa needs at this juncture of its history is to identify and examine the development of modern Japanese society as brilliantly illustrated by Achebe in his thought-provoking essay, "What Has Literature Got to Do With It?" in Achebe's *Hopes and Impediments* (London: Heinemann, 1988), pp. 106-117.

²⁸Said S. Samatar, *Oral Poetry and Somali Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 33.

²⁹Harry L. Rosser, *Conflict and Transition in Rural Mexico: The Fiction of Social Realism* (Waltham, Ma: Crossroads Press, 1980), p. 4.

³⁰Chinua Achebe, "The Novelist as Teacher" in his *Morning Yet on Creation Day* (New York: Anchor Press, 1976), p. 59.

³¹*Ibid.*

³²Faarax M J. Cawl, *Garbadaubkii Gumeysiga* (Mogadishu, Madbacadda, Qaranka, 1978).

³³*Ibid.*, p. 1.

³⁴Ayi Kwei Armah, *Two Thousand Seasons* (London: Heinemann, 1979).

³⁵A K Armah, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (London: Heinemann, 1969).

THE NOVELS

In this chapter, I will examine the relevance of my assumptions about the repetition of major features of oral literature in the written forms (Chapter II). The existence of oral literary characteristics in the written narratives does not invalidate the claim these written narratives may have to the novel genre. And "while the lack of basic definitions, terminologies and classic descriptions" ¹ about novels affect the novel genre as a whole, the Somali novel is in the process of national formulation. This process of national formulation is not unique to the Somali case. As demonstrated by Band (1966); Sfeir (1966); Gonzalez (1966) and Lutato (1980),² to mention a few, Israeli, Arabic, Filipino and Zambian novels, respectively, were molded by an amalgam of indigenous traditions and international cross currents. These indigenous forms of novel writing share the basic origins of 'the rise of the novel': "the reality of bourgeois life, of business and of the modern city."³ In Addition, the Somali novel is also, to use Philip Stevick's term, 'a mixed Genre', in the sense that it combines such diverse forms as "essay, romance, history, [orature]..."⁴ The chapter will illuminate the interplay of 'traditional and individual talent' in the stories under discussion.

Waasuge iyo Warsame is based on the experiences of the eponymous heroes whose differences in perception sustain the whole narrative. *Waasuge* lives near Jowhar, middle Shabelle region. *Warsame*, the other hero, is a camel herder from Mudug. These two men meet on a coach bound for Mogadishu; each is going there to visit his kinsmen. The sharp difference in their understanding of life shows itself early in the journey. *Waasuge* cannot contain his joy when he sees the farms which stretch along the road. A popular farm song comes to his mind. The song questions the possibility for a man who has not tilled a farm to stave off hunger pains. *Warsame*, likewise, opens up with joy when he sees passing camels. His song questions the nobility of a man who has never raised camels. And herein lies the essence of the pastoralist/peasant dichotomy. They have some mutual scorn for one another. The farmer ridicules the indolence of the camel-herder "who most of the times rests under the shade of trees." The nomad, on his part, despises the farmer as "he holds any kind of manual labor in contempt" and "as fit only for women or menials."⁶

The other passengers enthralled by the pastoralist's song, ask for an encore. *Warsame* who views repetition as a sign of barrenness recites a poem instead. The poetic duel is what sustains the conversation on the coach. Engaging in such a conversation shortens the journey. Poetic and oratorical contests by individuals or groups make the passengers oblivious of "coach-lag". The effect of taking part in these contests or listening to them is similar to that enjoyed by

workers whiling away the hard time with labor-chants. One conspicuous advantage of such dramatic combat is the emergence of different viewpoints as various travellers represent different backgrounds. Here, the coach, to a certain extent, represents or functions as a miniature of the town and a microcosm of its world.

These differences are freely expressed in such an ambience, a possibility less likely to occur within a more cohesive group which would not readily tolerate dissent. All travellers are temporarily displaced from their original places and are thus thrown into a new environment where reason and the understanding of others reign. Such an experience, therefore, is in itself important as it exposes people to ideas they would not have contemplated at other times. It is on similar grounds that *The Canterbury Tales*, for example, helps its characters to forget the tiring effects of the journey, while at the same time it creates a medium for sharing their ideas. The conglomeration of people from all walks of life and all shades of character stifles and precludes any anticipation for conformism. The author of any such story avails himself of this social mix to criticize the status quo and in the process brings to the open something that otherwise might not have escaped the scrutiny of an official censor.

The passengers are enthusiastically drawn to the duel which employs oratory, articulation and poetic recitation. There is one person among the passengers on the coach who is bored with the whole poetic combat. He is *Dhaanraac*, "caravan follower," a twenty year old, who, as his name shows, is not only uninterested in his culture, but likes to mimic other people's traditions. He is wearing bell-bottomed pants

and his hair is long and looks as if it has not been trimmed for a long time. He is listening to one of James Brown's songs. He is, without doubt, an irritant to the rest of the passengers, as indeed they are to him. There arises a wrangle between Dhaanraac and an old lady sitting beside him when over the woman's strong objections he tries to light a cigarette. The inclusion of such a character foreshadows the direction of the plot. The symbolic name Dhaanraac (caravan follower) is a derogatory teknonym "used as a mnemonic device to underscore the moral tone of the narrative".⁷ Like all supernumerary characters, Dhaanraac is given a short appearance. That is enough to warn Somalis of the assault foreign cultures keep launching on their tradition. Through the character of Dhaanraac, the author underlines those characteristics which are not in harmony with accepted norms of the Somali society. In short, Dhaanraac's demeanor is depicted as an aberration of tradition. His behavior registers in people's minds the value of their own culture vis-a-vis the foreign one symbolized by the bell bottom pants, the afro hair-do and his smoking habit.

Yet those habits of which Dhaanraac is accused were examples of counter-culture raging in the US and the West in the 1960's. So it is with a strange twist of fate that aspects of a civil rights movement in the US were also suspected by the powers that be in Somalia to foment a kind of counter-culture among the youth. In Dhaanraac's case, the Somalis remember an old maxim in an animal fable. The fox, it is said, once tried to mimic someone else's gait. She not only failed to achieve her aim but she also lost her own gait in the process. The resulting gait became the target of cruel jokes by both friend and foe alike. The

moral of the fable cautions Somalis not to blindly copy other people's culture. Later, the argument between Dhaanraac and the old lady over the lighting of a cigarette dies down when an old male passenger brings the previous discussion back to life. Soon, the coach reaches Mogadishu, and the passengers were less tired than usual thanks to the two men's discussion. Warsame and Waasuge before they break, promise to keep in touch.

Warsame is going to the house of his brother, a lieutenant in the army. Waasuge, on the other hand, has come to town to see Muuse his son, a graduate of an Italian University. The son is also married to an Italian. The importance of the Italian wife to the narrative is to emphasize the cultural clash that is to come. A Somali husband has authority over his household. With Maria in control, the author shows the symbolic meaning of the role reversal: the West is still in control in Somalia through western-educated Somalis. Muuse (Moses) is no where like his name-sake in the Islamic, Christian, and Judaic scriptures to proclaim the release of his people from bondage. The author is clearly alluding to the inability of the Somali "captive intelligentsia" whose umbilical cords are still tied to Europe.

Once in town, each one accumulates interesting experiences in his own way. But Waasuge seems to have enjoyed the strangest of experiences as he confronts an alien culture in the person of his daughter-in-law. The first meeting between the old man and the couple, Muuse and Maria, introduces Waasuge to a culture shock of immense magnitude. The couple, wearing shorts, were playing table tennis when the old man stepped in unexpectedly. Waasuge could not

believe his eyes. A woman in shorts! He coils back as if he had seen a snake, but Muuse comes running out after him.

As though the first incident was not enough, there arises a misunderstanding when the old man asks for a Somali dish—coffee beans cooked in seething *ghee* or sesame oil. Maria, thinking that the old man needs a cup of hot coffee, brings him one. The old man drinks the coffee, thinking that his version of the *bun* (coffee) is soon to follow, but when Maria calls them to the dining table, Waasuge flares up with anger. He states clearly that he will not taste the food unless and until they serve him his dish. It becomes necessary that some one who can make the dish be fetched from the neighborhood. The author does not let you forget the identity of the wife that she is other than a Somali. The equilibrium of Somaliness is disrupted. The value of *bun*-making in Somali society is somewhat similar to that of Kola in West Africa. Walter Rodney writes of the latter:

The kola nut is associated with religious rites, [circumcision] ceremonies, and property rights; it is used as a stimulant, ...as a symbol of hospitality, and in diplomatic relations between rulers; and it was particularly highly regarded among Islamicized peoples.⁸

It is easy therefore to understand the old man's imprecation against the inability of Maria, his Italian daughter-in-law, to prepare his favorite dish. To bring harmony to the household, a Somali female is fetched from the house next door to mollify the old man's anger.

Relations between father and son did not fare better. Waasuge could not stand his son's total disregard for his culture. Relations

reach their lowest ebb when Muuse tells his father of his intention of leaving the country for good. His reasons are many. The standard of living in Somalia is very low and he and his wife perceive life in Europe as being easier and better. In addition, the couple have received an invitation from Maria's industrialist father to come to Italy and work for him. To Waasuge that was the straw that broke the camel's back; and he strongly objects to Muuse's stated intentions. Sensing that his father is impervious to his brand of reason, Muuse pretends, for the time being, to have accepted his father's advice.

Warsame, on the other hand, had a good welcome from his brother, Dirir and Deeqa, his Somali wife. Indeed, the only discomfort he had was when Deega spanked her daughter for having shown some sign of disrespect towards her uncle. He did not like to be responsible for the spanking of the little girl. Here one sees a message of the book. The two women are juxtaposed, and without saying anything in defense of Deeqa, the author registers support for her.

The two old men had very interesting experiences in Mogadishu. They saw people with morals different from their own. The contrast between town and country life showed itself in the attitude of town folks towards the two men who were invariably seen as rustic and nomads devoid of "modern" civilization. The ways of the countryside become the center of scorn for town folks at a feast in Dirir's house. Waasuge and Warsame receive stringent criticism from their kinsmen in the town. People, like Muuse, envision the inevitable task ahead of the elites: if Somalia is to develop men like the two old men need to be catapulted into modernity. Here Muuse

ridicules the traditions of his people who, he believes, live in abysmal ignorance. The image one conjures of Muuse becomes complete when one remembers Occul in Okot P'Bitek's *Song of Lawino*.⁹ Both protagonists share a conspicuous disdain for their people's traditions.

Finally, on their home-bound journey, the two protagonists auspiciously meet on a coach. Warsame stays with Waasuge for a few days before he continues his journey. He gets a glimpse of the farmer's way of living when he is invited to a wedding where he plunges into a different sub culture. He shakes his head in disbelief and contempt when he witnesses the minimal number of livestock paid as brideprice. But he later agrees to the farmer's concept of not putting brideprice beyond the reach of any indigent prospective husband, as many an impecuous young man would otherwise die without a wife. Warsame's agreement on the principle of lowering brideprice is indicative of the 'refutation stage' which corrects the pastoralist's earlier misconception of the peasant sub- culture. Lowering the price also means that the community does not value livestock more than people. In light of this explanation, Warsame is reminded of a Somali proverb, "Don't brag with livestock to he who gives you people (the children expected from such a marriage)".¹⁰ The proverb in this context seems a bit progressive, in the sense that one should not estimate the value of a wife in the number of livestock paid for her brideprice. But still she is her father's property, and she is married only with his approval. Waasuge, too, visits Mudug at a later time. Each one of them gains a better understanding of the social reality which shapes the other's thinking. The story has a meaning. The journey

symbolizes a transition, as a sudden metamorphosis on the part of the protagonists would have betrayed the rationale of the story. Magel's "refutation stage" explained earlier (chapter two) comes through travel which entails the seeing of many new experiences. The story ends with Waasuge's remembrance of a meeting of a homestead council in Mudug, which involved a litigation between a man entrusted with the care of camels and the camel's owner. The council is the judge and jurors in one body. Most of the times, a council is formed and its members appointed, only after the consent of the litigants involved in the case is secured. Once before the council, the plaintiff is first heard, then the accused is given a chance to refute or accept the charge or charges. No council reaches its verdict without following such a procedure as the validity of a *caveat* is taken to heart by the elders of the community. Waasuge was amazed at the skill of the litigants at the Council. Such a Council meeting does require great skill in oratory. The litigants in general are asked if they have someone else to speak for them. As Jardine explains in the *Mad Mullah of Somaliland* "The Somalis are. . . no mean orators; and to be a man of distinction in a tribe you must have a reputation not only as a fighter and a man of many possessions, but also as a convincing spokesman."¹¹ Such a convincing spokesman is heaped with respect and as such he "wield[s] a greater power and influence in society."¹² He mediates between feuding clansmen, and/or is delegated to inter-clan debates. Sometimes the trouble is he can use his power, as is often the case with people in power, in way detrimental to discovering the truth. In this way, the man with the gift of speech ironically destroys the very essence of his

powers, and in extension endangers the existence of the very edifice which he is supposed to uphold. Plato's complaint against law courts is germane to this discussion. "In law courts, indeed, there is no concern whatsoever to tell the truth, but rather to persuade, and persuasion depends of verisimilitude."¹³

Waasuge does not seem able to forget a poem about a pus infested sore that will not suppurate. The poem is by Qammaan Bulxan, a well known Somali poet of the first half of the twentieth century. The poem is about the necessity of addressing ourselves to urgent matters, like the familiar 'a stitch in time saves nine.' It is pusillanimous, underlines the poem, to think that problems go away unsolved. The poem implicitly warns us not to settle for palliative measures for cure.

Thus ends the interesting story of Waasuge and Warsame. It is important to mention here that the author does not side with any party when it comes to contrasting the pastoralist and the farmer. The poem does clearly allude to the grudge each sub-culture nurtures against the other. The pastoralist scorns the farmer for killing the soil. The farmer, on his part, despises the nomad's way of living as fit for those afflicted with a wandering disease. Yet, the author does not side with any party when it comes to contrasting the pastoralist and the farmer. This is because an interrogative text of which this novel is an example encourages its readers to come up with their own solutions to the intricate questions it explores. In the end, the two protagonists are close to each other. They both understand and agree that there can be unity in diversity. The journey to and from Mogadishu symbolizes a

transition, as a sudden metamorphosis on the part of the protagonists would have betrayed the rationale of the story. The maturity of the two old men emanates from their new experiences. Their familiarity with each other's sub-culture helps them to overcome prejudices against what the other stands for.

The overcoming of prejudices is, in a nutshell, the theme of this novel. The author sees the need for an end to old divisions among Somali people and this is best symbolized by the poem about a pus infested sore that will not suppurate unless it is tended-graphic, but definitely to the point. What is important is that the author does not spell out the issues that need cure. "Indeed, the position of the 'author' . . . if it can be located at all, is seen as questioning or as literally contradictory."¹⁴ This is so because an interrogative text 'disrupts the unity of the reader by discouraging identification with a unified subject of the enunciation.'¹⁵ Put simply, "the interrogative text...[has] no simple hierarchy of discourses such that the reader is offered privileged access to the work's 'truth.'" Instead "the reader constructs meaning out of the contradictory discourses which the text provides."¹⁶ And in so doing the interrogative text "does literally invite the reader to produce answers to the questions it implicitly or explicitly raises".¹⁷

The author, Kaddare, acknowledges in the body of the text the many poets he borrows from. These include, among others, Qammaan Bulxan, Sheikh Axmed Gabyow, Xaaji Aadan Afqallooc—all popular poets at one time or another. The story also contains more than twenty proverbs. The narrator is a third person omniscient who pretends to be objective, but who makes subtle remarks about his

characters and their actions. The author makes use of narrative analysis rather than interior monologue. He sometimes uses "physical correlative," the correspondence of an object or a part of nature and a character, to describe mental states. The story moves from a rural setting to an urban one and then back to a rural setting.

The date of publication is not shown on the book. I tend to believe that this book was written in the late 1960's or early 70's. There are several reasons to support that belief. The bell-bottomed pants and afro hair style do not invite our curiosity anymore. Also, the big demonstration in support of an official orthography seem to lend support to our contention that the manuscript form of the book was written, at the latest, in the early 70's. The decision to provide Somali with a written alphabet was made in 1972. But the absence of the date of publication, as Donatius Nwoga argues, can have a practical reason as "readers finished with a book...used it for toilet paper or rolled their tobacco in it to make cigarettes or just threw it away."¹⁸ The discarding of books by the reading public was an incentive for publishers to reprint them for a later use. However, "if the date indicated that a book was up to a year old nobody would buy it."¹⁹

The poetic insertions in the works of Somali authors in the new medium of the novel reinforce the importance of poetry in Somali traditional society. That has already been discussed. Somalis, traditional or modern, still value their poetry. Poetry is indeed one of the most effective media through which one could make a point succinctly. A poet can instigate people to action. To comprehend the magical efficacy of Somali poetry, one need only bear in mind that

"poetic slander has been the source of many a lethal inter-clan feud, for an insult or slander in poetry is considered in pastoral sanctions to have the same effect on the victim as a physical assault."²⁰ This "magical efficacy" of the word is extinct in western narrative; instead Somali people enjoy the complexity of poetic language. This difference is what misled Margaret Laurence to believe that poetry in the Somali context was to help and act as solace to desiccated souls in dust-strewn, sun-scorched land.²¹ Such an explanation has its roots in European psychology. If you are helpless and cannot escape, your only recourse is to scream. Eking out a living from the harsh Somali prairie is a grim reality, but not the reason the people love intricate and well made poetry. Samatar has elsewhere refuted this spurious concept of why Somalis love poetry. The whole oral literature of a people cannot be equated to the ravings of "miserable souls" eking out their lives in an inhospitable environment. Rather, the literature of a group is the accumulated wisdom of many seasons--the expression of human experience. To refute such an erroneous idea in depth is a correct thing to do, but such a task is beside the point for our purposes here.

In relation to poetic insertions in the works of Somali authors (writing in Somali), one could have legitimate concerns for the correct portrayal of characters. After all, how many speak poetry in ordinary situations? This, as was explained in the introduction, is a problem many Somali critics have addressed in the short span of written Somali literature. Present prose writers do not use poetry, agreeing probably with Obiechina who, in relation to Onitsha market literature, writes "The verses destroy the sense of reality of the situation."²² This is

possibly true when the poets are "dowered with the hate of hate, the scorn of scorn,/The love of love."²³ But two factors are important in understanding Somali literature. In Somali society it is very possible for a person to be a poet or converse in poetry, but for a character in a story to be a poet or be able to converse in poetry, he/ she has to fulfil two requirements: period authenticity and location authenticity²⁴. In the work under discussion, for example, the eponymous heroes Waasuge and Warsame are described as men who are well-versed in the traditions of their people. Poetry is one strong pillar of that tradition. "The story", as Andrzejewski writes, "vividly illustrates the use of poetry among rural Somalis in their everyday life."²⁵ The protagonists can either recite an old poem or compose a new one .

AQOON DARRO WAA UNACAB JACAYL
[IGNORANCE IS THE ENEMY OF LOVE]²⁶

Poetry also shapes the plot of this novel. *Aqoon Darro Waa U Nacab Jacayl* came out at the height of the literacy campaign in 1974. The beauty of the book lies in its endeavor to reconcile remarkable events in two different eras. The story is found in some parts of the Somali territory to be true. This oral treasure in the memory of the old is used by Faarax Cawl, the author, to popularize the importance of literacy in late twentieth century Somali society. In the adapted version by the author, oral poetry extols the virtues of literacy. A poem in the book exhorts contemporary youth to seize the opportunity of learning the official Somali alphabet. The theme of this novel--the values of literacy--is gleaned from the traditional lore of the Somali

People. To drive his message home, the author focuses on love theme which he knows will greatly appeal to the youth. He invokes a tragic event in traditional lore where a hero is humiliated as a result of his being illiterate. The book's message is aimed at transitional youth swarming to towns in search of a better life. Most of these newcomers cannot afford to go to school because they are busy trying to survive. The book tells them that being literate frees them financially from a visit at the scrivener's place to seek help in writing a letter to a beloved. It also frees them from divulging their secrets. The successful reconstruction of an oral story in the form of a novel to combat illiteracy is credited to the dominance of didacticism in Somali literature. The novels of the transmuted were greatly read by the newly literate people.

Aqoon Darro waa u Nacab Jacayl (Ignorance is the Enemy of Love), a true story recounted in fictionalized form and translated by Andrzejewski (published by Zed Press) contains poetic inserts to enhance its period of authenticity. As Andrzejewski explains, "A narrative set in the period in question would appear odd and unrealistic [without poetic insertions]."²⁷ The hero, Cali Maxamed Xasan 'Calimaax', Cali the seafarer, is a dervish returning from a spy mission he has successfully carried out against the British in Aden. Cawrala Barre, the heroine, is on the same boat as our hero, Calimax. The importance of the boat to the narrative structure is similar to the function served by the coach in the first novel. The boat represents a miniature of the different homesteads. Its passengers are as different as those on the coach have been. Differences among people on the boat,

however, reflect those between the pastoralist and the semi or fully urbanized individual. Poetic and oratorical contests ease the burden of the journey on the sea. Cawrala is returning from a visit to a relative in Aden where she had the opportunity to become literate in Arabic. Cawrala is greatly fascinated with Calimaax's oratorical eloquence when he starts 'a bantering conversation' with Nuur Ciise, one of the passengers. Calimaax ridicules Nuur's apparent seasickness and mentions that Nuur should not have left his camels in the first place to "set out over this Jinn-ridden sea."²⁸ This is an apparent and satirical allusion to the nomad's dislike of the sea. Calimaax, the town dweller, is challenging the country man to poetic and oratorical contest. Calimaax aims at a tender spot in the nomad's tradition whereby a nomad sallies forth a journey on a hungry stomach to visit a distant relative in the town. It is the harsh and unyielding environment which teaches the nomad early in life to be frugal about whatever meagre resources he can lay hands upon. Cali assumes that Nuur Ciise was in Aden to get some food and clothes, when he asks,

How many bags of provisions and how many complete sets of clothing are you taking back to your family? You must surely have been on a visit to some relative--perhaps you went to see the son of the son of your maternal cousin?"²⁹

It is the wit of the men that is put to test. Nuur is expected to counter that argument with clarity and quickness, something which he does when he calmly replies "Cali don't you realize you're a weak-bodied townsman?"³⁰ The allusion being, that townfolks do not eat

right, since they live on imported food which the nomad feels is impure and unnourishing. This distinction is important, because the nomad's staple food consists of "cad iyo caano" meat and milk. The townfolk cherish rice and spaghetti over the nomad's diet. Nuur queries, if the dervish had not heard a poem about country versus town life and composed by none other than Calimaax's leader Sayid Maxamed Cabdulle Xasan. To gloat over the ignorance of his opponent, Nuur recites a part of the poem which drives his message home:

The provisions and the clothes which keep people busy in towns. Bustling and trading, are merely lifeless wealth brought in from outside. If the town is cut off from the interior, The Angel of Death. Soon comes to it on his errands.³¹

While the men are testing each other's wisdom, the women on the boat are engaged in their own conversation, albeit a carrying over of the men's argument. Cawarala is not only greatly fascinated with Calimaax, but is apparently in love with him at first sight. She is overjoyed to hear a poem with which Calimaax lambasts the "shaggy man of the interior". The critique sets off a cord of unhappiness in Cawrala's life. She has already been promised to another man in marriage. She tells her story to the other women. The anger against arranged marriage reverberates in the women's section of the boat, when it then sets off another unpleasant reaction in Saluugla, an older woman who had tasted the misery "wrought by arranged marriage".³² Saluugla recounts her anguish which began at the tender age of sixteen

when she was given in marriage to a man who, almost four times her age, "... had no front teeth and as for his hair, there is no point in mentioning it since he didn't have any. And he had to have a stick to support himself."³³ Saluugla had to go through her ordeal, because her father worshipped money and her husband had it in abundance. One had an unquenchable lust for money, while the other had lust for the luscious body of a sixteen year old. A perfect union. As Somali's say, "Biyo qabe iyo buda qabe waa isu baahanyihiin." "He who has water and he who has flour need each other".

But Saluugla was not to be bullied, she kept her resistance even after they had taken her to the bridal hut of the old man. She even attempted to get a divorce from him.

But then I found this wasn't possible, and I was declared officially to be a naakirad, a recalcitrant wife, for our Muslim religion, according to our ignorant clerics, says that a man can divorce his wife when he likes and how he likes, but when a wife comes to hate her husband she can't divorce him, whatever difficulties she may have. And then if she spurns him, she gets declared a naakirad and isn't allowed to marry any other man. ³⁴

The interesting thing about this passage is the whole barrage of events which unfolded a year after the publication of the book in 1974. In 1975 the Supreme Revolutionary Council in Somalia enacted the Family Law Legislation which among other things gave women the right to equal inheritance, and the right to have a say in marriage and divorce matters. As expected, some clerics rose up in anger and showed their consternation through preaching in the main mosques of

the country. They interpreted the government's action as an unIslamic heresy. That prompted a swift and retaliatory action from the government which executed ten clerics. The uproar died down. It is questionable whether the author knew what was in store for the clerics, but it does show one thing: a good writer always has a premonition about what is going to happen. It is perhaps relevant to note here Achebe's *A Man of the People*.³⁵ The author read the writing on the wall long before the Civilian government (First Republic of Nigeria) was overthrown. This does not mean that authors dream about the future, it shows that a good author uses his intelligence by synthesizing events, gleaned information from the present to predict the future.

While the passengers on the boat are engaged in their "customary exchanges of wit and wisdom", it rains heavily. The safety of the passengers and crew are endangered. Eventually the boat capsizes, and all on board struggle for their lives. Calimaax who can swim well, rescues Cawrala and this causes her secret love to grow. Before Calimaax continues his journey to Taleex, the Dervish Headquarters, he comes to see Cawrala to bid her good-bye. They talk about many things. Cawrala asks him to bear in mind two promises, "First, it is a promise between us that we will not forget each other and will keep each other in our hearts, and secondly, on the day you return I shall prepare a wedding-hut, and we shall marry and live together."³⁶ As to how she will manage to prepare a wedding-hut for her newly found lover when she is already betrothed heralds the ensuing tragedy which is to strike her.

Once at Headquarters, Calimaax briefed the Sayid and his command about the British impending attack on the Dervishes. All present were pleased with the report and "as a reward he was given a girl in marriage, and the wedding took place immediately, her father was a member of the Dervish High Command."³⁷

It was unfortunate that Calimaax had to acquiesce to an arranged marriage, especially right after he had left Cawrala in Xiis. Yet, he could not refuse the offer of marriage without incurring the wrath of his seniors and peers. The offer of the elders was, as always, a matter requiring one's utmost attention. Besides, it is more of an insult to refuse an offer of an intended wife than it is for the woman to refuse a future husband. What is clear from this double standard is that women are not taken seriously. A man's refusal to accept a certain woman as his wife is indicative of his scorn for a prospective wife's relatives. That a refusal of a future spouse might call for different responses is in itself indicative of the marginality of women. Women can suggest, but can not emphatically take a decision. Her guardians reserved the final word on her fate. To illustrate and perhaps explicate women's inability to decide for themselves, one has only to remember the Somali oral narrative entitled "Kaba Calaf iyo Huryo", which we described in the second chapter. In that story, the woman asserts herself beyond what is allowed in her society, but the final decision on who she could or could not marry was not hers. She could only suggest.

Calimaax's acquiescence proves that sometimes even men are not immune to arranged marriages, and share its disastrous effects

with women. Calimaax reluctantly enters the bridal hut. But fate throws pebbles into the superficially calm pond of Calimaax's life when he gets a letter from Cawrala. Calimaax had never availed himself of the opportunity to learn to read and write. Oblivious of his surroundings, Calimaax hands the letter to his new father-in-law and asks him to read it for him. The old man reads the letter to himself and after he gets "enough of the tenor of it", refuses to read it for Calimaax. Poor Calimaax, unable to understand the old man's reluctance to read it for him, "passes the letter to his brother-in-law who is very much offended."³⁸ Eventually the brother-in-law reads the letter for Calimaax. This painful episode makes Calimaax determined to learn the alphabet, from this derives the title of the book, "an illiterate man is handicapped even in his love." The incident gets expressed in poetic form, when Calimaax recites a poem exhorting his peers to learn the three R's.

I shall not stay idle until I can read whatever is sent to me.
And this is my advice, now that I have become wise through experience,
Having failed to read even one word in love letters sent to me:
Acquire knowledge, O people! For in tomorrow's world only those who have learnt something will be asked for their opinions.³⁹

This clearly proves the didacticism of the author whose contemporaries in Somalia were experiencing a similar desire to learn

how to read and write. The book came out at a time when Somalis were swarming to literacy sites all over the country. Since March, 1973 a national literacy campaign has been inaugurated. The book could not have come out at a more appropriate time as most of the people were singing "My pen weeps and I shed tears/ Tell me now what to learn/ Tell me now!"⁴⁰

Later on, Calimaax takes part in a raid which the Dervishes launch against the British forces. Calimaax is severely wounded and as a result he is left for dead in the wilderness. When he gains consciousness, he uses all the strength left in him to apply the survival techniques of the people in the country side. He traps a gazelle and roasts it on a fire made with *madag*: an improvised fire-stick. He is later found and saved by some herders and is taken to the house of one, Warsame Warfaa.

News travels like wildfire in a terrain where the spoken word is the only vehicle for a viable communication, and Cawrala receives the news with shock that her lover has been killed in a battle. She displays such hysterics, that her mother throws her out of the house. Her friend Saluugla tries to give her comfort and company. They walk together towards the sea. The sea invokes some emotions in Cawrala. Past memories come back to her mind. Showing her helplessness now that she has lost her last alternative to prevent her marriage with Geelle, she laments,

I have come now into the power of people who are not my equals, I have become a victim of injustice for the sake of a multitude of camels. Better that I should become an

old maid than be in this plight!⁴¹

After a time at the beach, Cawrala asks her friend to go back to the town and fetch her some cold water to sooth her seething heart and quench her thirst. While Saluugla is still away, Cawrala hears a beautiful voice addressing her thus:

Cawrala, a hero does not die;
He does not perish, while freedom is his quest
And while he pursues colonizers and infidel.
The full moon has not become dim, nor suddenly set,
But has descended into a valley that is rust-red in colour.
Do not give in till the spring brings its nourishing rain.⁴²

When Cawrala asks the voice to identify itself, she is only told "It is Cirsan-ka-yeer, 'He who speaks from an auspicious sky.'"⁴³ 'Cirsan-ka-yeer' is the name of a bird to which Somalis attribute some prophetic powers. The voice Cawrala hears, however, was not that of the famous bird, but of a Dervish-astrologer called Bile who broke the premature news of Calimaax's death. The role of the 'Cirsan-ka-yeer' is somewhat analogous to the deus ex machina in some Western classical plays where a hero is spared from harm by taking flight to safety through a lowered ladder. In this particular instance, it is clear that "should no tangible assistance be available, heaven itself intervenes, and 'a voice is heard' which explains [the hidden]."⁴⁴ Cawrala's confidence comes back. She begins to entertain some hope that Calimaax is alive. The words of the astrologer take some of the grief from her shoulders. When Saluugla returns from the town, she is flabbergasted to see Cawrala in a cheerful, even ecstatic mood. Cawrala

tells her friend about the 'voice' she has heard from the sky. Saluugla is a bit skeptical. She is unsure if she should brush off her friend's story as a fit of delirium and suggests they go home as it is getting late.

Calimaax, on the other hand, attributes his misfortune to a jinx he thinks Cawrala had perhaps put on his head. The suspicion is made all the more poignant when he recalls a line in her letter, "And if you still have no love for me in your heart--then on your own head be it!"⁴⁵ The line reminds Calimaax of the concept of *nabsi*, a spell the weak are capable of casting over their stronger opponents. Women, being part of the marginal group in society, are considered endowed with *nabsi*. The concept of *nabsi* is more of an indigenous concept than the tenets of Islam.⁴⁶ Yet it is based on the belief of a superior being who monitors our actions, and never lets any wrong doers get away with impunity. *Nabsi* is "a great and powerful balancing force". The concept, however, does not breed or foster the idea that "If a man is happy today, he will be sad tomorrow, if there is rain this season, there will be drought during the next, if a man is wealthy as a young man, he will be poor when he grows old."⁴⁷ The binary pairs that Dr. John Johnson lists above could follow each other as cause and effect only if there is any wrong doing or trespassing of a sacred law. Dr. Johnson's explication of this concept may derive from a poem by Gabay-Shinni. The poet was wary of the despotic nature of a clan chief. In a society where the poet plays the role of the critic, Gabay-Shinni attacks the chief with these lines:

The vicissitudes of the world, oh Olaad, are like the clouds
of the

seasons.

Autumn weather and spring weather come after each other in turn.

Into an encampment abandoned by one family, an other family moves.

If a man is killed, one of his relatives will marry his widow.⁴⁸

At face value, the first three lines of the poem lend credence to a general dictum in Somali culture, "ma sii haysan doontid." (you will not be able to enjoy [it] forever). The pervasive nature of the dictum is necessitated by a practical way of dissuading people from becoming selfish. Discouraging the love of cupidity is an essential component of the egalitarian system inherent in the nomadic mode of living. The ephemeral nature of having is underlined by comparing it to 'the clouds of the seasons'. In the semi-arid land of Somalia clouds or lack of them control and punctuate the temper of the people and their tempo of living. Their lack of rains is supposedly predicated on a break in their moral order. A disintegration of the moral fiber of the people comes in two ways: a conscious violation of the sacred law, or the creation of unjust system by those in power. The rampancy of injustice constitutes one form of a moral breakdown. The victims seek heavenly restitution. Droughts then become a symbol of Allah's dissatisfaction with the way things are on earth.

The irony is that such a statement may hold true for a different reason. Droughts are not the effect of any breach of supernatural order; they may be a breach in environmental harmony. Deforestation is one source of the break in environmental order. The Somali's inability to analyze the real causes of natural disorders such as droughts, harkens

Anthony's oft quoted lines: "The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars/ But in ourselves that we are underlings." It is to be expected therefore that fear of the unknown will be extensive wherever false consciousness in various manifestations holds sway. In the context of our explanations, *nabsi* is not the driving force which instigates the cyclical movement of seasons. Under ordinary situations a dry season alternates with a rainy season. It is only after an exceptionally long dry season that people begin to suspect the working of *nabsi* in one form or another. Nor does *nabsi* ensure the destitution of someone because he had wealth "as a young man".

The closest Western explanation is the motive of "avenging angels" in the *Oresteia*. *Nabsi*, like the avenging angels is controlled by a deity who lets it loose on earth when the heavens can no longer tolerate the sobbing of a helpless one. *Nabsi* does not necessarily occur right after the wrong doing. It can strike after the death of one it supports, as in the case of Agamemnon's wife. The idea is that there is always a regulating force somewhere who sees to it that we do not transgress upon each other. A Somali poem which carries that message is one composed in 1967 by Cabdullahi Qarshi, generally acknowledged as the father of Somali Heello.

The poem, which is quoted in John Johnson's work, starts thus:

Dawladii gumaysiga
E dul-ahaanba Afrika.
Waagii ay damaaciyayeen,
Shirkii ay u dalbadeen
Magaaladoy u soo dirteen
Kobtii ay ku doodayeen
Baarliin daya

Bal daya
 Derbaa dhexyaal
 Bal daawada.
 [The colonialist governments of the whole of Africa
 when they coveted it-
 The meeting they arranged [Berlin Conference of
 1884) for this
 The city where they sent [delegates]
 In the exact section [of town] where they debated-
 Look at Berlin
 All of you look!
 A wall is splitting it--
 Look and be entertained!⁴⁹

The poet relates the partitioning of Africa by the European powers in the notorious scramble for Africa to the partition of Berlin. To him, the erection of the wall is a visitation of the sins committed in the city. In 1884 Berlin hosted the conference and Berlin had to pay the price in 1961.

Calimaax, the hero of the book under discussion, promised to marry Cawrala at a later time. His acquiescence to an arranged marriage at the Dervish Headquarters shortly after he has made that promise constitutes a "jilt". Calimaax attributes his mishap to that unkept promise. The *deus ex machina* does not come to Cawrala's help, nor is she helped by Calimaax's reminiscence of lines from her letter as she is now forced to marry the old man her parents had chosen.

"About this man her father had chosen Cawrala had overheard people gossiping that he was the kind of husband who was always prying into household matters, and that he was a brutal domestic tyrant. They claimed that this had had something to do with her sister's death [Geelle's first wife], and that she had died because of

injuries he had one day inflicted on her with a camel herder's forked stick".⁵⁰

Here, Cawrala's life is not taken into account, for how could her father have given her hand in marriage to such a man. But greed has no bounds or limits, and the greedy hardly sees beyond what he covets. Like Midas' lust for gold, Cawrala's father had lust for camels. It is a classic case of parents taking matters into their own hands and never consulting their daughters about their destiny. This is a perennial problem that has roots in patriarchy.

The theme of arranged marriage appears as a *passim* in the works of many African authors. Its appearance in different works shows the inter-relatedness of African literature. In their efforts to appeal to foreign audiences, some African authors in European languages are accused of sensationalizing the topic. The subject, however, does not fare better in the hands of those writing in African languages. In relation to this, the case of Tanzanian authors is germane to our discussion for two reasons. First, Tanzania, like Somalia has adopted an African language, Kiswahili, as the lingua franca of the country. Secondly, the two states have tried to travel on a non-capitalist road of development. They both claim adherence to the principles of socialism. It is perhaps plausible to infer that these two shared characteristics—socialism and the adoption of an official African language—shape the literature of the two countries. The espousal of an ideology like socialism by the state pre-supposes the promulgation of laws which call for implementation of some drastic changes in the base and superstructure of the concerned country. In certain cases, the new

laws are put into practice before a comparably plausible change in the consciousness of the people is effected. Under such times, a clash of ideas between the new laws and those which they attempt to supercede becomes inevitable. The consequences could be lethal as had been the case in Somalia when the Family Law Statute prompted the execution of ten Moslem clerics. The sheikhs interpreted the provision of the Family Law which called for, inter alia, equal rights in inheritance among the sexes as anti-Islamic. In Tanzania, the new ideology stressed the creation of a socialist individual. Implicit in the tenets of African socialism is cardinal one safeguarding the equality of people irrespective of sex, ethnic background or creed. This tenet protects women from such unjust system in which a widow could lose the custody of her children to the family of her late husband. One could concur with R. Ohly that three main trends which dominate Tanzanian literature in Kiswahili also hold for Somali literature. These trends are "criticism of traditions, criticism of contemporary morality and criticism of the intelligentsia".⁵¹

The use of an African language to lambast tradition, and contemporary morality runs the risk of generating a semi-official literature since the bulk of works produced in African languages is published under the sponsorship of state printing agencies. Writers in African languages are to varying degrees conscious of the looming presence of the state. They also consider the impact another institution--audience--will have on their work. The African author in an indigenous language almost invariably walks on a thin line in his/her attempt at commanding respect from both camps. The

interests of the two are not exclusive of one another; nor do they conform to one agreeable mass. In traditional oral literature, the tug of war is amongst three groups: the performer-narrator, his/her audience and the tradition from which the first two take their cue. In a written literature, the troika assume different faces. The game is now among a writer, a literate audience and a state which supposedly fills the vacuum created by the erosion of some or most traditional institutions. The last two of the triangle constantly remind the writer of why it is important for him to bear in mind 'who reads what/ who is he/she writing for.' In the case of African writers in foreign languages, owners of publishing houses keep reminding their writer-client of the nature of the foreign audience. And

in accepting works for publication, western publishers had to bear in mind the fact that in practice, potential buyers were not Africans, but Europeans. A writer had therefore to submit to his publisher's demands and write for foreign readers and this often aggravated, rather than improved, the false image of Africa in Europe."⁵²

One of the three trends expounded in Ohly's essay and which is relevant to our purposes here is criticism of traditions. Ohly expounds parts of this literature, which criticize the more moribund aspects of Tanzanian traditions. Kezilahabi's *Kichwa Maji*, an example of this literature, is an indepth analysis of forced marriage. This problem puts the female population of the continent in a rather unenviable situation. The rampancy of the malady, proves if anything, the stark fact observed by Norbert, the local police sergeant in Mongo Beti's

Perpetue et l'Habitue de Mal Heure: "C'est frappant combien les gens de chez nous manquent de coeur à l'égard de leurs filles."⁵³ Perpetue, like Cawrala before her in the first part of the 20th century, was forced into a marriage she did not want. Her mother is a heartless woman who sells her daughter to Edouard, a flabby character who takes out all his frustrations and failures on Perpetue, his brilliant wife. Perpetue, like Cawrala, is a victim of a traditional system which does not uphold the rights of women.

These women are no more than a mere commodity, bought and sold. The brideprice is what they are worth at the market and as stated by Lakunle concerning Sidi in Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel*: "To pay the price would be/to buy a heifer off the market stall/ You'd be my chattel, my mere property."⁵⁴ African women like Perpetue, Cawrala and Sidi are all at the bottom rung of the economic order. As one female character in *Perpetue* truthfully and bluntly puts it: "Dans nos moeurs, une pauvre femme, cela compte 'a peine pour deux sous."⁵⁵ Perpetue shares one thing with Cawrala's late sister; the way they both lose their lives. Cawrala's sister is beaten to death with a camel-herders forked stick, while Perpetue dies as a result of her husband's beatings. Both women are treated like beasts of burden who are prodded when they show reluctance to do whatever the master orders them to do. Perpetue has one other thing in common with Cawrala. Their fate is sealed right after they feel some kind of love for men whom they want to be with. Perpetue feels tremendous love for Zeyang, the football player, who even volunteers to raise the brideprice that Edouard had paid for her hand. Her husband not only gets jealous--something

that's hard to believe since he had many times traded her to the local police chief for promotion--but he confines her to the house. Emaciated, gaunt and pallid from lack of sunshine, suffering from severe beatings, she dies in childbirth at the age of twenty. Cawrala will meet a similar fate. Her love for Calimaax starts her descent into misery. It indeed proves that "love is like the bitter aloe/ but covered with sweet juice."⁵⁶ Their hatred and scorn for their husbands could have sustained their lives, but ill-starred love was something they were not-prepared to cope with. The fact that their love is in itself a catalyst which quickens the pace of their eventual demise speaks of an irony.

Cawrala's father calls in his brother to persuade the "Kitchwa maji", the stubborn one. Avuncular relationships are very important in Somali cultural ties where the extended family features high in family decisions. The status of uncle is all the more elevated when he is older than the father. Cawrala's uncle is now charged with a difficult task: to make her abide by her father's decision to marry her to Geelle. The uncle resorts to poetry to achieve his goal. He uses religion-laden language. His message is conveyed by the last stanza of a poem by Xasan Xayle:

Do you not know that a parental curse is like a javelin
driven
into you?
Do you not know that the evil eye cast by your parents
is worse than the flames of hell?⁵⁷

Outright refusal is not expected from a niece and Cawrala promises to give some more thought to the matter. As usual, she seeks to benefit from the experiences of her trusted friend, Saluugla.

This is where the importance of Saluugla to the plot lies. She is a pool of expert resources for Cawrala, a confidant who provides the reader direct access into Cawrala's intimate feelings. As Cawrala's conduit to the outside world, she can also tell her what the townspeople think of her. The absence of many interior monologues that can bring out the feelings of the heroine necessitates the presence of a Saluugla in the story. Saluugla also acts as the role of a chorus in some plays, where history is narrated from the background. For example, she later narrates to Calimaax the circumstances of Cawrala's death. This time Saluugla's advice does not make Cawrala happy. She urges her to marry Geelle. Saluugla is annoyed at the news that Calimaax had married right after he left Cawrala in Xiis. Needless to say, Saluugla's advice falls on deaf ears, and a more adamant Cawrala pleads her case with her uncle thus:

Uncle the place where you want me to go is the darkness
of
a moonless night;
Do not bring disaster on me, nor the outrage done to
women,
And keep me away from back-bound hands, that I may
not
meet my death from grief.⁵⁸

Her uncle who believes his avuncular advice is flouted, relays her answer to her father. His advice: 'do not listen to her'--a

suggestion her father takes to heart. Word is sent to Geelle, the prospective husband, to come and get his wife.

Four milking periods later he arrived in *Xiis Xarrago*, his herder's stick resting on his shoulder; in front of him he drove a hundred camels and the stud he-camel, and among the herd were the two milch beasts, with their foster-baby, which had been promised to Cawrala's uncle.⁵⁹

Cawrala's appearance changes when Geelle arrives. She loses all her natural beauty, and is grief-stricken. Wedding festivities start. Animals are slaughtered, and the young start their games/dances. Cawrala takes no part in these dances. Instead her situation deteriorates as she stops eating after she has been taken into the bridal hut. Geelle sends her back to her family as he finds it difficult 'to look after her and nurse her". Her emaciated body tells the rest of the story.

For this reason she was granted a divorce without in fact having been possessed by this man who had been forced upon her, whom she had not wanted to marry and for whom she had no love, affection or inclination; he was promised that instead of Cawrala he would be given her younger sister.⁶⁰

Calimaax had only heard about Cawrala's marriage to Geelle and he tries to forget all about her as it is "one of the old and well established Somali conventions that once a girl is married, no man may say anything about her, good or bad."⁶¹ To do otherwise, i.e., run after a married woman will bring upon a man the notoriety of those who lose their moorings and who as a result become the subject of

scorn and hatred among the community. The reasons for such teachings are part of the practical way of ensuring harmony among the group. For instance, Mwindo, the eponymous hero of the epic by the same name exhorts his people about the sanctity of marriage: "Don't pursue another's spouse. . . And he who seduces another's wife will be killed."⁶²

The news of the dissolution of Cawrala's marriage does not come to Calimaax until later when he has convalesced from his wounds. A traveller from Cawrala's place breaks in the news. After hearing the whole story, Calimaax sends a message to Cawrala's parents asking that they give her to him in marriage. The parents readily agree. Unfortunately, Cawrala never recovers from the first blow of unrequited love after the presumed death of Calimaax and a forced marriage—and she succumbs before they can get married. Later on Calimaax comes to Xiis. After being told of the events by Saluugla, he heads off for Cawrala's grave. There he writes a reply on the other side of Cawrala's letter and hangs it on the grave. He takes full responsibility for her death: "I ask you to forgive me, I beg you to pardon me, If I brought about your death, for though I was the cause of this, yet I was the cause of your deliverance when I wrested you from the Sea".⁶³ Then he goes on to predict his eventual death with these lines:

Know that when Spica sets, the moon loses its beneficial influence;
Know that when the grass does not shoot forth,
destitution comes to the people who lose their livestock.
Know that within two years I shall follow you.⁶⁴

And follow her he did. "Two years later he too, afflicted by his old wounds and by the ravages of love which welled up in him, he dies in a valley called *Hadaaftimo* in the district of *Laasqoray* [in Northern Somalia]."⁶⁵

The manner which the author ends the novel deserves mention. First, the conclusion. "Here ends the story called *Ignorance is the Enemy of Love*, about the love which befell Cawrala Barre and Calimaax Maxamed," reminds one of the transitional nature of the work. The author unconsciously forgets he is no longer a performer-narrator who has to break the spell the narrative has held over his audience. Or, he consciously ends the story that way because of his ambivalence towards the receptive readiness of an audience which has not yet fully mastered the artistic element involved in the transmission of prose fiction through the written medium. On another level, the ending of this book reminds us of the genesis of the novel genre itself. At its inception, the novel was characterized by authorial presence. Interjections such as "dear readers..or Here ends..." provide evidence of strong authorial manipulation of plot.

Ignorance is the Enemy of Love also shows its affinity with the oral tradition. The novel contains an almost equal number of proverbs as that found in *Waasuge iyo Warsame*. The function of proverbs in this book as in others in Somali is multiple. They show the wit of the person who quotes a suitable saying from the vast repertoire of Somali proverbs. The audience whether oral or literate will invariably relish a relevant proverb as the palm-oil with which words are eaten.

Proverbs also sharpen characterization. A proverb which plays

this role, for example, is the one uttered by Haweeya, one of the women passengers when the boat is rocked by turbulent waves. Cawrala, the heroine advises the women on the vessel that in event of a ship wreck they should throw overboard everything, including the clothes they are wearing, which could encumber free movement. In response to that advice, Haweeya rejoins: "Thank you, Cawrala....But there is a Somali proverb, even when you are dying you should wipe away your dribble, and we really can't follow your advice to remove our clothes and stand only in our petticoats! Whatever may happen, it's very difficult to bare one's body."⁶⁶ Strange as it may sound for someone to be willing to court death, it seems legitimate in Haweeya's beliefs to drown rather than bare her body in the presence of men. The author has prepared his audience to expect this hard line stand from this character. Our encounter with Haweeya in a preceding passage depicts her as a religious person, a pious individual bent on observing the provisions of Islamic faith to the letter. On the eve of the trouble on sea, Haweeya asks other women passengers to relay the following message to her mother in case of her death: "I borrowed [a handfull of millet from a woman who lives in Xiis]-ask my mother to pay her back, so I won't get scorched for them in my grave-niche."⁶⁷ The piety of the girl and her steadfastness in observing religion is later confirmed by her rejection of Cawrala's advice to throw all their clothes but a petti-coat into the sea.

The author of this novel also blends poetry with prose fiction. But unlike Xuseen Sheekh Axmed "Kaddare", he sparingly acknowledges in the body of the text the many poets from whom he

quotes. In addition to the quoted poems, Cawl also puts into use some of his own poetry. Poems attributed to the two protagonists are also sprinkled throughout the novel. The incorporation of poetry into the text of the book reveals once again the close affinity the works of the transmeters have with oral tradition. Poetic insertions in this truly moving story add credence to the authenticity and intensity of the real characters and events.⁶⁸

Shire Jaamac's "Rooxaan"⁶⁹ (The Spirits), on the other hand, does not contain poetic insertions or have characters as poets. Nor does the narrative prepare us for such a possibility. The story uses Qammaan's poem about the unhealed sore, as an epigram. The general idea of this story is similar to the one in *Waasuge and Warsame*: no half way solutions could ever satisfy the inquisitive mind.

"Rooxaan" is the story of Guhaad who at the age of fifteen, leaves his village in the interior for Mogadishu. When the story opens he is already in Mogadishu, and the author narrates his background to us in a retrospective manner. Guhaad in his nomadic setting, was too different from his peers. In a litotes fashion, the author gives us what Guhaad did not share with the rest of his friends. He does not, for example, dislike trees and birds as did his friends, nor does he run away from contemplations. He used to think alot and barraged his father with many questions that the old man could not answer. Salient among these questions was an ontological one which enquired about trees and what holds them to the ground. His parents did not know what to make of these questions, much less how to answer them.

Therefore they always tried to dissuade him from asking such questions; a sufficient reason for Guhaad to hold a grudge against them.

One day, Guhaad goes to the house of Sheikh Saalax, the respected as well as feared Sheikh of the homestead. The Sheikh was no ordinary person. The people in the homestead were in awe of him, because they believed he had supernatural powers which made it possible for him to converse with the spirits. As a result of these powers, the people in the village kept flocking to his house for consultations and searching for cures to diseases as varied as impotency and consumption. He had an elixir for all maladies. He invariably gave his patients amulets to wear, or had them drink potions made from verses of the Qur'aan written on a palimpsest and then washed off into a dish. The village people proclaimed him to be a blessed saint of Allah.

Sheikh Saalax lived in a big traditional Somali hut. He had a wife, but she was not living with him. In fact he used to eat at the house of Guhaad's parents. Samatar and Xaliima, Guhaad's parents, were very fond of the Sheikh, who used to tell them stories about the Prophet and his contemporaries. Inside the Sheikh's hut were a lot of ornamental objects which the author never describes. The importance of the reference here is that the setting is a village where ornamental objects are not in the possession of the majority of the people. These are luxuries only the Sheikh could afford. But ornamental objects are not the only things which separate the Sheikh from the rest of the people in the village. His clothes and even his rosary beads smack of

perfume. He likes to wear silken clothes. His shawls and loin cloths are of the most expensive type. He likes glittering, showy colors. Guhaad was convinced that it was only Sheikh Saalax who could answer his question about trees. This was the reason he went to the Sheikh's hut. Without beating around the bush, he asks the Sheikh his famous question. But no answer is forthcoming. The Sheikh finds himself in a quandary. After stammering, he gives the lad a curt answer: a boy of Guhaad's age is not supposed to inquire about such ontological questions, which are known only to Allah and His Prophet. Sheikh Saalax, however, tells the protagonist about great religious men in Mogadishu who could perhaps give answers to his questions. Determined to go to Mogadishu, Guhaad sneaks onto a coach bound for that city.

Once in Mogadishu, he looks for and finds his maternal aunt. She and her husband Geelle were happy to receive him, and they give him the treatment due a nephew. Guhaad learns a lot during his stay in the capital of the nation. He enters a Qur'aanic school hoping to become a sheikh of Sheikh Salaax's stature. He finishes *Khamis*, the first chapter of the Qur'aan. Guhaad could now read and write in Arabic, but could not understand the meaning of what he was reading and writing. This is a problem that arises as a result of rote memorization demanded from Qur'aanic school students. To learn the verses by heart is the ultimate goal of the student who is never given the opportunity to learn the meaning of the verses. The Qur'aanic teacher himself rarely knows the meaning of the verses he teaches. Most Qur'aanic teachers were, until recently, suspicious of

European type schools. Their consternation showed itself in different ways. Guhaad's teacher did not allow any student to wear pants to school. The reason was obvious, he did not want the corrupt ideas of the infidel-run schools to spill over to his school. For that reason, he ordered his students to wear their loin cloth and tee-shirts to school although the latter was part of Somali traditional attire.

It is interesting to compare the reactions of Guhaad's teacher to those of Waasuge and Warsame in the first story of this chapter. The two old men are not against men wearing pants. Their dislike focuses on girls wearing them. This indicates the different time periods between the two stories. It also proves that popular writers can at times give a true picture of a particular moment in a particular society. This does not mean there is a one-to-one mimetic relationship of a writer's work and the events which unfold before him. To imply such an analysis would argue for the existence of a complete relationship between art and the reality of the social world. To subscribe to such a view means applying to art a kind of prescriptive reductionist theory that sees art only as a reflection. This is an irrational view of art, for what is the need for art if its a carbon copy of life itself. No mode, however accurate it pretends to be, is as authentic and inclusive as the "thing" it imitates. Roland Barthes has a valid point here, when he writes against orthodox Marxists, "We know how sterile orthodox Marxism has proved to be in criticism proposing a purely mechanical explanation of works or promulgating slogans rather than criteria of values."⁷⁰

Orthodox Marxists in this instance miss the fact that in the

process of creation, the artist is a mediator between creation and the social world. This means that a "transformative labour"⁷¹ goes into what is being created. Art, as Vazquez points out, becomes "a reality put to form--a human form by a creative act."⁷² Attacking reductionism by quoting Barthes does not in anyway mean separating a work of art from its social world. It is true as Graham Hough writes "Any criticism of the novel which neglects its ties with historical actuality is false to the novel's real values, and empty when it should be full."⁷³ The testimony is to the fact that one cannot "treat literature as mere documents for the illustration of national or social history."⁷⁴ The need is to realize that art and its social world need not be exclusive of each other, and that art does not need to encompass all the social world in which it exists. They complement each other, for "Meaning in a work of art is a function of the relationship between two worlds: the fictional world created by the author and the 'real' world, the apprehensible universe."⁷⁵

Waasuge iyo Warsame and "*Rooxaan*" testify to the validity of Hough's statement. As I stated earlier, *Waasuge iyo Warsame* was written at a time when boys wearing pants was commonplace. Guhaad's teacher in "*Rooxaan*" is a testimony to an earlier period when wearing pants was associated with infidels. The refusal of Guhaad's teacher to accommodate boys wearing pants circumvents the real issues at hand for the Somali Qur'aanic teacher: Is it right for Somali children to go to European schools and thus risk the possibility of losing them to an alien culture. Here they are echoing similar controversies which rocked many an African society as a result of its

collision course with an alien culture. Senegalese society was one such society. In Kane's *L'Aventure Ambigue* a similar turmoil causes chasms among the protagonist's community as a result of the introduction of French schools.⁷⁶ The whole community is characterized by indecision as to whether or not to allow their children to attend French schools. Chief among the traditionalists is the "teacher of the glowing hearth" of the Qur'aanic school whose suspicions of the new form of education adds fuel to their indecision. The teacher, like his counterpart in Somalia, shows no mercy to any student who becomes too lackadaisical to learn the Qur'aan. The fate of any truant is no better. The Senegalese teacher tells his students to go and collect alms for him, something the Somali teacher could not venture to do. Both teachers do not spare the rod when punishing their students. Guhaad finds himself in one such situation. He is badly flogged by his teacher. It takes four days for his wounds to heal. That was the last time he attended Qur'aanic school. But the desire to achieve Sheikh Saalax's eminence haunts him. He frequents Mosques and becomes "hooked" on the smell of frankincense.

After five years in Mogadishu, Guhaad gets a job as a cashier at a restaurant. The owner develops a great respect for him, and Guhaad himself never betrays that trust. Things were going well for him, until one day a customer steals fifty shillings from the till, while Guhaad was out. Nuur, the restaurant owner, does not believe Guhaad's explanation of the matter and sacks him there and then. Sleepless nights ensue as Guhaad's credibility is damaged. He wants to know whether his maternal aunt believes his version of the story, and she

tells him that she has no reason not to believe him. Guhaad feels much better after this conversation with her. He is later advised by his aunt to consult with one Sheikh Muxsin, considered to be the best sheikh in town who can assemble all kinds of spirits at the "snap of his fingers". The Sheikh lives in Boondheere, a quarter of Mogadishu. Guhaad wastes no time in trying to locate the Sheikh, an activity that does not take much time, as the Sheikh is the talk of the quarter. The people of Boondheere are in awe of this man, in the same way that people in Guhaad's village in the interior feared and respected Sheikh Saalax. Those who know Sheikh Muxsin believe he has some supernatural powers to reckon with. The Sheikh's physical features enhance his charismatic personality :

Sheekha indhihiisu way xariiran yihiin garkiisuna wuu cillaaman yahay. Ilkaha sare laba fool waa dahab. Hareed weyn ayuu leeyahay Shiikh Muxsin. Shiikh Muxsin dadka in yar ayuu la hadlaa. Isagu ma jecla in afkiisa la arko. Shiikhu dadka hortiiisa weligiis kuma qoslin. Bi-shimaha Shiikh Muxsin way dhaadheer yihiin. Da'diisu waa ugu dhawaan 40 sano. Wuxuu xirtaa macawis sa-barhindi ah iyo jubbad. Wejigiisu mar walba wuu dufansan yahay. Calaacalaha Shiikh Muxsin way cadcad yihiin oo jilicsan yihiin.⁷⁷

Sheikh Muxsin has glittery eyes, and a hennaed beard. He has two gold teeth in his upper jaw. [Sheikh Muxsin] has large sideburns. He talks sparingly to people. He does not like to show people his mouth [which means he does not let people see his teeth when he talks]. The Sheikh also never laughs in public. Shiikh Muxsin's lips are long. He is almost forty years old. He wears a loincloth of the *Sabarhindi* type [imported from the far East and once a symbol of status], and a jacket. His face is always anointed. The Sheikh's palms are white and soft.

Besides his charisma, Sheikh Muxsin is a despotic husband. The first wife is afraid of him, because he threatens her with divorce. The second one is the daughter of a late friend of his. Her father, before he died, told her to obey her husband. As a result, she is so docile that she cringes at the sight of Sheikh Muxsin. The Sheikh married fifteen different wives. Cawrala and Nadiifo, the first and second wives respectively, are his present wives. Curiously enough, most of his wives had come from three places in Somalia: Upper Juba region, Benaadir, and Bosasso district. That is the kind of Sheikh that Guhaad goes to consult about the money stolen from the till of the restaurant.

The protagonist tells the Sheikh about the stolen money. He gives one hundred shillings to Sheikh Muxsin. The Sheikh tells him to come the next day when the spirits will be available. Guhaad finds himself at the Sheikh's place early next morning. When Sheikh Muxsin wakes up at 10AM, he tells him to go and buy some frankincense which the spirits had asked for last night. Guhaad runs to the nearest shop and pays 70 shillings for this item. Again he is told to come after dusk. That day Guhaad goes to the beach and dreams about the spirits. He had confidence in the Sheikh that he will be able to restore his reputation by revealing the identity of the thief. Nightfall comes and Guhaad goes to the Sheikh's house. This time, he is taken to a room with old curtains. In spirit sessions, the paraphernalia plays an important role as it brings about the needed change in the person. A strong smell of perfume suffuses the atmosphere inside the room. The smell of the different kinds of perfumes are meant to destabilize the

client's psyche. Frankincense is used for all forms of trickery which deal with spirit summoning sessions. Guhaad feels dizzy. He then hears voices including those of women. His heart beats faster. Not able to remain seated any more, he opens the door to let the air in. His action prompts the Sheikh's stern reaction who tells him to leave since the spirits fled after he had opened the door.

The next night, the same ritual takes place. But this time Guhaad does not flinch. Sheikh Muxsin tells him he will find his money under the pillows at his home. A jubilant Guhaad dashes for home, but no money was to be found. He feels great anger seeping through his body. He comes to the Sheikh's house unexpectedly. This time he is determined to discover the truth. He also had a torch in one of his pockets. The Sheikh tells him to come in after Guhaad has asked, "can I come in"? Sheikh Muxsin pretends to be talking to the spirits. Guhaad is not fooled this time. Gazing through the peep holes with eyes like gimlets, he gets a glimpse of the action behind the curtains. He sees the Sheikh naked and sitting on a stool, with his legs tied to ropes hanging from the holes. Nadiifo, his junior wife, was helping him create a poltergeist-like scenario. Once the mystery is unraveled, Guhaad storms out of the room with great anger. Before he leaves the room, he remembers this proverb: "Meeshii iftiin soo galo mugdi wuu ka baxaa"--.78 (Where light enters, darkness dissipates into thin air.)

This story has some logical defects. The protagonist is not after the 50 shillings but the identity of the thief. The author, however, forgets about his plot by implying, at the end of the narrative, that

Guhaad was interested only in recovering the stolen money. Guhaad went to Sheikh Muxsin to exonerate himself of any wrong-doing and in the process to bring the culprit into the open, so that he, the thief, will not be able to repeat his filthy action and ruin other people's lives. If that had not been the case, Guhaad could have replaced the stolen money from his own pocket instead of giving to Sheikh Muxsin three times as much as was stolen. One finds it difficult to understand why Guhaad's parents and Sheikh Saalax were not able to tell the lad that it is the roots which keep the trees onto the ground. It seems that the author was only interested in proving that Guhaad was an anomaly. It would have been more convincing if Guhaad had asked what held the sky up there, or something about gravitational force.

In reading this story, one is reminded of oral narratives, especially didactic tales which have a proverb as a core-cliche' and as a structural device. The proverb, which is the whole story in a nutshell, comes at the end. The narrative is "designed to instruct as well as entertain, hence the need to draw or imply the moral at the end."⁷⁹ Somali proverbs which are structured in verse, function as mnemonic device and this in turn helps listeners remember the moral of the story. The moral, more often than not, "insists that the good should be rewarded and the wicked punished".⁸⁰

But punishment takes different forms in different stories. In Shiekh Muxsin's case it is psychological. The fact that his chicanery is unveiled helps him become a more useful member of his community. Such a form of punishment is "only a transition to the rehabilitation of the offender. . . [who] is hardly ever left in a state of permanent disgrace

and deprivation. He has to suffer, even suffer severely, but then he is rescued and restored, much chastened and refined by his punishment."⁸¹ Sheikh Muxsin can no longer remain a quack, but has to avail himself of a useful job to compensate society for his wrong doings. Guhaad's unveiling of the charlatan is useful in two ways. First it is a positive metamorphosis for the Sheikh. Secondly, Guhaad is awakened to a new realization, that spirit sessions are wrapped in prevarications. Sheikh Muxsin's punishment is more painful than any physical torture one could imagine. The Sheikh becomes wise only after the event, even though his practices all along had been potentially hazardous. The motif of punishment is woven into the fabric of his fraudulent practices and one assumes, and anticipates, his eventual downfall. Yet the story ends on "a rising note of optimism". The moral is served. The violator is punished without him incurring physical harm.

This theme is also found in African literature in European languages. Beatrice in Ekwensi's *People of the City*, for example, gets her senses back after a temporary loss of sanity as prescribed by her society.⁸² Beatrice is lured to the town by "high life" and glittery things not found in her village. Once in town and with no one to turn to for help, in order to survive, she becomes a prostitute. After a severe illness, she decides to go back to the countryside and salvage what is left of her honor and dignity. Her return to the village after her excruciating experience in the city is clearly patterned on a familiar motive in oral narratives: rites of passage. In such passages, the uninitiated leaves his/her village (separation) and goes through an

ordeal (trial period) only to be reunited (reincorporation) in to his/her original community after a successful trial. Sheikh Muxsin does not pass through any rite of passage in the strict sense of the phrase. He nevertheless delves into the unknown—quackery is not for most of the people—only to come back to society as a much reformed person, even though such a change is only implied. Beatrice and the Sheikh cause a disequilibrium which temporarily disrupts the pace of life in their respective communities. The restoration to the initial equilibrium in both stories is also in accordance with the folktale motif: the non-physical social punishment of the wrong-doers. Like the other stories under discussion, the influence from the oral tradition is quite conspicuous in *The Spirits*. The repetition of some of the major characteristics of Somali oral literature in the three stories discussed in this chapter reveal the influence Somali pre-colonial literary tradition exerted on the new written forms. Contrary to the precepts of cosmopolitan literature, these works manifest a quasi-national character. This character is reflected in their observance of the 'back-cloth', both in terms of content and style.

¹Philip Stevick, "Introduction," in Stevick (ed.), *The Theory of the Novel* (New York: The Free Press, 1967), p. 3.

²Arnold J. Band, *Nostalgia and Nightmare: A Study in the Fiction of S Y Agnon* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968); George N. Sfeir, "The Contemporary Arabic Novel," Henri Peyre (ed.), *Fiction in Several Languages* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1968); N. V. M. Gonzalez, "The Filipino and the Novel," in Henri Peyre (ed.); Kalunga Stanley Lutato, "The Influence of Oral Narrative Traditions on the Novels of Stephen A. Mphashi," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1980.

³Maurice Z Shroder, "The Novel as a Genre," In Stevick (ed.), p. 14.

⁴Philip Stevick, "Introduction," p. 2.

⁵Xuseen Sheekh Axmed "Kaddare", *Waasuge iyo Warsame* (Mogadishu: Akadeemiyada Cilmiga iyo Fanka, n.d.).

⁶Contini, "The Somali: A Nation of Poets in Search of an Alphabet", p. 302.

⁷Kevin B. Maxwell, *Bemba Myth and Ritual: The Impact of Literacy on Oral Culture* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1983), p. 73.

⁸Walter Rodney, *A History of the Upper Guinea Coast 1545-1800* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), p. 206.

⁹Okot P Bitek, *Song of Lawino* (Nairobi: EAPH, 1966).

¹⁰(cf.) "...he who has people is richer than he who has money" in Achebe, *No Longer At Ease* (London: Heinemann, 1960), p. 79.

¹¹Douglas Jardine, *The Mad Mullah of Somaliland*, Quoted in Said S. Samatar *Oral Poetry and Somali Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 33.

¹²*Oral Poetry and Somali Nationalism*, p. 24.

¹³Quote in Tzvetan Todorov, *The Poetics of Prose*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Cornell University Press, 1984), p. 80.

¹⁴Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice* (London, Methuen, 1980), p. 91.

¹⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 129

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p.91.

¹⁸Donatius Nwoga, "Onitsha Market Literature", *Transition* 4, 19 (1965):26.

¹⁹*Ibid.*

²⁰Said S. Samatar, *Oral Poetry and Somali Nationalism*, p. 4.

²¹See Samatar, *Oral Poetry and Somali Nationalism*.

²²Obiechina, *An African Popular Literature*, p. 57f.

²³*Ibid.*, p. 59.

²⁴Andrzejewski, "Introduction", to Cawl's *Ignorance Is the Enemy of Love*, trans. Andrzejewski (London: Zed Press, 19), p. Xiii.

²⁵*Ibid.*

²⁶Faarax M. J. Cawl, *Aqoondarro Waa Unacab Jacayl*, (Mogadishu: Wasaaradda Hiddaha iyo Tacliinta Sare, 1974); trans. Andrzejewski *Ignorance Is the Enemy of Love* (London: Zed Press, 1982).

²⁷*Ignorance Is the Enemy of Love*, p. Xiii.

²⁸Cawl, *Ignorance Is the Enemy of Love*, trans Andrzejewski, p. 5.

²⁹*Ibid.*

³⁰*Ibid.*, p. 6.

³¹*Ibid.*

³²*Ibid.*, p. 8.

³³*Ibid.*

³⁴*Ibid.*, p. 9.

³⁵Chinua Achebe, *A Man of The People* (London: Heinemann, 1966).

³⁶*Ignorance Is the Enemy of Love*, p. 23.

³⁷*Ibid.*, p. 26.

³⁸*Ibid.*, p. 35.

³⁹*Ibid.*, p. 36.

⁴⁰A Popular Somali Song.

⁴¹*Ignorance Is the Enemy of Love*, p. 46.

⁴²*Ibid.*, p. 47.

⁴³*Ibid.*, p. 49.

- 44 Todorov, *The Poetics of Prose*, p. 123.
 45 *Ignorance Is the Enemy of Love*, p. 49.
 46 John W. Johnson, *Heellooy*, p. 103.
 47 *Ibid.*
 48 B W Andrzejewski, "Poetry in Somali Society", in J. B. Pride and Janet Holmes, *Sociolinguistics* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1972), p. 258.
 49 Johnson, *Heellooy*, p. 141f.
 50 *Ignorance Is the Enemy of Love*, p. 65.
 51 Rajmund Ohly, "Literature In Swahili" in Andrzejewski et. al., p. 469.
 52 Stanislaw Pilaszewicz, "The Rise of Written Literatures in African Languages", in Andrzejewski et. al., p. 65.
 53 Mongo Beti, *Perpe'tue et L'habitude du Malheur*, 1974, p. 301.
 54 Wole Soyinka, *The Lion and the Jewel*, (Oxford: The University Press, 1963), p. 8.
 55 Beti, p. 90.
 56 *Ignorance Is the Enemy of Love*, p. X.
 57 *Ibid.*, p. 69.
 58 *Ibid.*, p. 71.
 59 *Ibid.*, p. 72.
 60 *Ibid.*, p. 75.
 61 *Ibid.*, p. 76.
 62 *The Mwindo Epic*, p. 144.
 63 *Ignorance Is the Enemy of Love*, p. 81.
 64 *Ibid.*, p. 83f.
 65 *Ibid.*, p. 88.
 66 *Ibid.*, p. 15.
 67 *Ibid.*, p. 14.
 68 *Ibid.*, p. Xiii.
 69 Shire Jaamac Axmed, "Rooxaan" [The Spirits] (Mogadishu: Wasaaradda Hiddaha Iyo Tacliinta Sare, 1973).
 70 Roland Barthes, *Critical Essays*, trans. Richard Howard, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1972), p. 255.
 71 Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, (Berkeley: U C Press, 1976), p. 7.
 72 Adolfo S. Vazquez, "On Truth in the Arts", *Ufahamu* 12.2 (1983):12.
 73 Graham Hough, *An Essay on Criticism* (New York: Norton, 1966), p. 117.
 74 David Craig, "Towards Laws of Literary Development", p. 148.
 75 Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg, *The Nature of Narrative*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 82.
 76 Cheikh Hamidou Kane, *Ambiguous Adventure*, (London: Heinemann, 1961).
 77 Shire J. Axmed, "Rooxaan", p. 9.
 78 *Ibid.*, p. 23.
 79 Obiechina, *An African Popular Literature*, p. 103.
 80 *Ibid.*, p. 104.
 81 *Ibid.*
 82 Cyprian Ekwensi, *People of the City* (London: Heinemann, 1954).

ANOMALY AND THE WAVE FOR THE FUTURE

FARAH: THE EARLY PERIOD

Nuruddin Farah is so far the only Somali novelist to write in English. That fact places him in a class by himself. But Farah also deserves the appellation of uniqueness for another reason. Somalis as depicted in preceding chapters are described as a nation of bards, yet unexpectedly her first major writer of international stature is a prose fiction writer. To compound our bewilderment, Farah, who writes his novels in English, comes from Southern Somalia which was an area formerly colonized by Italy, where Italian had been the language of communication in official circles. His subject matter and the style of his writing also alienate him from those who write in Somali. These and other factors distinguish Farah from those Somali novelists whose main audience is Somalis reading in their indigenous language.

In this chapter, we attempt to analyze his books, *From a Crooked Rib* and *A Naked Needle* and see how they relate to Somali literature (prose fiction writing).

We start with his first book, *From a Crooked Rib*.¹ We analyze it separately, for it is in this book that Farah gained his initial reputation for supporting women's rights. Yet it is our contention that Farah is close to tradition in his depiction of women in this work. For this reason we deal with *From a Crooked Rib* separately from his other works. The book symbolizes a transition in Somali literature in

English. It keeps much of the tradition, but because it is written in English we interpret it as transitional.

From a Crooked Rib is divided into four parts. Each part is introduced by an appropriate epigram. Part one begins with the Somali proverb from which the novel gets its name, "God created woman from a crooked rib; and anyone who trieth to straighten it, breaketh it". The solemnity of the proverb is underlined by the words "trieth" and "breaketh" which enhance a scriptural aura. In the prologue, a third person omniscient narrator tells us of a weak man whose only weapon now is cursing. The gaunt figure is Ebla's, (the protagonist) grandfather who is squatting "his buttocks resting on his heels"--waiting to hear from his grandson. The image of the squatting frail man is important. In Somali tradition, *kadaloob* (squatting) conjures up many images, such as a sense of urgency and a seriousness of intention.

A suitor, for example, squats outside the hut of his intended, so is the man with the "evil eye" in front of the house he expects to destroy. It seems that to hurl harm at an enemy one has to fulfill certain rituals commensurate with the intended efficacy of the curse. Like fighting a lion, the curser has to create a mental poise and crouch before taking aim at the beast. Ebla's grandfather squats so that he can give serious thought whether to curse her or not. When Ebla's sixteen year old brother comes back to the old man to report of her departure, the old man already expects the worst. That his wife had eloped with him years ago does not alleviate his fears nor does it assuage his resentment. Lost in his thoughts, his prayer beads fall apart. Again this conjures known images in Somali society "sida tusbax go'ay

taladaada Allaha kayeelo." [May Allah disperse your objectives as a strand of beads that has broken and spilled beads all around.] The old man secretly utters his imprecation "May the Lord disperse your plans, Ebla. May He make you the mother of many a bastard. May He give you hell on this earth as a reward."² And he drops dead.

The prologue is a synopsis of what to expect in this novel. It foreshadows Ebla's tumultuous life. By the end of the novel she is pregnant with a child whose father is unknown—"the mother of many a bastard". To compound problems, the product of that pregnancy, Sagal, is also afraid that she is pregnant with a child of a man to whom she is not married [*Sardines*].³ So it seems that the curse accompanies Ebla over generations. Even though she becomes a successful shopkeeper in Farah's second novel, *A Naked Needle*, the effects of the curse are never reversed, thus one of the morals of the story; flaunting parental advice invokes untold misery. Farah still writes within the parameters of tradition. This allows us to question the structural importance of the old man to the plot. Would things have been different if she had run away from the interior without incurring a curse, or if the grandfather had not specifically mentioned "bastard" in his curse?

This story reveals many trademarks of Farah's. These motifs will keep recurring in his other novels. First his intense rhapsody for the Sayyid is clear from the old man's remembrance of the Somali warrior who distinguished himself as a poet and dervish leader against the British. "The Sayyid did this...The Sayyid did that. The Sayyid killed Corfield"⁴ The author also bares one of the modus operandi of

the Sayyid's. His machiavellian character. His opponents contend that he will negotiate with a clan only to unilaterally abrogate the treaty and "eradicate the rebels".⁵

Secondly, the intense rivalry between generations—fathers and sons is a theme that keeps recurring in Nuruddin's novels. In all his books, patriarchy, in all its forms, is challenged in one way or another. The young do not heed what the old, like Ebla's grandfather, have to say, perhaps due to their "young blood". The contumacy of the young cuts across gender lines. A third aspect of Farah's works is his depiction of self-asserting females. A fourth theme in his books is the existence of the child prodigy. In his books, precocity is in the genes of all those who challenge the powers that be. Subsumed under the status quo are all forms of authority, whether in the form of personal, i.e. male household head, and public, i.e., head of a state power. The latter becomes synonymous with patriarchy. Thus, in *Sweet and Sour Milk*, the head of state is called, "The Father of the Nation. The Carrier of Wisdom, The provider of comforts"—all are epithets associated with the father of a household.⁶

Ebla is an 18 or 19 year old girl who as her name suggests is "graceful at 6 feet." She is running away from a marriage arranged by her grandfather. It is for this reason that she has lost all respect for him. Her anger against her grandfather finds expression in her total disillusionment with the egalitarian system of the nomads. She believes that each is for himself or herself, especially since no one accompanies anyone at the time of birth; and that when one's time comes one dies alone. As a result of that "One tried to solve one's

problems alone".⁷ Thus, in the name of Ebla, Farah successfully creates a prototype of the existential figure in his works. To prove that one fights for himself or herself, Farah portrays her as a callous person. "Not once in her life had she stopped doing anything because it would harm others".⁸

Ebla flees from the Ogaden, the place commonly referred to as *Ulasan* in the de facto border. She goes to Belet Wein. Her connections to her homestead are severed when she steps out of her hut. Her "My God, I am out,"⁹ is as literal as it is metaphorical. Out of the kraal symbolizes individual freedom. Enclosure symbolizes protection provided by the community. Disclosure, i.e., stepping out of the kraal, implies individual protection. She joins a caravan on its way to Belet Wein, a town on the other side of the border, in Somalia proper.

Life in the town constitutes part two which is introduced by a quotation from *Waiting for Godot*: "There's a man all over for you,/blaming on his boots,/the faults of his feet." She comes to visit, perhaps stay with a cousin, she had never seen. "This cousin was thrice removed, but that hardly mattered." Echoing Calimaax's gibe at Nuur in *Ignorance is the Enemy of Love*, "You must surely have been on a visit to some relative—perhaps you went to see the son of the son of your maternal cousin?",¹⁰ the narrator in *From A Crooked Rib* tells us that Ebla's cousin was three times removed. She becomes a maid/servant for his family.

Gheddi, the cousin, is wary of distant relatives, swarming to towns. He was been robbed of some clothes and money by a young

imposter who claimed he was a cousin, ten times removed. Ebla is told to care for the pregnant wife as well as for their cows. In a classic example of existentialist behavior Ebla is at once torn between helping the cows first or Aowralla in labor. She waivers between the mooing cows and the groaning woman.¹¹ (p.36.) She feeds the animals first, talking of how lucky they are for not pre-occupying themselves with the world around them. The animals become her friends.

A widow neighbor helps her move around the town. The importance of the widow in the novel is comparable to Saluugla in *Ignorance is the Enemy of Love*. The widow becomes Ebla's best friend. She also acts as her conduit to the outside world. With the widow's entrance, we are served with another recurring motif of Farah's works, that of the Arab, especially the Adenese living in Somalia. The widow, explaining the jealousy of her former Arab husband, alludes to a medieval practice of locking female anatomical parts with a chastity belt. The widow's Arab husband reminds one of a male monkey covering the female "thing" with mud. But Farah's portrayal of the Adenese as a pervert reaches its acme in *Maps*, his latest book. There, the precocious protagonist, Askar is warned not to go anywhere near the home of an old Adenese. Not only is he a pederast, but was once caught "with a hen on his leg".¹²

Four days later, Gheddi takes Ebla with him to a smuggling swap. The deal goes sour as the operation *gets busted*. He runs for his life. She goes to the widow's house. The widow explains to her what has become of the contraband scheme. Her cousin is forced to sell one of his cows. Dirir, the broker, has not only helped him sell the cow, but

he has also come up with some cash for Ebla's hand. The escape starts all over again. Ebla thinks about things, of inequality among people; of women being "slaves"; of daughters less cherished than sons. Her verdict transmitted to us by the narrator is categorical. "For sure this world is a man's--...nature is against women."¹³

Her castigation of the government is as harsh as her criticism of patriarchy. She sees the government as nothing more than an extension of patriarchal supremacy. It is men who run the state machinery. It is to them that women must go to demand justice. It becomes obvious why despotic governments easily become models for father-figures to emulate. Ebla's inner thoughts are transmitted to us by the narrator. "Before she has opened her mouth, she is condemned to the grave. Aren't men the law?"¹⁴ The narrator is a vehicle for her inner feelings. The quotation clearly alludes to infanticide practised in pre-Islamic Arabia against daughters. In a patriarchal society, it is the gender which, *a priori*, determines her role. In such times, she is better off if she could sell herself without a mediator. "Without a broker there is no bidder--and no auctioneer. All I need is the Sheikh's fee if Awill wants to marry me."¹⁵

Despite the distortions (by the quote) of the act of contracting marriage in Somali society, [the groom is the one who pays the Sheikh's fee], religion becomes a tool for men to oppress women. The sheikh is only a broker, but a broker profits by his trade. In this sense, the institution of marriage is nothing more than a commodity bought and sold with all the haggling over prices to the highest bidder.

The reification of the institution of marriage is another motif which appears in Farah's books. Marriage is not different from whoredom; indeed their functions overlap. Koschin in *A Naked Needle* put this unabashedly: "A whore which every woman is, married or unmarried, because if you stop providing your woman with all her necessities of life wouldn't she cease being your wife?"¹⁶ By selling herself she knocks other auctioneers (her grandfather and later her cousin) out of business. The substitution of the Sheikh for the grandfather is an indication of the interchangeability of the duo's roles, and by extension perhaps of their "trades".

Ebla agrees to elope with Awill. When the widow comes back from town, and was told of the elopement plans, she was happy that she has told Ebla "many things about life and men. From experience".¹⁷ The comparison with Saluugla in *Ignorance is the Enemy of Love* becomes apparent. Theirs, the widow's and Saluugla's are the tales of two embittered women whose relationships with men have soured, and by extension with society also. Farah never gives the name of the widow, thus the symbolic importance of her role to all women in similar predicament. She did not re-marry because, we are told, no one thought of her as desirable. But a widow is seen as a sign of malediction, a curse. The death of a husband is, in certain places and on certain occasions, interpreted as a manifestation of a woman's sins.

Part three opens with a quote from Miller's *After the Fall*; "Why do I ever think/ of things falling apart/ were they ever whole." The allusion is to Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. Ebla is the generation of Okonkwo's grandson, Obi, in *No longer at Ease*.¹⁸ [The falling apart

has long before taken place]. Awill takes Ebla to his rented room in Bondere, the biggest quarter in Mogadishu. That same evening Awill attempts to rape her. He badgers her with kicks all over her body. Personal and political rape is another topic of Somali life which preoccupies Farah. But in this case Ebla wards off her attacker. He tries a different method,--making passes at her, patting her hair, then Awill blows out the lamp snuffs out the light.

"Now that they were in bed and it was dark, she did not object to his passes."¹⁹ Her focus is on the agony that accompanies her defloration, the pain of the circumcised. This also reminds her of "Aowralla's painful child-delivery"²⁰ Two other things that crop up in Farah's books; the devastation wrought on women by circumcision and its accomplice--complications in child-delivery. But rape is rape whether it is committed in broad daylight or in the darkest hours of the night; whether it takes place on bed or in the most unholy of street alleys. In Islamic law, sex before matrimony is not allowed. And for Awill to rape her before they get married only enhances the fulfillment of the grandfather's curse in the prologue, "May you mother many a bastard." The author in trying to dramatize the plight of women [rape victims as unwilling partners], forgets the plot line he has constructed in the prologue.

Aunt Asha, so called not out of any blood relationship, but out of respect for the older person, is Awill's landlady. Asha calls for some Sheikhs to perform the marriage ceremony. Shortly after the ceremony, Jama, one of Awill's work mates, delivers him the news that he's to go to Italy for a short course. The government wants them

to leave in a week's time. Once again, the author contrives a scene to show that Ebla is not that important for Awill to delay or decline an opportunity to go and learn in Italy. Anticipating Jama's question, Awill preempts him by stating in Italian that he was not to destroy his life for a woman.²¹

The program is about the grooming of Somalis to run the Ministry of Education after independence. [This is sometime in February, 1960] The Ministry expects them to return a month before independence. The batch of students will leave for Italy and come back before June—Somalia's southern section became independent on July 1, 1960. Ebla had to accept the fact that Awill will have to leave for Italy, for "It was part of a man's life to travel for the benefit of the family".²² Awill tells Ebla on the 7th day of their marriage that he will be leaving in two day's time.

The last part, part four, opens with a Sicilian proverb, "Don't tamper with Camarina".²³ A week or so had passed when Jama delivers a letter for Ebla. He inadvertently forgot to take out the pictures of Awill and a semi-nude Italian woman. Ebla is incensed by the picture. She feels betrayed. Asha who now takes the place of the widow suggests that Ebla should likewise cultivate relationships with men. She tells her of a rich acquaintance who has visited her place several times, and who has shown some interest in Ebla. Asha is now playing the role of procurer for the rich man, Tiffo. It is here that her function in the plot differs from that of the widow who did not encourage an illegal act when she wanted her nephew to marry Ebla. Asha is the quintessential town dweller who, with no one to turn to

for help, must rely on their wits. It is not impossible to imagine that she expects her share of the gravy. And even though she is not in charge of a *raison de societe'*, she nonetheless expects a cut of whatever Ebla gains from the deal.

They also talk about the implications of polyandry. Ebla is pragmatic about the affair. Tiffo offers her a chance to get back at Awill, but also serves as a cushion to fall back upon if Awill decides to dump her when he returns. Ebla is comparable to Guhaad in "Rooxaan" in that both are precocious by any standards. Both are inquisitive about life. And both end in Mogadishu in search of life's meaning. The characteristics of a character are important as long as they provoke action. Here, Farah once again is close to a traditional form of story telling.

After the women discuss the final details of their "new project" over tea, each goes to her room. Ebla dreams of the arrival of her brother from the interior. She also dreams of her grandfather's death. This dream is important in that the grandfather had symbolically died before she went to bed. The consummation of the new marriage will destroy the sway of patriarchy over women. The act of polyandry is the final stage of challenging the system. As far as Ebla was concerned, her grandfather was the paramount patriarch whose presence and deed in the community stood for the transmission of that aspect of tradition to posterity. The death of the grandfather was always in her subconscious. The intended act of polyandry only closes that chapter of her life. Ebla does what she does because she loves life. An authorial intrusion tells us that her perception of life was wrong. This authorial

comment indeed reveals the writer's unwillingness to endorse Ebla's actions.

Ebla and Tiffo agree on the only arrangement that their marriage calls for. She is afraid of Awill showing up at anytime after a three month period. The next morning, after he consummation of the second marriage, Awill's friend, Jama, visits them to give Ebla a remittance of 300 shillings. After he leaves, Ebla withdraws to her room to take a nap. She has a day dream in which camels stampede all over her and her brother. A young camel herder causes the stampede by hitting the camels with a stick. Ebla shouts in vain for help. Two of the camel herders later rescue her. Her grandfather is summoned to give her a blessing, but he refuses to do so. She jumps and wakes up from the nightmare after she hears someone calling her name. It is the widow and Ebla's brother who have come to visit her.

The specter of the grandfather dominates her sub-conscious. Ebla is somewhat resigned to the fact that she will not get away with impunity (for flaunting his advice). But the image of the camel herder's stick is not lost on anyone. In *Ignorance is the Enemy of Love*, the stick was used to beat to death Cawralla's sister. In *From a Crooked Rib*, Ebla is trampled upon by camels fleeing a herder's stick. The herder is always a male.

The widow notices the absence of Awill's clothes in the wardrobe. Ebla explains that she has put them in Asha's room. The visitor tells her of her grandfather's death. To her brother, townspeople are nothing more than the scum of the earth. The widow's initial plan for the young man to enroll him in primary

school fizzles out. We get a sense of the melodrama when, in the middle of the night, Tiffo knocks on Ebla's window. The widow is unable to follow Tiffo and Ebla's conversation even though she strains herself to hear it. Ebla's brother refuses to stay in Mogadishu. And they go back to Belet Wein from where her brother will return to the homestead.

When Awill's return to Mogadishu nears, Ebla gets into an argument with Tiffo. She asks for his senior wife's name. When he refuses to tell her, Ebla tells him of her other husband. Now, his wife's name must be traded for Awill's. Tiffo does not still believe her. When he insists that she is a liar, Ebla calmly answers, "Why should I [tell a lie]? You have another wife and I have another husband. We are even; you are a man and I am a woman, so we are equal. You need me and I need you. We are Equal."²⁴ Ebla is adamant on this point, male and female being even. No one part of a pair can stand by itself. It is what it is because of the complementary nature of the other. Her argument is based on a Somali proverb [culled from a poem]; "Tabantaabady laba gacmood/ tabarku yeeshaane/ Hadday middigtu keli tahay/ tahar magoyseene." When Asha confirms Ebla's story, Tiffo divorces her right there and then. Awill is expected in the morrow. She had pleasant dreams [that night].

Ebla and Asha visit a savant the following morning. Ebla is sick- we are not told why. The savant writes dots on the sand. He tries to decipher the cryptic meaning which the dots purportedly convey. He tells them that there are four men in Ebla's life. He administers a prescription. He suggests Ebla urgently needs medication. "Somebody,

he claims, had sent an evil eye on her. It is very young and she can be cured."²⁵ Ebla feels happiness because her ailment is still in an early stage. Upon their arrival home they meet a circumcision practice in process. Asha is the least perturbed by the scene as she goes to her room. For Ebla, the event is disconcerting. This reminds her of a lingering memory of a similar episode. The carnage strikes another episode in her life—the agony of her first sexual experience.

Ebla went on thinking that because woman was created by God from the crooked rib of Adam, she is too crooked to be straightened. And anybody who tries risks breaking her. Ebla is perplexed with existential questions. To her the world is not only monotonous, but irrational as well:

"People don't get surprised when (as one might expect) when their beloved sons, daughters or friends disappear into the ground. God has taken them away. They don't get affected or moved when a new born baby comes into the world to create disturbance. Instead, they cut the throats of other animals to rejoice on the occasion. What is the use of life? Especially for a person like myself? I am nothing but an object. I am nothing. I did not cost Awill anything; he did not pay me or any relation of mine any dowry."²⁶

This shows the young Farah's criticism of Somali's collective consciousness at its highest. Birth and death, in their different ways, are accosted with different rituals. Somali oral literature abounds (if literature could arguably be shown to contain a people's history) with mothers, fathers, widows, etc. lamenting the sad departure of their beloved. Yet, by registering Ebl'a anger and frustration towards the

Somali's resignation to fatalism, Farah, it seems, is exasperated with 'sons and daughters' dying in the prime of their time. Equally voluminous are poems, stories, etc which reveal the ecstasy with which the new born is greeted in this world. But, again the quote seems to show a contradiction which besets the text. For the slaughtering of animals to commemorate the occasion is but a manifestation of the feelings of the family of the new born. Be that as it may, Farah is being ironic here. For him, it seems like a contradiction to celebrate life with death. Ebla's stream of consciousness alights her at a no man's land, a twilight zone which explains her eerie verdict: "Am I cursed; And if so who has done it?" She speaks of frustrations wrought to fail her ambitions. In a language reminiscent of Tantalus and Sisyphus she complains"....each time that it seems to be improving, something happens which leaves me in the same old situation."

She recalled an incident in the country in which a woman who was selling her body had been found out. Her relations seized the man who was in bed with her, and beat him until every part of his flesh ached. Then they got hold of the woman and burnt her house and all her possessions. She had been stigmatized until one day she left the country and came to Mogadishu, and took up prostitution as her profession. What good had her relatives done?"²⁷

Then she talks about how people are lured into doing evil things once in a while; and that violence never deters them from doing it. Then

she attempts to explain the cause of her agony. Herself? Family? (Is there such a thing?) The men in her life? Inexperience?

Ebla is like Askar in *Maps*.²⁸ Their inability to deal with reality shows itself in a physical sickness. She finds fault with her "nature" (So do a lot of colonized, oppressed people). She contemplates suicide—"but I am a woman and I cannot do that—I lack the courage."²⁹ She speaks as though bereft of power. She then reflects on the locus of her powerlessness.

"She thought that she had walked out on nature and that now it would give her slaps across the face, stab her from behind with a poisonous dagger or make her lag behind the children of nature."³⁰ One could substitute nature with patriarchy. Under such conditions her sex is her most cherished property. "This is my treasure, my only treasure, my bank, my money, my existence."³¹

Then she hears a knock on the door. It is Asha with the Sheikhs to perform the suggestions of the savant. When the elder of the two sheikhs asks for a razor blade, Ebla reacts with "what for?" in shivering voice fearing the blade will be used on her body.³² Ebla does not even stop when she is told of the uses the blade is to be put. In an apparent allusion to circumcision and defloration she says "As it is, I have enough cuts on my body."³³ But, Ebla knows that she has already been circumcised and no more cutting of her away is expected. The author, here wants to dramatize the agony of the circumcision ritual. The sheikh is seen here as not so different from that of the patriarchy. Perhaps she is reacting to the Sheikh's silence of what she considers is tantamount to mutilation. The Sheikh gives his blessings to the ritual

preceding the actual event of circumcision. The sheikhs give her a Qur'aanic potion washed off from a reed. When the Sheikhs leave, Ebla withdraws to her room, plagued by vomiting and dizziness. She imagines she is pregnant.

Tiffo shows up at lunchtime. Asha tells him to go away. Tiffo wants to warn Ebla of the impending danger, that is, his wife is on her way to the place with her other friends. Before he even finishes his sentence, Ardo, the wife, is there. Asha warns Ardo not to create a scene in her house. It seems apparent, though strange, that the two know each other. "Asha, are you here? I only meant to beat him and, then, come and tell you afterwards. Did you know that he was the husband of this woman?"³⁴ Asha explains that he is no longer Ebla's husband. When the belligerent wife and her friends leave, Asha tells to Ebla that the four always gang up on their husbands. They divorce or marry men as they like. Asha grew up in Baidoa with Ardo. She had had fights with her. It is strange that Ardo who was furious as she entered the place, left them peacefully.

In the domain of the text, the author reverses roles. He creates henpecked husbands such as Tiffo. The women have their own organization, terrorizing men. They follow their own rule. But the heterodoxy of their action incurs the wrath of the narrator whose value judgmental remark is unequivocal: "They don't care about religion, they are such crooks."³⁵ They dispense their own justice which in turn breeds a temporary suspension of patriarchy. Asha who suggested the act of polyandry to Ebla has no quarrel with the heavy-handedness of the women ". . . they are not too bad, otherwise, it is just their men--

troubles and men really ought to be beaten".³⁶ The divided self of the author again comes to the fore. Asha, the female character sees nothing wrong in women ganging up on their husbands, while the third-person narrator sees such women as crooks.

While Asha and Ebla are out shopping, Awill returns from Italy. Later he and Ebla talked about things. He asks her why she sent her brother back to the interior. She argues that that is where he belongs--with the animals. Awill queries her why she ran away from the homestead. He asks her smiling "You know how you were created?" Ebla answers him, "From clay". That was Adam, he tells her. He then continues:

"Let me tell you that they were created from the crooked rib of man".

Ebla was also talking and she adds, "And if any one tries to straighten *it* he will have to break *it* [emphasis added].³⁷ They agree to postpone their talk and go to bed. "Poor fellow, he needs me, she thought. He is sex-starved".

She welcomes, "his hot and warm world into her cool and calm kingdom".³⁸ Thus ends the saga of Ebla.

The beauty of the novel lies in its ability to capture the troubles a nomadic girl had to go through in a world created and dominated by men. The patriarchal nature of that world is shown through Ebla's grandfather and the other men whose paths cross with hers. But the creation of a fictional Ebla who could vote with her feet is not only found in Farah, but also in Somali lore. The case of Kaba Calaf in the second chapter is a case in point. Ebla's own grandmother is another

one. Elopement is therefore a way out for couples in love to escape parental injunctions. *From a Crooked Rib*, therefore, conforms to a basic precept of Somali culture--the contradiction between children and their parents and the uneasy task of mitigating a precept that appears to be a contradiction in the nature of the collective conscience of the people; the possible escape of those in love to defy outside interference and the eventual potency of the curse of the parent.

It is a dilemma. The uneasiness of a plausible solution bespeaks a rife contradiction within the superstructure of the society. Even though Farah deftly handles the subject with a touch of his personal disposition, the dilemma holds his art hostage and generates inconsistencies in the text. This hesitancy on the part of the author to wholly commit himself to the taming of patriarchy can also be taken as a symptom of his own ambivalence. This interpretation is encouraged all the more by the author's age at the time of its publication. Being twenty three, Farah had not perhaps filtered his ideas concerning certain aspects of Somali tradition through a rigorous process of investigation and introspection. That streak of ambivalence somewhat fades out in his other novels. Farah in no uncertain terms castigates decadent aspects of tradition in his later novels. He also forms, and falls victim to, his own interpretation of the social reality which surrounds him. Now, the collective myth of the Somalis is pushed to a back-burner; and at times one doubts if some of Farah's deductions in these novels could share the same "back cloth" with the oral literature. The fictional period of *From a Crooked Rib* focuses on pre-independence era. The novel comes to a close at the return of Awill

from his trip to Italy. It is about sometime in May, as his group was supposed to come back a month before independence day of July 1, 1960.

NURUDDIN: THE SECOND PHASE

Sometimes it is understandable that people spit so much, when all around decaying things push inward and mix all the body's juices with the taste of rot. Sometimes it is understandable, the doomed attempt to purify the self by adding to the disease outside.

Ayi Kwei Armah,
The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born

Farah's second novel, *A Naked Needle*, deals with Somalia after the military take-over in October, 1969.³⁹ The title comes from an Arabic proverb: "The needle that stitches the clothes of people remains naked itself." The profession of the major protagonist is not in the Sartorial field, but in teaching. The title then could perhaps be explained in such a way that it alludes to either one or both of the following: the utter disorganization and carelessness of the teacher-protagonist or the moral turpitude of his nemesis, the Principal of the school. Koschin is the name of the protagonist, but Koschin also is the real name of the author's son. Thus, the association reminds one of the importance of the author's intended, at times scathing, criticism of Somali political and social systems.

The novel is divided into movements instead of chapters. The movements in *A Naked Needle* go back and forth in more ways than one. Ideas in any movement become incomplete without their being

associated with other ideas in preceding or succeeding movements. Thus, the importance of the cinematic technique of the book. The novel is written in a stream of consciousness style. The plot, if there is something of that nature in *A Naked Needle*, is based on movement.

Nancy is coming from England; Koschin is rife with expectation. He is going to Idil's store, to school, to his friend's house. And when Nancy finally arrives he takes her around, showing her Mogadishu. They go to a party. A lot of movements. People coming and going all the time. It is three in the morning and they walk home. So the characters too are on the move. On a different level, Somalia is on the move with the "revolution"—with all the connotation and meaning of the word. The nature of the novel is such that it moves on multi-layered levels. But it is the need for these movements that catch our interest. It is possible to argue that constant motion affords little contemplation or brooding over ideas. It is only after the day's work that ruminating animals chew their cud. The absence of serenity enables the protagonist to stop worrying and think over ideas in motion, actions in full swing. In short, the surge, temporarily and superficially, allows one to procrastinate as he pleases. In a nutshell, movements of the plot reflect the protagonist's ambivalence or perhaps his groping in the dark for answers to difficult metaphysical and existential questions.

There are a lot of personal and political events that Koschin is not prepared to either castigate or lend his blessings to. The arrival of Nancy to whom he had given his word years ago to marry if neither of them settled in two years time, disturbs him. He has his doubts as to

the viability of their would-be marriage. At times, his doubts are not confined to the figure of Nancy, but it reflects his resentment towards her background and by extension to her culture. His juxtaposition of his amulet against the rosary beads given to Nancy by her mother to keep as a souvenir sheds light to the extent of his frustrations against her culture which calls his memories of his mother "left overs from superstition".⁴⁰ In contrast to Senghor's defense of his "totem" in the poem by that title, Nuruddin through his alter ego Koschin grumbles and whines against the onslaught, "because despite all that I have seen, read, learnt of yours I am still afraid of labels designed, pregnant with prejudices."⁴¹ His social activity is not made easier by his disdain for his compatriots.

On the political level, Koschin is torn between praising and lambasting the military government. For example, he decides to lend his support to the military government, "The most outstanding government Somalia has ever had.....in many fields, the stability of the state, a statedom, neutral not among the neutralized, effulgent Somalia has become radiant in the Eastern horn of prostituted Africa."⁴² But fifty eight pages later, Koschin is not so sure after all if his earlier characterization of the government was that apt. For "Isn't it the same people doing the same jobs as before the revolution!"⁴³ So the movements seem to be waves, which punctuate the forming and the inchoate ideas of the protagonists as well as, to use a Joycean phrase, the "uncreated conscience of the nation". The breaking down of the novel into movements instead of chapters does not have any significant impact on characterization. Koschin is as waiving in the

end of the book as he was in the prologue. And if man is what Lacan calls "homolette" breaking and forming under some heat or experience and pressure without losing his fundamental human-ness, then Koschin cannot be argued to have changed a bit,⁴⁴ but comes out at the end to only lend credence to Lawrence's "the old stable ego of the self."⁴⁵

Koschin is awakened by noises and voices which carry through the quietude of the wee hours of the morning. There are also the voices of his co-tenants, all eight of them, that is, if you do not count the guests "on an away day from where they live". The building he shares with these nocturnal creatures is not only in shambles, cramped but it is rodent-infested as well. If, as Wellek and Warren argue in their *Theory of Literature*, it is true that "A man's house is an extension of himself", then Koschin's existence in such an environment could perhaps be viewed "as metonymic, or metaphoric, expressions of [his] character".⁴⁶ Yet, it seems that Koschin wants us to believe otherwise. His living in this place is necessitated by "silly governmental interference, intervention if you like, with regard to rent."⁴⁷

But Koschin entertains a simple attitude to life, a simplicity of which cuts across class and gender lines. The protagonist of *From a Crooked Rib* agrees with Koschin's version when the omniscient narrator transmits her thoughts to us: "'Life is simpler than we think' she decided, smiling peevishly into the face of life, which was represented by the room she was in."⁴⁸ The narrator acts as a conduit for her thoughts. But Koschin's commonality with Ebla's simplistic

attitude to life ends there. He never does wash his underwear nor his socks.

On a metaphorical sense, the depiction and imagery of filth in this book symbolically reveals a corresponding impoverishment in the material and spiritual being of the society under scrutiny. In a passage reminiscent of Ayi Kwei Armah's description of the bus conductor and the Cedi notes in his hands in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Born*,⁴⁹ Farah writes about Koschin:

His hands in his pockets, there is only a tenner, a filthy, aged, Xaaji Faarax [a one time finance Minister] note (A note that must have been clutched in the folds of many an elderly woman's sweaty hands, or warmed in the safety of the aged breast of a milk woman. One ten poverty pills, with Nancy coming!⁵⁰

On a literal sense, however, Koschin's unwillingness to wash his underwear and socks does not derive from a Somali tradition. The importance of cleanliness in Somali culture is best described by the proverb "Being dressed in rags is a sign of poverty, but being dressed in dirt is a thing of shame."

Awake by that early hour, Koschin engages in a conversation with Nancy through an interior monologue. His neurotic behavior comes to the fore when, scared by the sound of an aircraft, he goes into fits-weeping and foaming at the mouth. His verdict: "A snake that hisses as if in preparation of an attack? Nancy you are....a snake. Or, aren't you?"⁵¹ This quote anticipates or perhaps unravels the unreasonable fear that seizes Koschin every time Nancy's name is

mentioned or even when something reminds him of her. He even asks himself "Why am I drunk with hatred when Nancy's name is mentioned?"⁵² The bizarre relationship between the two necessitates the fear. Koschin associates Nancy with Death, especially when he pronounces her last name, Stonegrave, as "grave". The "tomb" image is important. She will seal him off from his people. Like the city which severs relationships, Nancy will break his ties with his people. The juxtaposition of Nancy, the country and the Revolution signifies that they are not mutually inclusive of one another. The symbolic entombment explicit in the word "grave" is best grasped when read in the context of cultural domination and hegemony. Nancy and by extension her European background will entomb the intellectual in a cocoon. To Nancy, Koschin is the Devil, and she recites weird hymns from the tenth century during their sexual encounter. Koschin believes the hymns "are the Crusade ones."

The hymns are followed by her display of the cross. "A Tau cross she holds in her hand when we make love. Ancient Tau cross her great great grandmother got from her grandfather. It has come through all ages of metal, and she clasps the cross in her hand".⁵³ Nancy's resentment, to put it mildly, is obvious. Her brandishing of the cross reminds one of the many uses the cross is put to, especially for exorcising ghosts and evil spirits which haunt the living. Koschin is not unaware of the spectacle when he asks: "What are we after, the so-called intelligentsia of this country, running like Paris after those foreign women....? Why are we unsatisfied with our own."⁵⁴ The allusion to Troy is important. It was Paris' flirtation and elopement

with Helen that caused the destruction of a whole town and its civilization. A similar catastrophe is to befall Somalia and Africa in general. The agents of this imminent danger is none other than the intelligentsia of the land.

Here, Koschin is not all alone. In "Movement Two", Koschin is visited by a Somali friend, Barre, who is married to an American, Mildred. Barre met with Mildred in Minnesota when he "was a participant in an AID course." But today, Barre comes to consult with Koschin about the next step he must take, since Mildred has left him and was spotted in the bathroom of a missionary. Barre can not claim to a high level of fidelity since he had had sex with Barbara, the American wife of his Somali friend, Mohamed. There is a kind of incestuous circle which Koschin does not condone. He also reminds Barre how he engaged the woman with the ruses men use to woo women. Echoing Soyinka's "...and The Other Immigrant" in which the first person narrator of the poem has his dignity "sewn/ Into the lining of a three piece suit"⁵⁵ he has rented, Koschin teases Barre doing the scene in which Barre similarly using the meagre scholarship allowance begs Mildred to marry him: "Why not now dear, why not now in this hired car, me in my borrowed suit and you in yours..."⁵⁶ Koschin's harsh words register his indignation with the way men, like Barre, bring Mildred's kind to their respective countries, only to let the poor woman fend for herself once the bitter reality hits home. In Barre's case, his dreams of rearing children were shattered when the doctors told him he could not have any. His story is that of a broken man unable to collect the pieces and embark on another journey. But

when Koschin answers, "I am afraid I can't" to Barre's question of why not fight the corrupt principal of his school, it then dawns on Barre that impotence has different forms. His verdict "The bear, for all its fur, feels absolutely cold, is that it?"⁵⁷ harkens on the title of the novel. Melancholic as ever, they sit silently smoking. The feeling of impotence in the novel bred by ideas which merely encumber action is a clear break with tradition.

Koschin continues to contemplate what advice he should have given Barre even after the latter has gone. Koschin also attempts to analyze the locus of their "complication": Barre is troubled by Mildred while he is scared to death of Nancy's arrival. Like existentialist characters in contemporary fiction, Koschin and his peers "give birth to thoughts that generate further thoughts, which in turn breed a further progeny of thought ad infinitum."⁵⁸ Their casuistry only culminates in generating a lack of action. Koschin's after thoughts end in desperate need for answers. His frustrations are directed inward. He sees the world in himself. Losing track of his identity, he interprets his problems as a microcosm of the social world. Unable to grasp reality, he walks around like a zombie:

I have been let loose on this city [Mogadiscio] by boredom-cum-fear, which to me is a personality tangible. Bored with life I am no doubt, but do I really know what life is-- or even what fear is, or what boredom is if I deal with each separately?"⁵⁹

Like the ostrich which hides its head in the sand in order to ignore a potential hazard, Koschin, as usual, runs away from reality.

He waits on the road again waiting for a cab to take him to down town Mogadishu. There are two women and a man with Koschin in the cab. The other passengers in the cab talk about a drought that has hit Kismayo, Koschin's home town.

Association of ideas affords Koschin an escape from reality. The conversation reminds him of his last trip to Kismayo. He went there to find his dying stepfather. Once in Kismayo, Koschin found Meyran, a former prostitute, who "had left Mogadiscio, determined never to return, made a home in Kismayo, where she worked the Port as a clerk/typist".⁶⁰ To prove that his compatriots in the text are afflicted with indecision Koschin succeeds in sleeping with Meyran who had vowed earlier not to lapse into her old profession. Koschin stayed at the Enrico Hotel, "the only decent hotel there". The Italian owner admires Chairman Mao Tse-tung, which prompts Koschin to ask the Italian".

-Come Mai ammiri questo uomo? [How come you admire this man?] To which the Hotel owner replies, "Troppo en gamba e un grande politicante del secolo" [(because) he is very smart and one of the greatest politicians of the century].⁶¹

Once in his room, Koschin hunts for his favorite novel of the year, *The Interpreters*; he browses it "trying to find passages on Sekoni". The journey motif here does not fit into the traditional mold where traveling entails the acquisition of new experience. Consistent with its plot, the journey motif in this novel has an important use, i.e., that of a diversionary role to enable the protagonist to indulge in his

quandary. Other than that, Koschin's journey to Kismayo does not demonstrate anything save his pedantic incursions. We are not, for example, given an opportunity to see what is in the hotel owner's mind when he, a member of the Italian settler-bourgeoise community in Somalia, admires, of all peoples, Mao Tse-tung.

The cab brings Koschin to his destination, at the Hotel Shebelle. He has to hike the rest of the distance to the school where he teaches-- which

is a hundred yards farther up, in the heart of a village, never constructed to attract an eye, even an elephant's. A beautiful building which is an oasis in the midst of that ugly wilderness of the city. It comprises sixteen classrooms in all, of which only ten are in proper use. It has neither a laboratory, nor a lavatory with running water. A fancy school."⁶²

The full quotation of this passage is intentional. It is through these words that Farah captures a reality he had lived. The taxi did not take him up-hill towards the school as that constituted not only an extra fare to be paid but that it meant waiting for another cab between two stands. So Farah would alight at the cabstand near Hotel Shebelle and walk the "hundred yards farther up". The school, Fifteenth May Secondary school, is still a popular one in the heart of a village which has gone some changes since the last time Farah was there.

His running battle with the Principal is also true to life. The latter had a great penchant for nubile girls. It is our contention that *A Naked Needle* is somewhat autobiographical in nature; and that it does not belong to the trilogy which comprises *Sweet and Sour Milk*,

Sardines and *Close Sesame* as suggested by E. R. Ewin.⁶³ These three books fall under the general title of "Variations in the Theme of an African Dictatorship". It will be difficult to speak of a trilogy if *A Naked Needle* was to be incorporated into the thread of the other books. And while one could really make a good case for the incorporation of the theme of *A Naked Needle* into a tetology which no one has so far touched upon, it is our contention that this book is a bridge between the first book *From A Crooked Rib* and the rest of the novels, especially *Maps* which, to my understanding, form the third phase or period of Farah.

It is however easy to locate the reason some critics might insist on proving a link. In the first book of the trilogy, *Sweet and Sour Milk*, the reader learns of Koschin's incarceration and torture. But one must bear in mind that if the re-appearance of a character in a subsequent novel validates the contention of "linkage" then a case could also be made for *From a Crooked Rib* to tie it up to the next four novels by Farah. Ebla, the protagonist of that first book re-appears in *A Naked Needle* as a successful shopkeeper and then emerges in the second book of the trilogy, *Sardines* as the worried and concerned mother of Sagal, the swimmer. If such an analysis is to be adopted, then the first five books will join to form a quintet.

And herein lies the ingenuity and craftsmanship of Farah. All his six novels to date cover a span of approximately half a century in Somali socio-political history. While the documentation of real or imagined events in the span of time could legitimately be taken to task, the fictional events and characters who dwell in the novels form a

concatenation of events in a chronological manner. In short, these novels could also be valued for their historiographical input: the history of Somalia as seen through the lenses of one of her most educated citizens. One must not forget, however, that Farah is a member of the petty bourgeoisie. As such his views are not impartial. Also, the medium of the transmission for his ideas widens the cleavage between his novels and his Somali audience.

Walking up hill towards the school, Koschin meets Mary whose "sophistications" are seen in the different ways her name is pronounced. Merriam belongs to sixteen or so girls with a sobriquet of "party-girls". She and Koschin met at Barbara and Mohamed's party. She never left him alone. When she learnt that he had written a thesis on Joyce, she told him of her spiritual affinity with "great men of old". She also told him that "*Finnegans Wake* is my night cap."⁶⁴ The allusion to Joyce and to *Finnegans Wake* is important in that it attempts to preempt the reader from associating the text with another Joycean text which calls for more than comparison. *A Naked Needle* resembles *Ulysses* in a number of ways. The most obvious resemblance lies in the span of a twenty four hour period each text delivers its message. Also, reminiscent of Joyce in *Ulysses*, Farah resorts to vulgar, street language in many occasions. There is no love lost between Koschin and Faduma, the maid, who cooks for him and three other men who "live within fifty meters of each other, who pool in and share a meal...."⁶⁵ Faduma's answer to his statement that his clock has stopped is in a case in point:

Mac Sokor, she says, sarcastic and bitter. I shall crawl into you one day, I swear, he says to himself, as he notices the way she is sitting, her legs one east, the other west.⁶⁶

In another instance Faduma uses the "F" word when "as he levels with her, he belches a paunchy Sikh's belch, and upon her behind is written for only Koschin to see: The Abomination of The Earth",⁶⁷ Koschin also calls Mildred, Barre's wife 'Butana' [a whore].

When Mary's structural importance to the plot appears utilized, Koschin tells her that he is late for school. Then a car which has come from uphill hoots at them. Mary now disappears and leaves the scene for Barbara to take him to her home. They stop at Koschin's school where he engages in a brief exchange of harsh words with the Principal. They then proceed to Barbara's house. Koschin is still oblivious as to the reason he was hijacked by Barbara. Each entertains a mutual dislike toward the other. Barbara came to Somalia two years ago with the expectation of reconciling her differences with her American husband, Baldwin. The effort petered out. Then she met with Mohamed in a drinking bout. Thus their marriage.

Koschin still does not understand why he is at Barbara's house. Despite their mutual dislike towards each other, they conduct some kind of discussion on a variety of subjects. Then Mohamed with a bleeding neck comes in. Barbara hands her daughter to Koschin, but her "Where is Nancy?" is answered with a thud on the floor. Again, Nancy's name disorients Koschin. His "I always called her Grave" reverberates in the text with an eerie feeling.⁶⁸ The way he and Nancy met in the first place could perhaps shed light on the nature of his

"Nancy-phobia". They met at a pub in England at the end of a month. Koschin, like Barre and Soyinka's narrator in the "Other Immigrant" "had just collected my monthly fortune of a scholarship allowance and my purse in the hip-pocket was bursting with pound notes".⁶⁹ Nancy was to meet her boyfriend to "decide on the fate of their friendship". The boyfriend never showed up. Koschin, on the other hand, had just terminated an affair with another woman. There was also a second woman who claimed to be pregnant by him. When she called from a telephone booth in Edinburgh, she, or rather "the instrument threatened, the instrument, mind you, for I can never distinguish voices of women, the instrument threatened...."⁷⁰ This quotation reminds one of Soyinka's "Telephone Conversation" in which the protagonist tries to rent a room over the phone.⁷¹ The landlady cannot tell the color of the caller. But when the protagonist tells her of his pigmentation, she abruptly terminates the conversation by telling the person on the other side of the receiver that there is no vacancy. Koschin's allusion to Soyinka's poem alters the racist rhetoric into a sexist one. The remark is consistent with his earlier remarks about Faduma, the maid, and Meyran, the ex-prostitute who moved to Kismayo, his hometown, near the Somali-Kenyan border.

Then Nancy shows up. His resentment is obvious. She is dressed "in a black nylon two-piece dress, and a dark jumper and dark shoes: and this...a pact with the darkness of death, my God!"⁷² The association of the color "black" with death is in a sharp break with its traditional symbolism. In Somali tradition, "white" is the symbol of

death. The subversion of the traditional use of color significance by Farah reveals the nature of his intended European audience.

Mohamed and Barbara serve lunch to the couple. After lunch, they are given a room to themselves. Nancy wastes no time, when she asks if Koschin loves her. True to his ambivalent character, Koschin responds with "I don't know". Nancy cries. To mollify her anger, he treats her to a walk around Mogadisco.

The subject of "movement: Five" is their promenade after lunch. He is a Cicerone, a tour guide. The first stop is the Arch of Victory near the airport. In all, he takes her to more than thirty one places of historical significance. The last leg of their tour takes them to the Tavola Calda owned by Xussein Kadare, author of *Waasuge iyo Warsame* in Chapter IV. The Tavola Calda now defunct was once a popular snack-bar in downtown Moagdisco. Koschin talks about Kadare's importance within the Somali language Commission. Koschin adores the revolution for its bravery in adopting a Somali script. "Hence, 21 October 1972 is the most important day in the Somali People's history".⁷³ They eat at the snack bar where Koschin has an account. That ends "movement: five".

The last Movement of the novel, six, starts with their alighting from a taxi. Nancy pays the fare. They come to the party thrown by Barni and her husband Dulmar, who is now re-appointed as ambassador. Dulmar asks Koschin about his plans after quitting his job. "I will trot around the globe for sometime,"⁷⁴ answers Koschin. And there begins Nuruddin's real itinerary, for he is still trotting the globe. There are a lot, if not most of the Somali elites at the party.

The party is comparable to an assembly of crooks who cut across gender and ideological lines. There is Ambera, a teacher trained "somewhere south of the Dixon line at a second rate religious institution." There is also the more flashy character, Xaali, whose ostentatious personality includes the flaunting of her degrees from Padova University in Italy. Then there is Bulxan, a political scientist and a potential candidate for General Secretary of the Somali Socialist Party. The man has bandages all over his legs and feet. His confessions as to the nature of his "ailment" could send shudders in one's spinal cord: "My dozen pairs of socks, all of them, were dirty. I washed them this afternoon. They wouldn't dry in time and I so much wanted to come to the party. So!"⁷⁵ So much for honesty and integrity, if these were necessary qualities for the post. There is also Amxad, (a bastard, as is his name which is the bastard form of Axmad). He is a graduate of Lumumba University in Moscow. Amxad is an atheist in a sea of believers. His heterodoxy is predicated on his attendance of the famous Russian school for Africans. Nor does Amxad entertain any sense of decency as he is a man who would borrow some money to have his advertisement for himself appear in the *Corriere Della Somalia*. The depictions of the last two characters transcend their fictional lives in the world of the novel.

At the time of the writing of *A Naked Needle*, Somalia was supposed to be on a socialist road to complete emancipation. The Supreme Revolutionary Council created what they called "Public Relations Office" of the Council. Later that name metamorphosed to "Xafiiska Siyaasadda Madaxtooyada GSK" (Political office of the SRC

Presidency). Cadres were sent to East European countries. People who had never had an opportunity to read, let alone understand, Marxism began professing Marxist-Leninist ideology overnight. Before long, *Hantiwadaagga Cilmiga Ku-dhisan* (Scientific Socialism) became more than a fad among city dwellers, genuine intellectuals and quacks of all shades. The sifting process was itself faulted in that it did not become possible for it to develop an apparatus which could separate the chaff from the seed. It is that first false step which begat people like Bulxan and Amxad. The type these last characters represent has frustrated and at times foiled the aspirations of the few sound and genuine socialists in the midst of that desolate strip of land. As the saying goes "one bad fruit is able to rot a whole group". It is the sign of failure which stands the test of time. That this is so, is manifest in *A Naked Needle*. The cream either did not attend the party or Koschin was only able to spot the worst of them.

It is past 3 am and Nancy and Koschin walk home. The streets of the town are abandoned at that early hour of the morning save for a police patrol car which stops them for identification purposes. They continue their hike until somewhere near the Kenyan Embassy they find Barbara and Mohamed by the side of the road. Their car had died on them. Eight uniformed men on their way to work at the Milk Factory help them start the car. Nancy and Koschin also ride in to cover the remaining distance. But the Kenyan Embassy was located across Tre piano, their second stop at the beginning of their tour. The Arch of Victory, their first stop is a few yards away. Thus his tour guide

has come to less than its full circle. Also the tour has taken place within a twenty four hour period.

Koschin's cubicle, a shack of a house, is dark for there is a power outage. They enter the room. Everything in the room is in topsy-turvy condition. They go to bed, amidst the squalor, and when Koschin tickles her we are told that "She giggles, almost a whore's giggle".⁷⁶ "Sleep well" they say to each other.

A Naked Needle marks a sharp break with tradition both in terms of content and form. The two cannot be separated, for the kind of information the novelist imparts is closely linked to the mode of its dissemination. *A Naked Needle* utilizes a stream of consciousness technique to deal with contemporary Somali society. Opposing political views within Somali society are evaluated in terms of the consciousness of Koschin. It is our contention here that such an evaluation would fall short of aiming at a cross section of Somali society. The absence of an evaluation which caters to and emanates from a consensus is not depreciative of the author's authentic interpretation of reality from a specific historico-political background. A case in point is the fourteenth stop in Movement Five in which Koschin is a Cicerone to Nancy. They come to the statue of Xawo Tacco, near the National Theater. Koschin gives this explanation of the lady of the statue, "She was in the Jihaad against the Italian infidels and a Somali whose son is now a governor of a region, hit her. The arrow was poisoned, and she died of it".⁷⁷

The Jihaad against colonialism is a theme that is absent in Somali fiction writing. The reasons are obvious. As we explained in

Chapter three, each sub-culture in Somalia developed its own version of the struggle for independence. It becomes obvious then that Koschin and the man alleged to have killed Xawo Tacco hail from two different sub-cultures. In order to avoid the sowing of hatred among the people, creative writers in Somali refrain from confining their fictional world of the independence era, "To the limits of an individual mind and assessing value solely in terms of the consciousness of that mind."⁷⁸

Neither do they create in their works a character such as Koschin who denigrates the role of women who participated in the struggle for Somali independence. Koschin meets Warsame who works for the security branch and his brother Bulxan at the party in "Movement: Six". The reader is told that the two men's mother had been a staunch supporter of the Somali Youth League (SYL), an organization credited for its role in the independence movement. Bulxan, the namesake of the potential candidate to the secretaryship of the Somali Socialist Party, is born out of wedlock. "Hence the nickname 'Son of League'.⁷⁹ The allusion is to the moral turpitude and flaccid character of women freedom fighters. Such a characterization in a Somali language work is inconceivable because it challenges the Somali national belief in the independence movement. It is only in the consciousness of a Koschin that such portrayal is possible.

The greatest break with tradition reaches its crescendo in the following quotation where the toilet reminds Koschin of Somalia:

Somalia is a big sandy toilet, Nancy, with children lined up, squatting, defecating, their mothers watching, blessing,

praying to God that He may help the little ones ease their bowels, defecate for constipation is of daily occurrence here.⁸⁰

This image is directly opposite to the one employed by traditional and contemporary men of letters in Somalia. In traditional Somali lore, the country, Somalia, is spoken of as a She-camel *Maandeeq* (the one who gratifies the mind).⁸¹ When the same country is described in such derogatory and insulting manner, then the shifting paradigm tells the rest of the story. Once again, a colonial epithet is accentuated in the cosmopolitan work of a native son. Thus Farah seems to be consciously rebelling against or challenging Somali culture and tradition.

The lack of concern for tradition is not the only characteristic which weakens the links Farah's works might have had with Somali literature. By using a foreign language, he has isolated himself from his own culture. Nonetheless, Farah has made and will continue to make an important contribution to Somali literature, or at the very least to the European view of Somalia. Many of his literary techniques and social insights can be of great use. However, his influence will not prevent a Somali literature from continuing to develop.

The Somalis are one of possibly two nations in Africa who can lay claim to a homogeneity of any sort. They share a common language, religion and tradition. The existence of a shared language erases the need for a European lingua franca. Thus the absence in the Somali context of what Ali Mazrui calls "vertical cultural dualism". The Somali's pride in his language is beyond parallel. European

languages are not accorded any special importance; as a famous Somali song claims "Knowing a foreign language does not constitute knowledge in any epistemological sense".

It becomes imperative then for the Somali language to develop and satisfy the needs of its users. In Somali oral literature, poetry has fulfilled the Horatian elements of entertainment and instruction. In the written prose fiction, the language has enabled its user to expand and experiment with relative ease. It is in this context that the language becomes flexible enough to accommodate both tradition and individual talent. This accommodation coupled with the sharp breaks with tradition which separates or isolates Farah's works, plus the absence of vertical cultural dualism, will enhance the future importance of fiction in Somali language. The expansion of this fiction creates a trampoline for what could be termed "a wave for the future". This wave stunts the growth of fiction in European languages, thus the anomalous nature of Farah's works. For more than twenty years he has enjoyed a reputation as the only Somali novelist in English. But even the emergence of other novelists in European languages will not cause the downfall of the new crop of writers in Somali. Our rich culture and language make these new writers the inevitable speakers for the future of Somali.

¹Nuruddin Farah, *From A Crooked Rib* (London: Heinemann, 1970). Press, 1982), p. 5f.

Almost all Somali poets describe the country as a she-camel who satisfies the mind. See Axmed Cali Abokor, *The Camel In Somali Oral Traditions*, Translated by Axmed Arten Xange (Uppsala: Somali Accademy of Sciences and Arts in cooperation with the Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1987).

²*From A Crooked Rib*, p. 6.

³Nuruddin Farah, *Sardines* (London: Allison and Busby, 1981). The father of Sagal's child is a London-born black man of Barbados parentage.

⁴*From A Crooked Rib*, p. 4.

⁵*Ibid.*

⁶Nuruddin Farah, *Sweet and Sour Milk* (London: Allison and Busby, 1979), p. 15.

⁷*From a Crooked Rib*, p. 9.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 18

¹⁰Faarax M. J. Cawl, *Ignorance Is the Enemy of Love*, trans. Andrzejewski (London: Zed

¹¹*From A Crooked Rib*, p. 36.

¹²Nuruddin Farah, *Maps* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), p. 67.

¹³*From a Crooked Rib*, p. 84.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 85.

¹⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁶Nuruddin Farah, *A Naked Needle* (London: Heinemann, 1976), p. 32.

¹⁷*From A Crooked Rib*, p. 88.

¹⁸Chinua Achebe, *No Longer At Ease* (London: Heinemann, 1960).

¹⁹*From A Crooked Rib*, p. 97.

²⁰*Ibid.*

²¹*Ibid.*, ["Ho mio moglie. Ma Non Voglio Distruggiare la mia vita per una donna."] p.110

²²*Ibid.*, p. 113.

²³Nuruddin Farah told me when we met at Michigan State University in East Lansing, March, 1989, for a conference on the upcoming book, *Islam in Sub-Saharan African Literature* that the Sicilian proverb comes from Robert Graves' *I, Claudias*.

²⁴*From A Crooked Rib*, p. 145.

²⁵*Ibid.*, p. 148.

²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 151.

²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 153.

²⁸Nuruddin Farah, *Maps*. Askar is the protagonist of the novel.

²⁹*From A Crooked Rib*, p. 156

³⁰*Ibid.*, p. 160.

³¹*Ibid.*

³²*Ibid.*, p. 162.

³³*Ibid.*, p. 163.

³⁴*Ibid.*, p. 173.

³⁵*Ibid.*

³⁶*Ibid.*, p. 175.

³⁷*Ibid.*, p. 179.

³⁸*Ibid.*

³⁹Even though the novel was published in 1976, its manuscript form was finished by 1972—almost two years after the military take-over. And while it may be easy to become wise after the event, the same cannot be said of an author trying to capture the essence of a forming and inchoate feeling.

- 40 *A Naked Needle*, p. 6.
41 *Ibid.*
42 *Ibid.*, p. 93.
43 *Ibid.*, p. 151.
44 Quoted in Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice* (London: Methuen, 1980), p. 60.
45 *Critical Practice*, p. 74.
46 Rene Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1949), p. 229.
47 *A Naked Needle*, p. 3.
48 *From a Crooked Rib*, p. 160.
49 Ayikwei Armah, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (London: Heinemann, 1969), p. 3.
50 *A Naked Needle*, p. 19.
51 *Ibid.*, p. 5.
52 *Ibid.*, p. 6.
53 *Ibid.*, p. 76.
54 *Ibid.*, p. 42.
55 Wole Soyinka, "...and the Other Immigrant".
56 *A Naked Needle*, p. 35.
57 *Ibid.*, p. 40.
58 Charles I. Glicksberg, *The Literature of Commitment* (Cranbury, N. J: Associated University Press, 1976), p. 14.
59 *A Naked Needle*, p. 42.
60 *Ibid.*, p. 475.
61 *Ibid.*, p. 46.
62 *Ibid.*, p. 51.
63 E. R. Ewin, "Nuruddin Farah" in G. D. Killam (ed.), *The Writing of East and Central Africa* (London: Heinemann, 1984), p. 196.
64 *A Naked Needle*, p. 52.
65 *Ibid.*, p. 8.
66 *Ibid.*, p. 6.
67 *Ibid.*, p. 20.
68 *Ibid.*, p. 73.
69 *Ibid.*, p. 74.
70 *Ibid.*, p. 75.
71 Wole Soyinka, "Telephone Conversation", in John Reed and Clive Wake (eds.), *A Book of African Verse* (London: Heinemann, 1964), p. 20.
72 *A Naked Needle*, p. 78.
73 *Ibid.*, p. 120.
74 *Ibid.*, p. 131.
75 *Ibid.*, p. 137.
76 *Ibid.*, p. 180.
77 *Ibid.*, p. 104.

- 78 David Daiches, *The Novel and the Modern World*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1940), p. 9.
79 *A Naked Needle*, p. 169.
80 *Ibid.*, p. 11.
81 Almost all Somali poets describe the country as a she-camel who satisfies the mind. See Axmed Cali Abokor, *The Camel In Somali Oral Traditions*, Translated by Axmed Arten Xange (Uppsala: Somali Academy of Sciences and Arts in cooperation with the Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1987).

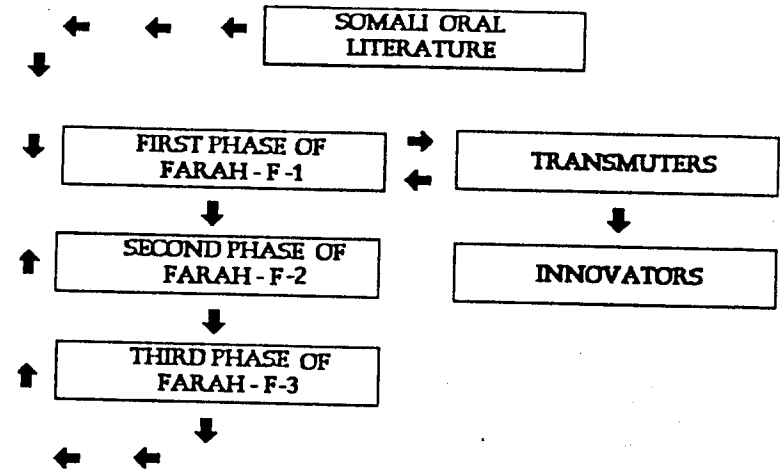
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

All writers begin with the literary tradition they inherit, no matter what they do to it, and they write for an audience educated to respond in particular ways. What is significant about the first novels is that writers used materials and techniques from older literary forms to provoke new kinds of responses. Later in the genre's development, when the audience knew how to respond in the new way, elements from more traditional kinds of literature generally disappeared, and earlier novels became the chief influence on new works. Literature radically now takes a while to be accepted or even understood, since an audience must have some degree of preparedness in the reading process, and even though the earliest novels offered something very new, they did so in a way that seemed neither radical nor upsetting because of this manipulation of traditional elements.

Ira Konigsberg, *Narrative Technique in the English Novel: Defoe to Austen*

Throughout this study I have attempted to put into perspective the place of contemporary Somali written fiction and the first two novels of Nuruddin Farah vis-a-vis Somali pre-colonial literary tradition. I have argued that Somali oral tradition gives birth to a bifurcated development: the transmuter group of writers and, what I call, the first period of Nuruddin Farah, or F1. This phase is represented by Farah's first novel, *From a Crooked Rib*. Schematically, the process of the bifurcated development will appear something like this:



There is a somewhat close kinship between the first offshoot of the development F1 and the transmuters. As I have argued in (Chapter V), *From a Crooked Rib* fulfills the plot line of a traditional narrative, especially in terms of its didactic pronouncement. The protagonist of the novel, Ebla, defies and consciously rebels against patriarchy. Twice she "votes" with her feet, until she finds a home in Mogadishu, the Somali capital. Her tenacity to hold onto life under some adverse conditions pays off, but not until she breaks free of the hold of patriarchy (by consummating a polyandry).

There is one residue of patriarchy, however, that Ebla can not shake off--the curse her grandfather hurled at her before his death

which, it is alluded, had been caused by her departure from the homestead. His "may you mother many a bastard" haunts her more than once.¹ It is, in this respect, that the novel conforms to a tradition of Somali storytelling. In Somali oral literature, children are exhorted to heed their parents' words and wishes. By refusing to accept her grandfather's choice of husband, Ebla, although she successfully charts her way to a middle class life, has been caught up by the grandfather's curse. She is raped by Awill before a real marriage takes place. And while rape is rape whether it takes place before, during or after a marriage, Ebla's case is all the more aggravated by the Islamic values within which the curse functions. The offspring conceived in that act is considered an illegitimate by Islamic values. The fact that Awill marries her after the rape is of less importance; the grandfather's curse has been vindicated.

From a Crooked Rib has also some artistic affiliations with the oral literature. The role of the omniscient narrator closely resembles that of tradition. Authorial intervention, like the ever present voice of the traditional performer, contradicts the ideas and actions of the protagonist. This contradiction, which sometimes takes the form of passing value judgments on the deeds of a protagonist, has a parallel in the stories under discussion in Chapter IV. This resemblance, I have argued, is occasioned by Farah's double allegiance to the oral tradition and to the character of the transition novel. I interpret *From a Crooked Rib* as a transition novel, in the sense that it is the first novel in English by a Somali.

The close resemblance of *From a Crooked Rib* to Somali oral literature fades away with Farah's second novel, *A Naked Needle*. This novel is a product of the second phase of Farah or F2. Here, formal and content links to Somali oral literature are severed. Farah experiments with a stream of consciousness writing that closely resembles James Joyce's technique in *Ulysses*. The division of *A Naked Needle* into movements, rather than chapters, demonstrates the fluidity and volatility of the concepts explored. Contrary to the dominance of action in traditional Somali literature, inaction, in the form of waiving, characterizes *A Naked Needle*. The movements, in this sense, serve a structural function in the novel. They help the protagonist to prolong his procrastinations about metaphysical and existential questions which nag him for concrete and immediate solutions.

The narrative structure of *A Naked Needle* is important in another way. Through the protagonist's vacillations, we are presented with a lot of problems which plague the modern Somali polity. These are burning issues which galvanize the community. It is, perhaps, because of the nature and weight of the problems raised in *A Naked Needle* that the author has decided to break out of traditional narrative modes as exemplified by the first novel, *From a Crooked Rib*. This subversion of traditional narrative modes allow the author to test the durability and depth of the Somali shared code of reference. This testing is important in that it focuses on the urban dweller. The town (as illustrated in Chapter III) is a common ground for people from different sub-cultures. A sub-culture, as explained in that same

chapter, refers to a mode of perceiving reality from the standpoint of a specific clan in the clan-raked social fabric of the Somali. Farah, in this novel, manages to turn Somali socio-political and historical life inside out, and the novel genre allows him to conduct a critique of the assumed 'common consciousness' of the Somali. Farah's critique is helped by the traditional role of the town and, to use Ian Watt's words of nascent individualism in 'the rise of the novel'.³

The absence of a shared code of reference in towns breeds a need to focus on the trials and triumphs of the individual. Like the English novel in the eighteenth century, *A Naked Needle* employs a first person narration to accentuate the cutting edge of a budding individualism. *From a Crooked Rib*, on the other hand, employs a third-person narration thereby showing its allegiance to tradition. *A Naked Needle*, therefore, shows Farah as an urban *griot*, *par excellence*. His depictions of Mogadishu, the Somali capital, after the 1969 military take-over is, whether one agrees with him or not, beyond parallel in any literature on the town. His portrayal of urban characters delves into the essence and psyche of the elites who participated in the unfolding of events before and after the coup. *A Naked Needle* can lay claim, at least in its description of post 1969 Somali socio-political events, to its share of Engel's encomium for Balzac's *The Human Condition*: "That complete history of French society from which, even in economic details, I have learned more than from all the professional historians, economists, and statisticians of the period put together."⁴ It is perhaps the protagonist's lack of fixed principle[s] that helped the author present a whole gamut of human emotions.

On a different level, *A Naked Needle* shows Farah as a cosmopolitan writer. Farah's blending of many elements of foreign literatures at times enhances his break with Somali tradition, including that of the urban center. Farah's depiction of the country as 'a sandy toilet' is in conflict with the she-camel image, *Maandeeq* (the one who gratifies the mind) employed by Somali literary figures.⁵ Also, Farah subverts the cultural connotation of the color 'black' in Somali tradition.⁶ Farah uses 'black' as a symbol to signify death, (Chapter V). To explain these points, so as to set the record straight, is important, because with Farah's writing "Somali literature" enters the international market. I put "Somali literature" in quotes to reflect my basic agreement with Jorge C. Bocobo's statement: "The great Filipino novel, or the great Filipino drama, or the great Filipino poem, will not be in English; it will be in one of the Filipino languages."⁷ These words apply, *mutatis Mutandis*, to the Somali novel, drama, or poem.

To the second phase of Farah also belongs his trilogy which I did not touch upon for lack of space and time. These three novels, *Sweet and Sour Milk, Sardines*, and *Close Sesame*, pick with clarity, the socio-analysis of the post-1969 Somali society—, where *A Naked Needle* left the topic. The books are grouped under the general rubric of "Variations on the theme of an African Dictatorship."

Also, not discussed for the same reasons is the third phase of Farah or F3. To this period belongs Farah's latest novel, *Maps*. With this novel, the author, returns in a round about way to Somali tradition. The question of *Maps* in the delineation of colonially-created boundaries is important to the Somalis and to the rest of the

nationalities in the Horn of Africa. His description of 'atmospheric spirits' roaming in the Horn reflect the Somali concept of the assumed movements of 'dead souls' in pursuit of vengeance.⁸ But the 'return to the source', to use Amilcar Cabral's words, does not imply a complete and primordial visit to tradition in two ways.⁹ First, the source or tradition is not a static thing that is immune to change. Secondly, neither is the coming back a complete espousal of tradition. In short, a mutual undermining of the source by the returnee, and vice versa is implied.

The other component of the bifurcated development of Somali oral literature gives birth to the transmuter group of writers. This group (as illustrated Chapter IV) reveals a strong kinship to Somali oral literature. The language factor, (they use Somali), cements their relationship with tradition, especially since their works represent a transition between orature and written forms. Written literature by these authors incorporates aspects of traditional literature. These aspects, as shown in Chapter II, include poetry, proverbs, and some elements of narrative structure including plot (journey motif), characterization, and intervention of dialogue. As illustrated in Chapters I and IV, the incorporation of aspects of traditional literature does not breed stasis in the written forms. This is true because of the nature of Somali language which takes into consideration Norrman and Haarberg's observation of the dual role of language: malleability and stability.¹⁰ The first allows the author to take to heart the Somali understanding of language as sinew. Even though languages possess stable elements in their disposition of vertical and horizontal

meanings, it is the malleability factor which enables the language user to experiment and play with words. It is because of this possibility that the transmuter group have managed to write transitional novels. Ira Konigsberg illustrates the common denominator that transitional authors share: "What is significant about the first novels is that writers used materials and techniques from older literary forms to provoke new kinds of responses."¹¹ The successful use of 'techniques from older literary forms' to initiate new ways of perceiving reality is facilitated by the existence of centripetal and centrifugal forces in tradition. The first maintains a gravitational pull which ensures a continuum to tradition. The second allows room for improvement by minimizing the stifling effects of tradition. To further ensure the dialectic nature of these two forces, there will come a time when "earlier novels [become] chief influences on new works."¹²

In Somali written literature, the transmuter group give way to the innovators who contribute to the experiment of novel writing in Somali. The ranks of this group is continually swollen by the influx of new college graduates. I have not discussed the creative output of this group for one reason: they are twice removed from the oral literature on which I am basing my thesis, viz., the need for a diachronic analysis to examine the existence of common grounds between Somali oral and written literatures. The innovator's works take their point of reference from the oral literature, the transmuter works and from their modern educational background. Being relatively better educated than their transmuter counterparts, the innovators pose new problems. The question of craft sometimes alienates them from the newly literate.

Even though they share a code of reference with the urban culture, the absence, for example, of a direct sequential form of story-telling in the works of the innovators can put a lot of readers at a disadvantage. The effects of some of these disadvantages can be gauged by the publication of *Maana Faay*, the first novel work in the Somali language that is worth the name.¹³ I remember many newly literate Somalis struggling with the techniques of retrospection and interior monologues in *Maana Faay* and in other works by innovators. *Maana Faay* came out in 1980 after it was serialized in the nation's only newspaper, *Xiddigta Oktoobar* (October Star).

Maana Faay is the story of love which compels the eponymous heroine to undergo an undepictable ordeal. Her problems emanate from a rigid culture which denies the individual the right to choose her own partner in life. This is the Xamari culture, for the setting of the story is Xamar, the indigenous name for Mogadishu, the Somali capital. Maana Faay's father, Xaaji Muumin, like the rest of his peers in the old quarters of the town, believes that a deserted custom brings forth the wrath of Allah. He wants to give his daughter's hand to his nephew, Ikar, in marriage. This is an arranged marriage which takes so many socio-economic questions into account. The two brothers, Xaaji Muumin and Aw Mukhtaar, agreed at the time of their father's death not to share out their inheritance. The arranged marriages in which Maana Faay marries Ikar, and Maana's brother marries Ikar's sister, is a form of securing the family tie and ensuring that the family's wealth stays with the children.

But Maana Faay is in love with an engineer called Axmed Jaamac whom she had come to know through a girl friend, Sahra Yuusuf, who also happens to be the engineer's cousin. Maana's father does not know this. Nor is he the kind of father who bothers himself to know the feelings of his daughter. Yet, the daughter is on the verge of defying her father and all that he stands for. Conspicuous is the gap between the generations. A filial bond is crumbling to ashes. This is the essence of the story, the theme, so to say.

Thus begins a long and arduous journey for both Maana Faay and Axmed Jaamac. She gets thrown out of her father's house. Axmed, on the other hand, is encouraged by his cousin, Sahra, to marry Maana. His mother, Cambara Cali Dhoof, who does not know of her son's private life is only interested in seeing him become a father in her life time. All the odds are in his favor, or, so it seems. His father, Jaamac Dhegey, is a manager of a parastatal agency. He is an upstart who cannot adjust himself to his new status. Women, wine and *qat* (A chewing substance that is like a mild form of "speed") are his favorite "items" to kill the time. The author, in his depiction of the manager, is venting his anger against a system which produces characters like Jaamac en masse. *Maana Faay* was published almost at the same time as that of Farah's *Sweet and Sour Milk*. The early gains of the 1969 military coup have by this time gone sour. The true color of the Supreme Revolutionary Council was revealed. Clanism and nepotism re-surfaced with a vengeance. Jaamac Dhegey, the manager, is but a manifestation of the deterioration of the Somali body politic.

To indulge in his vices, Jaamac Dhegey needs a number of accomplices—that is besides the system which has created him. Beydan Shabeel runs a brothel for big shots in Mogadishu. Her situation is indicative of the cancerous stage of the crucial problems of urbanization. Her anger against the society of men who run the state machinery is revealed in her willingness to procure Maana for Jaamac's pleasures. Beydan, the procuress, knows all the details about Maana's love for Jamac's son. She wants to settle a score with the "Don Juan". One is reminded of the words of the deformed in Shakespeare's "Richard III", who swore to be in the company of the devil just to avenge his deformity. The deformed's anger is directed towards God; Beydan's at a socio-political system created by men.

Beydan lays in wait for the opportunity to get back at Jaamac's ilk. Then one day, Maana Faay has a fight with Axmed. Taking advantage of Maana's situation, Beydan, the procuress, persuades her to come and live in the Green Villa which, incidently, belongs to Jaamac's agency. It is reserved for clandestine and illicit purposes. When Jaamac comes to the Green Villa and finds Maana there, he believes that the procuress has her mission accomplished. But Beydan never told the poor girl what to expect.

Night falls and as Jaamac is about to "devour" the unsuspecting girl, the procuress shows up. She demands more money from Jaamac. He refuses. She, the procuress, goes to Jaamac's wife and tells her all there is to tell. The two women come to the Green Villa. The wife fights with Jaamac, her husband. The scene they create attracts a lot of

spectators, including their son. Axmed and Maana hug each other. Their marriage is implied. And the saga of the town girl ends there.

As shown in Chapters IV and V, arranged marriages bring untold misery to women in Somalia. Cawl's protagonist, Cawralla in *Ignorance Is the Enemy of Love* dies, in part, from the effects of a forced marriage. Farah's Ebla in *From a Crooked Rib* manages to flee (from disaster) in time. And Afrax's Maana is saved from the cruelty of such a marriage. Yet, what is interesting about the saga of the three women is the difference in their social and economic status. Ebla is an illiterate nomadic girl who, apparently as an orphan, comes from a poor background. Cawralla is semi-literate in Arabic and straddles two different modes of living. She lives in a small village in the interior, but she has visited the town of Aden in Yemen. Maana has never been to a nomadic setting. She belongs to a Xamari culture which is urban and middle class. Yet, she shares with these unlucky ones a problem of immense magnitude. The first two women, Cawralla and Ebla, are given to men in exchange for wealth. Both marriages are exogamous. Maana's arranged marriage is meant to perpetuate a family name that basks in enclosure. Her marriage is endogamous, nay incestuous. The forms of the marriages may be different, but their content is similar: the imposition of parents' wishes on their daughters, even if it means the death of the girl.

The novels of the innovators, of which *Maana Faay* is an example, pose some problems to the critic. The debate over language comes to the fore. It seems that language is not the only thing which separates a writer from his/her audience. While newly literate

Somalis can and do read these novels, their total comprehension of the plot may not be that easy. *Maana Faay*, on certain occasions, uses retrospection. An audience which is not accustomed to this technique finds itself at a loss in grasping the story. Here then is the re-emergence, albeit in a different form, of a problem that Nigerian Critic, Obi Wali, long ago formulated with regard to the African novel in English.¹⁴ Wali's consternation with the African novel in European languages was its perpetuation of the cleavage between the elites and the majority non-elite. Wali's fear of the esoteric/demotic paradigm created by the African novel in a foreign language is now ironically reappearing in the form of the novel in African languages. And while the future is bright for the Somali novel, the fear that an author's deceptive use of language will enhance his/her being separated from the reading public by genre, and not by language looms large. The fear is all the more made real when one remembers of George N. Sfeir's comment on the Arabic novel:

"The generation of the experimentalists and innovators of the decades following World War I were succeeded in the forties and fifties by a new breed of writers—writers who were more sophisticated in their approaches to the social problems of their time and broader in their interests. Unlike their predecessors, these writers lacked a common cause and did not form a single group or school."¹⁵

The innovator group in Somalia will eventually give way to another group. This group will, perhaps, find an opportunity in the fragmentations of the Somali body politic to create or stage the appearance of *A Naked Needle* in Somali. Historical events are always hard to predict. But if Nuruddin Farah and contemporary Somali tradition were able to embrace in *Maps*, there is no telling what the future holds for written Somali prose fiction.

¹Nuruddin Farah, *From a Crooked Rib* (London: Heinemann, 1970), p. 6.

²Frank Kermode, *The Art of Telling: Essays on Fiction*, (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 64.

³Ian Watt, *The Rise of The Novel* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1957).

⁴Karl Marx and F. Engels, *Literature and Art: Selections from their Writings* (New York, 1947), p. 43.

⁵Nuruddin Farah, *A Naked Needle*, (London: Heinemann, 1976), p.11 (cf.) the depiction of the country as a she-camel by Somali poets in Axmed Cali Abokor, *The Camel in Somali Oral Traditions*.

⁶Nuruddin Farah, *A Naked Needle* (London: Heinemann, 1976), p. 78.

⁷Quoted in N. V. M. Gonzalez, "The Filipino and the Novel," in Henri Peyre (ed.), *Fiction in Several Languages* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968), p. 22.

⁸Ali Jimale Ahmed, "Literature and Politics in the Horn of Africa: An Overview," *ACAS Bulletin* 22 (Spring 1988), p.35.

⁹Amilcar Cabral, *Return to the Source*, (New York: Monthly Review Press); Also Ali Jimale Ahmed, "Editorial", *Ufahamu* 16, 3 (1988):2.

¹⁰Ralf Norrman and John Haarberg, *Nature and Language: A Semiotic Study of Cucurbits in Literature* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), p. 6.

¹¹Ira Konigsberg, *Narrative Technique in the English Novel: Defoe to Austin* (Hamden, Ct.: Archon Books, 1985), p. 1.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Maxamed Daahir Afrax, *Maana Faay* (Mogadishu, 1981).

¹⁴Obiajunwa Wali, "The Dead-end of African Literature?" *Transition* 3, 10 (1963):14.

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