

# GABAY-ḤAYIR: A SOMALI MOCK HEROIC SONG<sup>1</sup>

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## I

The country teems with ‘poets’ . . . every man has his recognized position in literature as accurately defined as though he had been reviewed in a century of magazines—the fine ear of this people causing them to take the greatest pleasure in harmonious sounds and poetic expressions, whereas a false quantity or prosaic phrase excites their violent indignation . . . Every chief in the country must have a panegyric to be sung by his clan, and the great patronize light literature by keeping a poet.<sup>2</sup>

So wrote the romantic, eccentric British explorer, Sir Richard Burton, in the 1850s from the Somali coast of Zayla<sup>c</sup>. Burton’s comment was prompted by a desire to share with his countrymen what he thought to be a “strange” phenomenon, notably, that an unwritten language “should so abound in poetry and eloquence.” Burton’s expression of astonishment in finding the unlettered Somalis in possession of developed literature reflects a widespread, if complacent, assumption especially in the West, equating literature and literary perfection with writing. Yet contemporary students of literature would tell us that the “connection”<sup>3</sup> between writing and literature is “actually accidental,” and belongs “only to a secondary phase in the history of literature.”

Burton, however, has validly noted the prominent place occupied by poetry among the pastoral Somalis; for poetic oratory and pastoralism tend to dominate the Somali sociopolitical system and few students of Somali culture and history have failed to observe the salience of these two themes in the social institutions of the Somali pastoralists. The works of such scholars as M. Maino,<sup>4</sup> Margaret Laurence,<sup>5</sup> and B. W. Andrzejewski and I. M. Lewis<sup>6</sup> have confirmed Burton’s assessment of the importance of oral poetry for the social milieu of the Somalis. These authors refer to the Somalis as a “nation of bards.” Their appraisal is echoed by Somali commentators on numerous occasions, most notably by the late president of the Republic, Dr. ‘Abdirashiid ‘Ali Shermarke, who spoke of his countrymen’s lyric verse as “one of the two national assets of inestimable value.”<sup>7</sup> The other asset the president had in mind was Islam and in putting poetry on the same

level of importance, the president paid no small recognition to his country's poetic heritage.

If not also a nation of nomads, the Somalis are a nation in which nomadic pastoralism plays a dominant role in the life of the people. Not only do more than half of the Somali people still continue to pursue pastoralism as the chief mode of economy but urbanized nomads dominate the modern state.<sup>8</sup> They form the class of people who, for want of a better term, we may propose to call "the transitional generation": former nomads who have migrated to the urban centers in the last thirty years and taken over control of government from the departing expatriates in the wake of decolonization. Although bred by the countryside and essentially pastoral in culture, the transitional generation, nevertheless, has a commanding place in the economy and the civil service. Despite the ring of incongruity in the phrase, the long-urbanized Benaadiris—who resent the supremacy of the recently arrived pastoralists—complain of the "nation's nomadic bureaucracy."<sup>9</sup>

## II

With a measure of precision and articulateness that often astonishes literary academics, the pastoral Somalis cultivate their oral poetry and classify it into a precise range of forms and genres. The technical term for poetry in Somali is *Maanso*, although *Gabay*, a less adequate word referring to only one popular form of *Maanso*, is more commonly used. The pastoralists classify their *Maanso* verse into at least six forms, each of which has a particular name and definite melody to which it is chanted or recited. The six forms of *Maanso* are *Gabay*, *Geeraar*, *Jiifto*, *Weeglo*, *Guuraw* and *Buraambur*.<sup>10</sup> The criteria for classifying the six types of poetry into distinct forms emanate not only from melodic variations but also from variations in theme. The pastoral Somalis also classify their *Maanso* verse by genre and identify by name at least fifteen divergent themes that a poet may treat in his work.

*Form* and *genre*, in ordinary as well as literary usage, are confusing terms; and, hence, it may be helpful to define the sense in which the terms are used in this essay. Briefly, I speak of *form* to refer to the manner in which a poem is composed—its word arrangement—as distinct from what the poem is about. *Genre* is used to indicate the substance, subject matter, content, or theme of a poem, as opposed to its style. Thus, in relation to form, namely, the six-part division, we speak of such things as rhythm, balance (Miizaan), alliteration, syllabic arrangement, and the

diction of the language employed. In relation to genre, we are referring to the thought or theme of the poem. Form and theme are thus independent of each other and, theoretically, any form may be used as a vehicle for the treatment of any theme. In practice, however, certain forms tend to give expression to certain themes. The *Geeraar* form, for example, has been called the “war song.”<sup>11</sup>

The table provides a graphic representation to further elucidate the categorization by form and by theme that Somalis note in their verse. As indicated in the table, the singer of Gabay-Ḥayir seeks comic effect by combining formal and elevated language with a trivial subject. The mock poem is therefore an artful imitation that derives its appeal from mimicking something “majestic,” describing, in heroic terms, a series of low incidents and nonheroic actions. In so doing, the mock singer provides his audience with comic relief, giving the nomad, as one author put it, “a moment of respite from his bleak and demanding environment.”<sup>12</sup> The imitator attempts to reproduce sounds, syllables, and accents very similar to those of a classical poem. In almost every aspect, then, the imitation poem becomes identical to the original work of great standing except for its trivial theme. If, for example, the original poet treated the experience of a harrowing war campaign, the second poet may treat the harrowing experience of satisfying his sensuous passions. Similarly, if the first poet treated in his work the beauty and merits of the daughters of a noble lineage, the burlesquer adopts the high style of this work to treat sarcastically the “worthy” daughters of an outcaste clan. The humor and mirth resulting from the incongruous analogy in almost identical language constitutes the essence of Gabay-Ḥayir.

To illustrate, we may take a couplet from ʿIlmi Boodari’s fervent love poetry, the *Qaraami*, or passion, dedicated to the memory of the girl he loved but could not marry because he was too poor to pay the bridewealth demanded by her elders.<sup>13</sup> Referring to the opportunity he missed in not meeting the object of his passion because he was asleep when she once paid him a secret visit, Boodari sang regretfully:

Harka galay hurdadu waa xuntehe hohe maxay seexshay  
Bal inaan habaar qabo maxaa Hodon i waydaarshay

Oh, to sleep in broad daylight is the [root] of evil.

Why have I slept?

If I am not accursed, why have I missed [the opportunity of meeting] my beloved Hodon?

## Types of Somali Verse

Genre	Form employed	Characteristics
1. <sup>o</sup> Alaa <sup>o</sup> alka (the lament)	<i>Gabay</i> , <i>Guuraw</i> , and <i>Jiifto</i>	The poetic lament is the tool of the insulted and the injured in society. It is the chief vehicle whereby a wronged person or party articulates grievances in a compelling manner so as to obtain the sympathy and goodwill of others.
2. Ammaanta (the praise)	Any one of the six forms may be used	The praise is the lover's as well as the flatterer's vehicle. A lover praises his beloved, her family or clan, and <sup>o</sup> Ilmi Booqari, a man believed to have died of love, advanced this genre to its highest development. The flatterer, on the other hand, uses it to lavish praise on an important clan or clan leaders to win their favors.
3. <sup>o</sup> Ayda (the diatribe)	Usually the <i>Gabay</i> form	Probably one of the most perverse themes in traditional verse, the diatribe plays a central role in the provocation and perpetuation of feuds. It is connected to the institution of <i>Godob</i> (cumulative grievances). Briefly, <i>Godob</i> concerns the accumulation of a debt of wrongs for which a person (or a party) is answerable as a result of offenses committed against another person or group. Since an attack

in poetic diatribe is regarded by pastoral Somalis as being as serious and injurious as a physical assault, this genre sustains reciprocal vendetta among the clans. Maḥammad ʿA. Hasan, the Somali nationalist leader of the Dervish anticolonial movement, who used to boast: “Allah taught me the art of the invective,” is thought to be the undisputed master of this genre.

4. Digashada (the taunt song)	Any form	The taunt song gloats over the fall of a rival and celebrates the destruction of an enemy. Since it immortalizes the humiliation and indignity suffered by a person or a party, it increases the likelihood of the victim seeking revenge so as to clear his name and restore his honor. Hence, the Ḍigasho, too, contributes to the prevalence of feud.
5. Diradiraha (the provocative)	<i>Geeraar, Jiifto, Gabay, and Guuraw</i>	This type is the most vicious of Somali verse as its <i>raison d'être</i> is to incite trouble. Like the diatribe, it provokes and sustains virulent feuds and conflicts between the lineages. ʿAli Ḍuuḥ, the Dulbahante poet (1884–1950), is recognized by pastoralists as a provocateur par excellence.
6. Faanka (the boast)	Any form	The boast is not only a type of poem but boasting as a theme is a recurring motif in oral verse. It is an inte-

gral part of traditional verse, a sort of ritual. A poet uses the boast technique to establish his own superiority and the excellence of his verse over that of a rival poet.

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| 7. Farriin<br>(the messenger)    | Any form          | The messenger is used for the general dissemination of information. The word <i>dheb</i> (say, proclaim) appears at the end of almost every line. Thus, Maḥammad c A. Ḥasan addresses a valedictory message to the slain commander of the Somaliland Protectorate Camel Corps, Richard Corfield, in 1913.  |
| 8. Gabay-Ḥayir<br>(mock-heroic)  | <i>Gabay</i> form | The role of this genre in Somali oral verse is so similar to that played by its counterpart in western prosody that I have chosen to designate it by using the same term. The Somali term is a compound noun, <i>Gabay</i> (poetry) and <i>Ḥayir</i> (to block or prevent). The chief function of Gabay-Ḥayir, therefore, is to imitate in syntax and subject a serious poem for the purpose of trivializing it. |
| 9. Guubaabo<br>(the exhortation) | Any form          | This genre is the provocative without the sinister element. Whereas the provocative seeks to incite trouble between hostile groups, the exhortation attempts to encourage good deeds between kinsmen. It calls on the members of a lineage to assist the weak, the   |

widowed, and the afflicted. The *Guubaabo* also lends itself to nationalistic purposes and was extensively used in the struggle for independence.

10. Hal-Hiraale (the riddle)	Any form	The riddle is a poetic puzzle that attempts to confound a rival through the use of metaphoric formulas and set phrases. An example of a good Hal-Hiraale is the exchange between Raage Ugaas of the Maḥammad Subeer Ogaadeen and Ina-Liibaan Jadeer of the Habar Yoonis Isaaq.
11. Higmadda (the philosophy)	Any form	The learned and the pious employ this genre to reflect on nature, the universe, and the scheme of things in this life and the next.
12. Kaftanka (humor)	Any form	This type of verse is used in lightheaded humor. It is the poetry of the raconteur and the storyteller. It abounds in wit and wisecracks.
13. Kuhaanka (the curse)	Any form	The instrument of malevolent pronunciation, the Kuhaan is the type of poem most feared by Somalis. It is uttered by an <i>af-ku-leeble</i> (he whose mouth is a dart), the notion being that the pronouncement of a poetic curse has the same lethal effect on a person as a hurled dart.

14. Sarbeeb  
(hidden verse)

*Gabay form*

A poet employs this genre when addressing a sensitive subject that requires the use of veiled or hidden (Qafilan) language. For example, the poet Ḥuseen Dhiqle of the Somali Dervish movement sang in 1923 of the plight of his people under the capricious sway of “lion justice” when in reality he was alluding to the tyranny suffered by the defeated Dervishes under Sultan Nuuh Maḥammad Daadhi, the Aromo chieftain of southern Ethiopia.

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15. Waanada  
(the advice)

*Gabay, Guuraw,  
and Jiifto*

The vehicle of the aged and the sage, the advice uses wisdom and experience as its criteria. Hence, it establishes the role of the elder, the wise, and the pious as opposed to upstarts and impious men.



Then an anonymous nomad burlesquer who is said to have lost a camel, sang in mock regret:

Harka galay hurdadu waa xuntehe hohe maxay seexshay  
Bal inaan habaar qabo maxaa hashii i waydaarshay

Oh, to sleep in broad daylight is the [root] of evil.

Why have I slept?

If I am not accursed, why have I missed [the opportunity of meeting] my beloved camel?

The pastoral poet of Gabay-Ḥayir, as in other genres, presents his composition orally before an audience, chanting or reciting it slowly, repeating important lines now and then, so that they can be absorbed by the audience. The audience may be a formal assemblage of a lineage or of numerous lineages that congregate from time to time in the shade of a tree in order to hear poetic contests, diatribes, satires, parodies, and other forms of artistic exchange among rival poets. Alternately, the forum may consist of an informal get-together of literarily inclined individuals wishing to enjoy poetic performances.

Such audiences provide the pastoral poet with many admirers, especially if he is a good poet. These learn his poems by heart and not only preserve them, but also recite them to other audiences and memorizers who in turn learn them by heart and pass them on to others. As nomadic society is in constant flux, with people constantly dispersing and regrouping, dissemination occurs at a rapid pace. In this way it is not unusual for a poem to be known in the whole country within a few weeks or even days of its first recital. In this connection, it may be of interest to note how the amazing rapidity with which pastoral verse spreads through the country leads to the popular Somali belief that it is transmitted by *jinn* and other supernatural forces.

This pastoral tradition of poet and memorizer as key collaborators in the production, preservation, and transmission of Somali oral verse came to the city with the transitional generation. Unlike the pastoralists who engaged openly and freely in interclan poetic duels in the vast immensity of the desert, the urban dwellers have to practice their craft with several restrictions attendant upon the nature of their new habitat. To begin with, that great forum of the pastoral poet, the tribal assembly, does not exist, at least officially, in the urban setting. The word *tribe* has been proscribed from Somali vocabulary—though tribalism itself has stubbornly refused

to go away—by a succession of national governments anxious to impose on the Somalis a measure of centralized authority in place of the traditional rule by clan elders. Feud and vendetta, which used to feed pastoral satire and poetic acrimony, are no longer vital factors in city life—or so, at least, it is officially given out. In addition, urban poets have to be careful with what they compose lest they offend the political powers that be, a restriction that does not impinge on their pastoralist counterparts.

Nomads, as well as urban Somalis, regard poetry as a potent instrument in public persuasion and mobilization because of the remarkable hold that the craft has on the minds and hearts of the Somali people. It can be used, often to terrific effect, by or against government. Therefore, the talented poet in the city is under tremendous pressure either to declare for the government, in which case he runs the risk of losing public respect, or to resist government patronage and protection, in which case he risks hostile political action, such as harassment, exile, or even imprisonment. Indeed, the latter has been the fate of a number of dissident poets in recent years.<sup>14</sup>

In the absence of the clan forum, urban poetry is mainly disseminated through the use of radio, tape recorders, cassettes, and other accouterments of modern technology. The cassette is particularly popular because it can be easily carried across great distances. Qaat sessions—to which we will devote some attention shortly—serve as something of an urban clan assembly for the urban poet and it is here that poems are recited and tape-recorded to be listened to in bazaars and other public gatherings. Poems that contain politically explosive material are secretly taped and listened to in private hideaways or are clandestinely spirited out of the country to be used by Somali communities in Aden and East Africa and even in Europe and America.

### III

Among contemporary poets, Somalis single out <sup>c</sup>Abdisalaam Ḥaaji Aadan, an Isaaq poet from Bur<sup>c</sup>o, as a composer of outstanding parodies. This poet is unusual in that he combines in his works overtones of classical versification with contemporary temper and tastes of written literature. Although a learned man, well versed in English, written Somali, and literary Arabic, he prefers to compose his verse extemporaneously at small gatherings. In this essay we will deal with his poem describing the culture of Qaat. Because of its significance for oral poetry, it may be helpful to make a few

observations on this stimulant herb, Qaat,<sup>15</sup> before looking into the uses that <sup>c</sup>Abdisalaam Ḥ. Aadan makes of pastoral verse in an urban setting.

Qaat is a stimulant herb to which many urban Somalis and Hararis are addicted. It is raised on the Ethiopian mountain escarpment around Harar, where the leaves and twigs of the herb are tied into bundles ranging in price from \$1 to \$10 and exported to Somalia by lorries. The user chews on the slender shoots and soft leafstalks of the plant, sucking in the juices while periodically spitting out the remaining pulp. Originally consumed by night travelers and holy men for their meditative vigils, Qaat is an energizer, providing a sort of high and “momentary happiness.”<sup>16</sup> There is widespread addiction to the herb in northern Somali towns; and, although successive administrations have attempted to stop the sale and consumption of Qaat, it remains a household commodity, with people of both sexes and from all walks of life increasingly taking to it.

The consumption of Qaat begins usually around 2:00 p.m. and may continue late into the night. A first-rate socializer, it brings together persons of similar tastes and pursuits: a Qaat-eating session may thus consist of holy men, Sufis, and spiritual seekers, aiming through the sense-heightening effect of the stimulant to achieve mystic union with Allah, or of politicians and businessmen seeking to make “hard” deals, or of poets and their admirers wishing to enjoy light literature, or of young men in a mood to socialize with young women.

Qaat is sometimes eaten in the houses of women of dubious character where it is alleged to serve as a catalyst for morally questionable behavior between men and women. Indeed in some religious circles, the Qaat, the poet, and the courtesan are spoken of as “partners in an unholy alliance,”<sup>17</sup> while the pious and the puritanical decry the perverse uses that poets and pleasure seekers have put to the “holy” plant of the former group.<sup>18</sup>

The mullahs’ grumble aside, Qaat-chewing sessions have become to the urban singer what the tribal assembly used to be for the singer of pastoral verse: a forum for the propagation of the literary tradition. As one user put it: “In the casual, sedated atmosphere of Qaaters, conversation is uninhibited, the mind is relaxed and the imagination allowed to soar.”<sup>19</sup> It is here that young poets try out their talents before small, receptive groups and old men recite songs which they had learned in their youth. As the elder, Yuusuf Meygaag Samatar of Hargeisa, sang in tribute to Qaat:<sup>20</sup>

SOMALI TEXT

1. Anigaa furoo qaadka waa lagu fahmeystaaye;
2. Filkaaga iyo waayeeladuu kula fariishaye;
3. Afkana wuu furaa maansaduu kuu fidshaa abid e;
4. Fagaarihiyo haasaawuhuu aad u fiic yahaye;
5. Kolkaad hawl faraha saarto buu sii fariid yahay e;
6. Hayeeshee hadaan fiirshay waa kula fogaadaaye;
7. Hadaad maalin oo idil fadhido faydo kuuma leh e;
8. Fiidkii kolkaad sare kacduu kugu fidaayaaye;
9. Fakar iyo wuxuu kula galaa faalla aan jirin e;
10. Markaasaad wax jeer hore fakaday dib ugu fooftaaye;
11. Ood soo faqdaa xaaja aan fari ka noolayn e.
12. Waxbase hadalku yuu ila fidine waxaan ku faygooyey:
13. Kol hadaadan maal fara leh oo fiicanna u haysan,
14. Asaanad faraq ka soo buuxsaneyn beer ad sii falatay,
15. Nin faqiiirahaw reerka yuu kaa fadqalalaynin.

LITERAL TRANSLATION

1. I, for one, unfolded the Qaat plant and find it to give intelligence.
2. It makes you sit among the elders and men of your age;
3. It opens the mouth to sing *Maanso* verse;
4. It is good in conversation and courting;
5. And it is better when you set the hands to work.
6. But I pondered [its effects] and [find] it can carry you away.
7. There is no gain for you to sit by [Qaat] all day long:
8. When you rise up from it in the evening, it begins to overwhelm you,
9. Then it penetrates you with false hope and vain illusion,
10. Then you begin to relive the worry of lost opportunities in days past,
11. And you bring back memories of lost causes.
12. In brief my advice is thus:
13. If you are in want of the wherewithal to guarantee you [a good supply of Qaat]
14. And you cannot reap a harvest of it in your garden,
15. Oh, man of meager means, let not [Qaat] unsettle your family

INTENDED MEANING

1. When I eat of this Qaat plant I find it to inspire.
2. It helps me to take a seat among notable peers;
3. It opens my mouth to speak wisely and to sing verses to the genies of Gabay.

4. It is good for conversation, better for courting the [maids],
5. And best for laboring hands.
6. But . . . it can carry you far, far away . . .
7. And it profits not a man to sit by Qaat every day
8. When you rise up from it in the evening, it creeps through the body, overwhelms the mind,
9. Infecting you with sorrows of vain ambition.
10. Then you relive the losses, failures, and broken hopes;
11. It brings back memories—memories you'd fain forget—memories of lost causes.
12. My advice, in brief, to him who would have Qaat:
13. If you are in want of the wherewithal to guarantee you [a good supply of Qaat]
14. And you cannot reap a harvest of it in your garden,
15. Oh, man of modest means, let not [Qaat] unsettle your family

The type of verse produced by Qaat-chewers is necessarily “spontaneous” and “inspired,” a phrase used to denote poetry produced while the poet is under the influence of the herb, and, therefore, does not seem, in my view, to measure up to the best in pastoral verse. Nor, however, does it represent a “wholesale vulgarization” of the classical tradition, as some disgruntled advocates of the old ways lament. Some of these elders charge that the poetry of the urban dweller is “not poetry at all but a travesty of the pastoral art, conceived in hallucination and born in courtesan midwifery.”<sup>21</sup> They speak of the urban poet as a “feeble and fatuous product”<sup>22</sup> of the town. Admirers of urban oral verse counter that their verse is freer and more experimental than the rigid, alliterative, and suffocated songs of the pastoralists.<sup>23</sup>

#### IV

<sup>c</sup>Abdisalaam Ḥ. Aadan, our composer of the Gabay-Ḥayir, won his reputation as a master satirist of Dervish poets in Qaat-chewing forums. The Dervishes were a Somali anticolonial movement that led a war of resistance against Euro-Abyssinian imperialism at the turn of the century. During the course of the struggle, which lasted a little more than twenty years (1900–1920), the leader of the movement, Sayyid Maḥammad <sup>c</sup>Abdille Ḥasan, and his general, Ismaa <sup>c</sup>iil Mire, produced a significant body of heroic political poems designed to gain public support for the Dervish cause. The

themes of their verse, which they used as a weapon to mobilize public opinion, were themes of liberation and victory over colonialism. In choosing to draw on the political poems of the Dervishes for his burlesque verse, <sup>c</sup>Abdisalaam has ingeniously adopted a live tradition; for almost every adult Somali, urban or pastoral, with literary inclinations is familiar with the Dervish prosodic legacy, given the movement's eminent place in the nation's history. <sup>c</sup>Abdisalaam's best known poems are his parodies on the poems of the Dervish leader, Sayyid Maḥammad <sup>c</sup>Abdille Ḥasan, and those of the Dervish general, Ismaa<sup>c</sup>iil Mire. I have treated elsewhere<sup>24</sup> <sup>c</sup>Abdisalaam's burlesquing of the Sayyid's verse; for the moment, we will take a look at his satire on Ismaa<sup>c</sup>iil Mire.

Ismaa<sup>c</sup>iil Mire's poem, which <sup>c</sup>Abdisalaam burlesqued, is the Dervish general's narrative work "This News to Rome"<sup>25</sup> composed in 1913 soon after the impressive Dervish victory over the British expedition commanded by Colonel Richard Corfield of the Somaliland Camel Corps. The poet describes in heroic terms the defeat of the British, the death of the commander, and the successful Dervish seizure of camel herds belonging to British-protected tribes. According to indigenous testimony, Ismaa<sup>c</sup>iil Mire was called upon by his master to recite an impromptu poem, describing the planning, execution, and completion of the expedition, and the share which he, the "poet"<sup>26</sup> received of the looted stock as war booty. In response to the Sayyid's urging, Ismaa<sup>c</sup>iil Mire chanted his poem, alliterating in the letter *T*.<sup>27</sup> Here is most of the Somali text of that poem along with the English translation in a somewhat inadequate free verse rendition:

1. Annagoo Taleex naal jahaad taladi soo qaadnay;
2. Toddobaatan boqol oo Darwiish togatay neef doora;
3. Sayidkeennu tii uu na yiri torog ku heensaynnay;
4. Shakadaha intuu noo tebbedey noogu tacab qaybi;
5. Ilaahay ha tabantaabiyee ducada noo tuumi.
6. Wareegada rag baa waxay tewali yaan wax kaa tegine;
7. Annana towlka qaalmaha nin iyo tulud u soo saaray;
8. Sibraar caana geel loo tabcaday talax ku sii maallay;
9. Tiirkii rasuulkiyo sharciga toog ku wada fuullay.
10. Galabtaa taxaabiyo kadlaba toobiyaha raacnay;
11. Habeenkii fardaha wow turriye taag ku sii mirannay;
12. Tun biciida lagu qoofalyoo xamashka loo taabey
13. Talaaduhu markii ay dheceen talalay oo reemay;
14. Tixda gabay markii aan akhriyey toose niman jiiifey;
15. Tiraabkaygu meeshuu ka baxay la isku soo tuumi;

16. Salaaddii markii aan tukaday yaarka kaga taagnay.
17. Togga Ulasammed dooyadii horay u tuuryeynay;
18. Intay timacad noo soo arkeen marada noo taage;
19. Annaguna jahaad kama tagnee tiimbad ugu rooray;
20. Sengeyaal tabaadihiyo gool weerarka u tooxnay.
21. Tiiraanya ololkii dhulkii taani laga qaaday;
22. Tallaala'ayda qaylada Berbera tahan la weydaari;
23. Taambuuglayaashiyo kuway tabeysey soo gaare;
24. Sidii teysa roob oo onkoday tininigtii yeedhay;
25. Talaxumada awrkuu u xiray baqe taraarsiinnay;
26. Girligaanka meeshuu turqaday lagu tunsii geela;
27. Tirsan maayo uunkii tirmiyo gaala taabaca e;
28. Turjubaanadii iyo halkaa Koofi lagu toogay.
29. Gaaladu waxay tacab lahayd taabnay galabtaase;
30. Maadhiin turaabkaa ka badan tuurta kaga qaadnay;
31. Tukihii intaan niman u waray tobanle soo qaatay.
32. Gebagaba u tooxnoo kufriga maarre kaga teednay;
33. Tafwareeman maynee intaan tubay ku aynshaadey;
34. Galabtaa caraabada ku timi turugaa Buuhoodle;
35. Habeenkaa ninkii tabar lahaa tarantaree gaarka;
36. Habeen kale taxaashay Nugaal godon u tuuryeynay;
37. Habeen kalena tuuraha Cadduur toolin kaga maallay;
38. Habeen kale Tagaabeeye iyo tu'innay Hayllawe;
39. Habeen kale Dariiqada tubnoo toosan lagu qaybsay.
40. Toban gool tabaadiga dhigiyo toban unuun gooyo,
41. Iyo toban tiftii hore rimoo taani lagu qooqshay,
42. Iyo toban abeer tawllanoo tixinka qaalmooda,
43. Iyo toban irmaanoo aniga la igu taageeray,
44. Iyo taan eryoon jirey markay tubantehee joogto,
45. Been laguma tookhiyo afaan taabud noqoneyne,
46. Intaa Xarunta waa tubay xaq waa lagu tanaadaaye!
47. Warka Tuurre waa laga hayaa tan iyo Iimey e;
48. Suldaan Ruunna loo tabe inuu tuuladii gubaye;
49. Waa Xamar tarrara oo misana taab ku sii daraye;
50. Taltallaabsigiisiyo kabtiga tabo kalaw dheere;
51. Tafantoofka gaalkuu u diley waa tixgeliyaaye;
52. Tuludna uma godlaan reeruhuu tawl ka saanyaade;
53. Anigana tis bay galay intaan col ugu taagnaaye;
54. Tima soohanlow Eebbahay kuma tabaaleeyo!

1. Residing at Taleeh<sup>28</sup> we raised the question of holy war.
2. At once seventy hundred Dervishes selected powerful horses

3. And we reined and saddled them according to the Say-yid's<sup>29</sup> instruction.

4. Cartridges of bullets he distributed among us;

5. Lord, bless him! he prayed to Allah for us.

6. When provision was sought, some men became miserly [to contribute];

7. As for us, we each contributed a choice young camel [for the expedition]

8. And we filled the *sibraars*<sup>30</sup> with camel milk.

9. By the pillar of the Prophet and by the Shari'a we rode the horse.

10. That afternoon, in canter and gallop, we pressed forward,

11. But, mindful of the horses, we pastured them by night;

12. We hobbled them gently and let them nibble at tangles of lush undergrowth,

13. But when the triplet-stars began to set I stirred, and hummed the (lines);

14. And when I chanted the verse, the sleeping men awoke,

15. Gathering around the place where my voice sounded;

16. And when I said the dawn prayer, we saddled, marching purposefully.

17. By the Ulasameed rivulet I sent out the scouts;

18. Soon they spotted the infidels' camels and lifted to us signals from afar,

19. And as we shy not away from the *jibaad* [holy war] we plunged forward,

20. With mighty stallions we rushed forward to the raid.

21. In burning dismay from the places where we seized the camels,

22. A sad cry arose seeking for help from Berbera<sup>31</sup>

23. Then the rescue party of the British infidels caught up with us,

24. Then a rending rumble as of thunder was heard,

25. And the Englishman did fly, leaving his badly hobbled camel<sup>32</sup> behind,

26. And where he held the maxim guns we made the camels trample over.

27. I will not count the decimated hordes and the followers of the infidels,

28. There, Corfield<sup>33</sup> and his interpreters were slain.

29. That afternoon, we possessed the entire belongings of the infidels,

30. And of guns numberless as the sand, we seized,



31. And to the vultures we spread the flesh of the enemy to feast upon,
32. And we gathered the herds, warding off the infidels with rifle fire—
33. And over the multitude of collected camels I sang with gladness!
34. That afternoon by a prolonged march we took the camels to Buuhoodle wells,<sup>34</sup>
35. And in the night he who had stamina kept the wakeful vigil,
36. And in another night we brought the camels to the valley of Nugaal,<sup>35</sup>
37. And in another night we milked them at °Aduur,<sup>36</sup>
38. And in the next night, weary with fatigue we marched through Haylaawe and Tagaabeeye<sup>37</sup>
39. And in the next night we brought them to the Dariiqa<sup>38</sup> where the camels were divided!
40. Ten plump camels which have just calved,
41. And ten, just conceived, well serviced by the mighty he-camel,
42. And ten, young, healthy she-camels,
43. And ten milch ones, with which I was specially assisted,
44. And the one<sup>39</sup> which is mine when the herds are assembled [to be divided],
45. To speak truthfully and wisely—
46. That many we have brought to the Ḥarun<sup>40</sup>
47. The news of Tuurre [my horse] has spread rapidly from here to Iimay<sup>41</sup>
48. And even to Ancient Rome it is signalled that he has burned the (infidels') home,
49. Of crimson color, he is master of the springy step and of the agile gallop,
50. In addition to his light step and brisk canter, he possesses other strategems.
51. He [poet's horse] has won grudging respect from the infidel whom he slew with lightning ease,
52. And they whom he [poet's horse] despoiled are now without a single camel to milk.
53. As for me, the endless months I rode him for the holy war make me weary-ill—
54. Thou, Braided-mane, may Allah protect you from evil!

In quoting extensively from the Dervish poem, I have meant to

show something of its heroic element, which, it is hoped, has come through even in an inadequate translation. "Here is a hero," as one pastoralist put it, "describing in familiar images the brave activities of brave men who have vanquished an enemy believed hitherto to be invincible."<sup>42</sup> It is an impromptu poem<sup>43</sup> in which, with its sense of immediacy, the poet locks up the audience emotionally, with the fury and intensity of his battle. It is satisfying not only aesthetically but also historically. The events it describes are only too real and the recitation of the poem is nothing less than the recitation of the history of the people.

In drawing on the work of the Dervish poet for his satire, 'Abdisalaam H. Aadan has cleverly adopted a well-known poem that at once establishes the identity of his own song. 'Abdisalaam composed his poem, ostensibly in a Qaat-eating session in 1966, obviously modelling it on the Dervish poem.<sup>44</sup> In pompous language reminiscent of the original, he adopts the same alliterative technique and sound-image patterns and, in doing so, produces a tale almost identical to the original but for the trivialization of the theme. The ingenious use of stiff language and high style to address a trivial subject produces the comic effect. Where the earlier poet sang of the war campaign that he led against the British infidels, the satirist sang of sensuous campaigns, of single-minded devotion to seeking carnal pleasures under the stimulant, Qaat. Here is the text of 'Abdisalaam's poem along with a free verse translation:<sup>45</sup>

1. Duhurkii toggaa Herer haddaad qado ka soo tuurto
2. Hurdo laguma taamee naftaa lala tacaalaaye
3. Anigiyo toddoba aan ku jirey tumasho soo qaadnay.
4. Rag tabaabushuu leeyahaye wax istusaalaynay;
5. Labo tubaha soo kala cayima hore u sii tuurray;
6. Ayaguna tasmada warkay sideen nooga tibixsiye.
7. Togwajaale qaadkii ka yimid tacab u soo miirnay;
8. Markay laba tobnaad noo xireen toobiyaha qaadnay;
9. Tagsi lagama maarmee nin wadey suuqa nagu tooci;
10. Tilmaan-quruksantii lala ballamay saani ugu toosnay;
11. Tubtii horeba boqol jaa'ifaa teybalka u saarray.
12. Barkimooyinkii teedsanaa suxul ku taageerray;
13. Nin waliba halkuu soo turqaday garabka soo tiiri.
14. Isagoo falaas laga tif tiray laysu tebi shaaha.
15. Nin waliba tankiisii haraaq tiilley ugu laabnay.
16. Kaftan aan turxaan lagu ogeyn la isku tuurtuurye.
17. Laba aad turkiga mooddid oo tikhilka naagooda,

18. Iyo laba tiftirihii jannada lagu tilmaamaayo,
19. Iyo laba wax layskama tirshee sida tiriiggaasa,
20. Iyo taan lahaan jirey markaan tumasho soo qaado,
21. Intaasoo xarrago tiicayoo temeshle luudaysa,
22. Oo toobab noo soo xidhay oo tal iyo xiisaan leh,
23. Oo timaha soo firay salaan gacanta soo taage!
24. Annaguna hablaha kama tagnee geerish ugu taagnay;
25. Heesaha rag baw tamar galee kuwii tiriyeey soo qaadnay;
26. Alla-tiirigii heesi jirey noogu tacab sawdka;
27. Tiiraanyo qaylshihii rabaab faraha taabsiiye;
28. Kaman talalaxleeyiyo durbaan tininigtii yeedhay;
29. Annaguna tustuurtay lahayd sacabka tiitaynay.
30. Goortay cabbaar naga tumeen tegis u qoontayste;
31. Sheekadu hablahay noo taxnayd togannay haasaawe;
32. Hadal tooxanoo hoos u teyan la isku taataabay;
33. Siduu teyse roob nagu onkoday taaha ku caweyney;
34. Rag takooran baa nagu jiree tabaha qaar diidnay;
35. In kastoy taftuba noo dhoweyd teedka sharaf eegnay;
36. Talantaalli labadii gacmood tahan isweydaarte;
37. Warmihii tumaatiga adkaa tiirka qabadiinnay;
38. Waan taag darreeyaa haddaan taabto geedkaba;
39. Habeenkaa ninkii tamar lahaa taxay murqaankiisa!!

1. By the Herer ravine,<sup>46</sup> if at noon, you gulp down an unpalatable lunch

2. Sleep you should not enjoy—you must wage a holy struggle for the soul,

3. I and seven others raised the question of self-indulgence.

4. It is the habit of true men to be ready [for action]. We exchanged counsel [on how to fulfill our desires]

5. Then two we sent to ascertain the paths<sup>47</sup>

6. And they signalled news for us to go ahead.

7. And forward we rushed to select samples of Togwajaale Qaat<sup>48</sup>

8. And when the seller readied two bundles of ten [shillings], in haste we departed.

9. Instantly, we took the essential taxi, and the driver sped us by the market

10. And straight away we departed to the Beauty's<sup>49</sup> place whom we had made a promise with

11. And immediately, we placed a hundred [shillings for her services] in her bosom<sup>50</sup>

12. And we leaned our elbows against the pillows lying about in piles
13. And every man [of us] reclined against the niche he had selected
14. And we passed around the tea in an overflowing thermos flask
15. And everyone [of us] wrapped up in a piece of paper a sufficient amount [of Qaat] to consume
16. And humor without grace we exchanged
17. Then two plump beauties that seemed next of kin to the Turk<sup>51</sup>
18. And two who looked like the (houris)<sup>52</sup> of heaven,
19. And two who, to speak wisely, shone like fluorescent lights,
20. And the one who<sup>53</sup> is mine when I am in a mood for self-gratification—
21. These many, stately of gait and gracious of step
22. Wearing the loose *tobe*<sup>54</sup> and brilliant sashes round their waists,
23. And with hair just combed. They extended their hands for salaams.
24. As for us, we shy not away from the maids—we pressed on with Geyrash embraces.<sup>55</sup>
25. And with musical connoisseurs among us, we had no difficulty in sending promptly for the singers
26. Then the Allah-supported lad entertained us with his [lecherous] voice,
27. And in preparation for the tune, his hands caressed the instrument
28. And the twang of the lute and the rumble of the tam-tam was heard
29. And in comradely etiquette, we supported him with clapping.
30. Then the (band) left, having entertained us to satisfaction
31. And in conversation we continued to court the girls.
32. Yes, in whispers, we shared silent words with them
33. And with groans as of torrential rain we moaned late into the night!
34. And some boys there were [among us] whose ways we did not approve
35. And, although the hem of the skirt was near enough and tempting, we deferred to the dictates of courtesy

36. And there were our arms tightly locked up in passionate  
embrace  
37. But against the fence we jabbed the hardened spears,<sup>56</sup>  
38. Yet the touch of the plant renders me feeble<sup>57</sup>  
39. That night he who had stamina gained his intent!

To gain something of the comic flavor of the burlesque, we may juxtapose relevant sections of it with the corresponding parts in the original poem:

- I. Original:      Residing by Taleeh we raised the question  
                                 of holy war,  
                                 At once seventy hundred Dervishes selected  
                                 powerful horses.
- I. Parody:        By the Herer ravine, if at noon, you gulp  
                                 down an unpalatable lunch,  
                                 Sleep you should not enjoy—you must wage  
                                 holy struggle for the soul,  
                                 I and seven others raised the question  
                                 of self-indulgence.

The phrase “By the Herer ravine” in the parody stands in a symmetrical balance to “Residing by Taleeh” in the original—Herer and Taleeh both being valleys, the former going through the city of Hargeisa (the northern Somali cradle of Qaat) and the latter through the Dervish capital, a couple of hundred miles to the east. The use of the image of “holy struggle for the soul,” after “an unpalatable lunch” is an attempt to mimic the idea of holy war in the first line of the original. Where the Dervish poet “raised the question of holy war,” the burlesquer “raised the question of self-indulgence.” Because the burlesquer introduces the notion of an unpalatable lunch into his lines—something which does not exist in the original—he runs into a syntactical problem: he is unable to introduce the exposition in two lines as the original has done; instead, he settles for three lines. Also, “I and seven others” of the burlesque alliterates in the Somali with “seventy hundred Dervishes” in the original.

- II. Original:      By the Ulasameed rivulet I sent out the scouts,  
                                 Soon they spotted the infidels and lifted to us  
                                 signals from afar,  
                                 And as we shy not away from the holy war,  
                                 we plunged forward!

- II. Parody:      And two we sent to ascertain the paths.<sup>58</sup>  
                           And they signalled news for us to go ahead  
                           And forward we rushed to select samples  
                           of Togwajaale Qaat<sup>59</sup>

Here the parallel is obvious: in both passages scouts are sent, in the one poem to spot the herds of the infidels to be seized by the Dervishes, in the other to spot the house of the courtesan where the stimulant herb is to be consumed. The comic effect is also heightened by the imitator's use of the original poet's phrase, "plunge forward," following the signals of the scouts to seize bundles of the dope and making off with it to the "Beauty's place," a play on the making off with camels in the earlier poem.

- III. Original:    And as we shy not away from the *jibaad*,  
                           we plunged forward,  
                           With mighty stallions we rushed forward  
                           to the raid,  
 III. Parody:     And straight away we made to the Beauty's<sup>60</sup>  
                           place whom we made a promise with.  
                           As for us, we shy not away from the maids—  
                           we pressed on with Geyrash embraces.<sup>61</sup>

*Jibaad*, or holy war, one of the most solemn tenets in Islamic theology, commands the faithful, among other things, to defend their property and religion against heathen incursions. As good Muslims, the poet boasts his men "shy not away from the *Jibaad* . . . we plunged forward." The burlesquer is at once profane and bitingly satirical, making a sacrilegious symbolism between the solemn doctrine of *Jibaad* and his sexual adventures with his "maids," and in doing so elevates his erotic subject to respectability by investing it with mock dignity: "and as we shy not away from the maids, we pressed on with Geyrash embraces."

- IV. Original:    Then the rescue party of the British infidels  
                           caught up with us,  
                           Then a rending rumble as of thunder was  
                           heard,  
                           And the Englishman did fly, leaving his badly  
                           hobbled camel behind,  
                           And where he held the maxim guns we made  
                           the camels trample over.  
                           I will not count the decimated hordes and

the followers of the infidels,  
There Corfield and his interpreters were  
slain.<sup>62</sup>

- IV. Parody: And with musical connoisseurs among us, we  
had no difficulty in sending promptly for  
the singers  
Then the Allah-supported singer entertained  
us with his [lecherous] voice,  
And the twang of the lute and the rumble of  
the tam-tam was heard . . .  
And in conversation we continued to court  
the girls . . .  
And with groans as of torrential rains we  
moaned late into the night!

The “twang of the lute” and the “rumble of the tam-tam,” symbols of entertainment, are designed to mimic the “rumble and thunder” of the maxim guns in the original. Then there are the groans and moans of the libertine horde modelled on the groans and moans of the “decimated horde” of infidels in the original.

- V. Original: Ten plump camels which have just calved,  
And ten, just conceived, well serviced by the  
mighty he-camel,  
And ten milch ones, with which I was specially  
assisted,  
And the one<sup>63</sup> which is mine when the herds  
are assembled [to be divided] —  
To speak truthfully and wisely—  
That many we have brought to the Ḥarun<sup>64</sup>
- V. Parody: Then two plump beauties that seemed next of  
kin to the Turk  
And two who looked like the (houris)<sup>65</sup> of  
heaven,  
And two who, to speak wisely, shone like  
fluorescent lights,  
And the one<sup>66</sup> who is mine when I am in a  
mood for self-gratification—  
These many, stately of gait and gracious of  
step,  
Wearing the loose *tobe*<sup>67</sup> and brilliant sashes  
round their waists,

And with hair just combed. They extended  
their hands for salaams.

VI. Original: And we gathered the herds, warding off the  
infidels with rifle fire,  
And over the multitude of collected camels  
I sang with gladness!  
That afternoon by a prolonged march we  
took the camels to Buuhoodle wells,  
And in the night he who had stamina kept  
the wakeful vigil.

VI. Parody: And some boys there were (among us) whose  
ways we did not approve . . .  
But against the fence we jabbed the hardened  
spears,  
Yet the touch of the plant renders me  
feeble,<sup>68</sup>  
That night he who had stamina gained his  
intent!

In the heroic song, the camels “are gathered” in the kraal and the infidels “warded off with fire.” In the parody, the girls are gathered and the poet and his dissolute company brag of having “jabbed their hardened spears against the fence” in self-evident imitation of the fire that the Dervishes rained on the British from the kraal fence.

Here, however, an interesting sideshow develops: in his eagerness to present a line-by-line imitation of the original, the mock singer entangles himself in a sudden twist of irony, in his own humor. The logic of mimicry forces him to confess to a weakness. Thus he laments: “But the touch of the plant renders me feeble,” and in doing so scores a hilarious point with his hearers, who are likely to share with him the intimate knowledge of the depressive effect the Qaat herb produces on the sexual prowess of some people. The stratagem allows him not only to achieve his intent of comic humor, but also to level with his audience on the frailty of the human physique. In the admission to frailty man gains strength and the technique of ‘Abdisalaam’s self-exoneration is ingenious enough: he seeks the justification for his “feebleness” on the same ground that the original poet sought his, namely, sheer physical fatigue. Thus, where the Dervish poet sang, after a furious day-long battle, “And in the night, he who had stamina



kept the wakeful vigil," the burlesquer mimicks, "That night he who had stamina," that is to say, he who was not overwhelmed by the potent effects of the herb, "gained his intent"—as if to apologize to his male-dominated hearers for failing them in that moment of truth when masculinity itself was put to the test.<sup>69</sup>

The poet, though, succeeds in discharging his prime obligation: entertaining the audience. Humor is what his audience wants and he provides it in plenty by magnifying such a light subject as the gratification of his sensuousness on so ambitious a scale. That he succeeds in achieving this in a poem of no more than thirty-nine lines bespeaks the power of his craftsmanship.

## NOTES

1. This essay is based on a paper submitted at an ethnomusicological conference at the University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana, April, 1979.

2. *First Footsteps in East a Africa*, v. 1 (London: Tylston and Edwards, 1894), p. 82

3. The observation comes from H. Munro Chadwick and N. Kershaw Chadwick whose monumental three-volume work, *The Growth of Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932, p.x) is considered a major contribution to the subject.

4. *La Lingua Somala—Strumento d'Insegnamento Professionale* (Alessandria: Ferrari, Occella & Co., 1953).

5. *A Tree for Poverty* (Nairobi: Eagle Press, 1954).

6. *Somali Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964).

7. Somali Government, *The Somali Peninsula: New Light on Imperial Motives* (London: Staples Printers, 1963), p.v.

8. The ratio of nomadic to urban Somalis has not as yet been reduced to reliable statistics, but the official guess is two nomads for each urban person.

9. The Benaadiris essentially make up the four coastal, southern Somali towns of Mogadishu, Merca, Brava, and Kismayo. Unlike other Somalis, the Benaadiris have been an urban community for centuries and are distinguishable from the pastoral Somalis by linguistic and economic differences.

10. For a discussion of some of these forms, see Andrzejewski and Lewis, *Somali Poetry*, pp. 46-51.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 49.

12. Laurence, *A Tree for Poverty*, pp. 1-2.

13. For a brief discussion of °Ilmi Boodari and Hodon, the Romeo and Juliet of Somali folklore, see *ibid.*, pp. 40-44.

14. These include °Abdi Qays who spent time in jail in 1975

for his alleged composition of an antigovernment piece; Aḥmad Ismaaʿiil Diiriye (Qaasim), a talented northern Somali versifier who has been in exile for some time now for his alleged composition of witty antiregime satires; and Ḥadraawi who, following the composition of his heavily metaphysical and highly popular work, "On the Scene of a Slaughtered Camel" (Hal La Qalay Raqdeedaa), was banished to a remote village in western Somalia where he continues to be under house arrest.

15. Also called "Chaat"; the scientific name of the species is *Catba edulis*.

16. This note and similar ones below are based on nine months of field work (1976–1977) in Somalia and Kenya that I conducted as part of Ph.D. dissertation research in history at Northwestern University. The project was funded jointly by the Social Science Research Council and Northwestern's graduate school. The part of these notes (hereafter to be called fieldnotes) used for this essay will be cited as follows: first, I cite the name of the informant, then the nature of the material that I identify by the word *field-note*, then the place and date of the interview. Thus, in the present example, we have: Sheikh Jaamaʿ ʿUmar ʿIisse, Fieldnotes, Mogadishu, April 8, 1977.

17. Sheikh ʿAaqib ʿAbdullahi Jaamaʿ, Fieldnotes, Mogadishu, May 5, 1977.

18. Al-Ḥaaj Saʿiid ʿAli of Burʿo, Fieldnotes, May 10, 1977.

19. Ibid.

20. Yuusuf Meygaag Samatar, Fieldnotes, Mogadishu, January 30, 1977.

21. Maḥammad Ḥaaji Ḥuseen "Sheeka-Ḥariir" (Hereafter, Man of Beautiful Story), Fieldnotes, Mogadishu, February 13, 1977.

22. Ibid.

23. Maḥammad Khaliif Salaad, Fieldnotes, Mogadishu, February 15, 1977.

24. In Chapter 5 of my history dissertation at Northwestern University, 1978–1979.

25. Somali poets, as a rule, do not give titles to their poems, a job which falls to their memorizers and commentators. I derived the present title from the line, "And even to ancient Rome the news has been dispatched, that he has burned the infidels' home-  
stead."

26. Man of Beautiful Story, Fieldnotes, Mogadishu, February 17, 1977. In the ethos of pastoral warfare, it is considered essential for raiding warriors to include a poet. The poet's task is to pray for the success of the expedition and to curse the enemy

clan (Yu'asho). Should the warriors succeed in carrying off in loot the stock of their enemies, the poet was given, in recognition of his poetic skills, an extra camel (called the poet's camel) in addition to his regular share of the booty.

27. With the exception of limited, quite recent innovations, all pastoral verse uses alliteration, a feature so regular that it can even be recognized by a reader who is unacquainted with the language. In my translation, however, I have not attempted to adopt an alliterative scheme for the English version, a task that would be too demanding and too involved for the limited objectives of this essay.

28. Taleeh: capital of the Dervishes in northern Somalia.

29. Sayyid: honorific title of the leader of the Dervishes, Maḥammad ʿAbdille Ḥasan.

30. Sibraar: a skin container used by pastoralists to preserve and transport milk.

31. Berbera: seat of the British colonial administration.

32. Badly hobbled camel: British transport camels carrying ammunition and other military logistics, which the British apparently left behind when they fell back.

33. Corfield: commander of the British troops.

34. Buuhoodle wells: a cluster of wells about a hundred miles southeast of Bur<sup>c</sup>o in the country of the Ḍulbahante clan in northern Somalia.

35. Valley of Nugaal: the well-watered Nugaal Valley is in the heartlands of traditional Ḍulbahante country in northeastern Somalia.

36. ʿAduur: a rich pasture plain in the Nugaal.

37. Tagaabeeye and Haylaawe: a cluster of hills and gullies in the Nugaal valley.

38. Dariiqa (Arabic for order): headquarters of the Dervishes.

39. The one: the poet's camel; see note 26.

40. Ḥarun: the word for capital in Somali, referring to Taleeh, the Dervish capital.

41. Iimay: town on the headwaters of the Shabeelle River in southern Ethiopia.

42. Al-Ḥaaj Sa<sup>c</sup>iid ʿAli, Fieldnotes, Bur<sup>c</sup>o, Somalia, May, 1977.

43. I have my own misgivings as to the sheer physical achievability of giving such a long poem extemporaneously. My doubts have repeatedly been dispelled though by pastoral powers of memory and by other feats in memorization.

44. The immediate circumstances that inspired ʿAbdisalaam to

compose his brilliant satire seem to concern the battle of the young and old Somali generations. According to local accounts, the elder Muuse Galaal chanted the Dervish poem before an audience of young people and challenged his listeners, somewhat patronizingly, to interpret the poem for him. Muusa's intention was to embarrass his young audience by exposing their ignorance publicly and hence establish the superiority of the old to the young. 'Abdisalaam, a hitherto unknown but talented young poet, rose to the challenge by informing Muuse Galaal that within a week or so 'Abdisalaam would prove to the elder that he understood the poem by composing a burlesque on it. The result was 'Abdisalaam's satire.

45. The version of 'Abdisalaam's satire used here came to me from Aḥamad Faarah 'Ali "Idaajaa," a young Somali writer in Mogadishu, Somalia, in 1977.

46. Herer ravine: a seasonally dry ravine that cuts through the city of Hargeisa in northwestern Somalia.

47. Ascertain the paths: to find a courtesan's place where they were to put in for the night.

48. Togwajaale Qaat: See above, pp. 459–460.

49. The lady at whose house the consumption of the herb would take place.

50. The mistress at whose place the herb is consumed is often paid for her services.

51. Next of kin to the Turk: probably means the lady in question is light-skinned, short, and plump, physical attributes that Somalis associate with the Turks.

52. Houris of heaven: Heavenly maids, in some unorthodox Islamic circles believed to be given to the faithful as a reward for leading an exemplary life here on earth. See Edward Gibbon's description of the attitude of the Christian clergy of his time towards this doctrine, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, p. 867

53. And the one: the urban singer's special lady, designed here to serve as a play on the pastoral poet's special camel; see footnote 39.

54. *Tobe*: a loose gown worn by city women of northern Somalia; the *tobe* is transparent and displaying and thus tends to catch the attention of men.

55. In the ritual of Geyresh, Qaat-eaters would pair off in couples, whence the girl puts her beloved between her legs like a baby and feeds him tenderly from her hands with twigs of the Qaat herb.

56. “Against the fence we jabbed the hardened spears”: in this line, the poet is probably making a sexual allusion to the erotic excitement of the poet and his company.

57. Somalis believe that Qaat depresses sexual feelings and tends to induce in some men a prolonged sensation of sexual feeling while at the same time rendering them incapable of executing the act.

58. See note 47 above.

59. See pages 459–460 of the text for a description of Qaat.

60. See note 49 above.

61. See note 55 above.

62. See note 40 above.

63. And the one: the poet’s special camel; see note 39 above.

64. See note 40 above.

65. See note 52 above.

66. See note 53 above.

67. See note 54 above.

68. See note 57 above.

69. This paragraph also illustrates an interesting point about the nature and growth of oral literature. In a conversation with me (Dec. 8, 1979), ‘Abdisalaam disclaimed authorship of the last two lines dealing with the deleterious effects of Qaat on sex; it is possible that the poem has been tampered with since it was first composed in 1966. Yet the tamperer—if tamperer there has been—must have possessed an exceptionally dextrous hand; for a content analysis of the whole poem and its analogous relation to the original work by Ismaa‘iil Mire would seem to argue for the authenticity of the two lines in question—lines 38 and 39. Indeed without them ‘Abdisalaam’s poem would appear incomplete.

#### NOTE ON TRANSCRIPTION OF SOMALI WORDS

In transcribing Somali words, I have adopted the official Somali orthography that has been in use in the Somali Republic since 1972. This orthography uses Latin characters with minor adjustments designed to accommodate Somali phonetic sounds. In this essay, however, there are three consonants which do not conform to the new system of Somali spelling: the aspirate *b*, the palatal *d* and the *ayn*. In the new Somali orthography, the letters *x*, *db* and *c* are used to render these consonants. In this essay, by contrast, where these consonants appear in isolated words, I retain the conventional symbols used to denote them. Thus I adopt:

*h* instead of *x*  
*ḍ* instead of *db*  
*ᶜ* instead of *c*

This measure is taken to meet the needs of the English reader who is unacquainted with the official Somali orthography or with Somali phonetic sounds.

Where any of the three consonants appear in a phrase, expression, or a sentence, I adopt the official Somali system of spelling, as the following example illustrates:

*Single Word**Phrase or Sentence*

Maḥammad  
 ᶜAbdille  
 Ḍalaan

Maxammadow kaalay  
 Cabdille ma yimid?  
 Dhalaan weeye