

# GENRES, FORMS, MEANINGS

## Essays in African Oral Literature

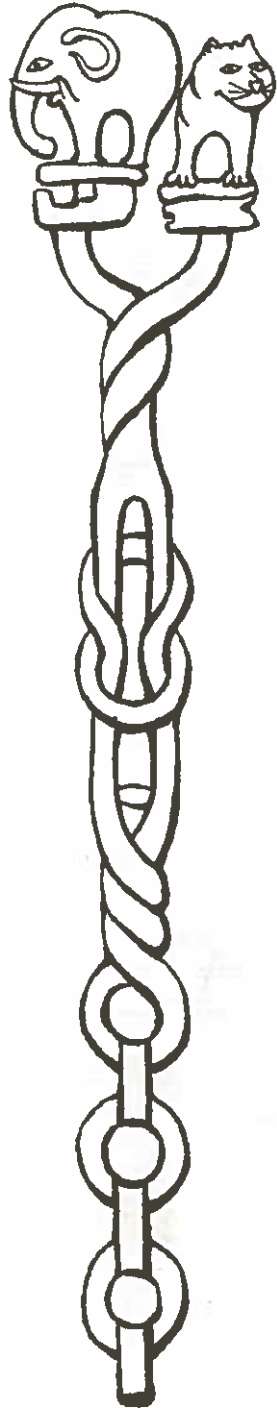
# GENRES, FORMES, SIGNIFICATIONS

## Essais sur la littérature orale africaine

Edited by

Textes réunis par

**VERONIKA GÖRÖG-KARADY**



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**GENRES, FORMS, MEANINGS :**  
**Essays in African Oral Literature**

Papers in French and English

Edited by

**VERONIKA GÖRÖG-KARADY**

With a Foreword by RUTH FINNEGAN



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**CORRECTION and APOLOGY**

Due to an unfortunate error B.W. Andrzejewski (Bogumił Witalis Andrzejewski) has been incorrectly referred to in this volume as Bronislaw Andrzejewski.

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## C O N T E N T S

	PAGE
<i>Preface</i> by VERONIKA GOROG-KARADY.. .. .	i-ii
<i>Foreword</i> by RUTH FINNEGAN .. .. .	iv-vi
DIANA REY-HULMAN	
<i>Pratiques langagières et formes littéraires</i> .. .. .	1-13
JEAN DERIVE	
<i>La reformulation en littérature orale. Typologie des transformations linguistiques dans les différentes performances d'une même oeuvre</i> .. .. .	14-21
JAN KNAPPERT	
<i>Swahili oral traditions</i> .. .. .	22-30
VERONIKA GOROG-KARADY	
<i>Retelling Genesis: The children of Eve and the origin of inequality</i> .. .. .	31-44
GENEVIEVE CALAME-GRIAULE	
<i>La jeune fille qui cherche ses frères. Essai d'analyse</i> .. .. .	45-56
DOMINIQUE CASAJUS	
<i>Autour du rituel de la nomination chez les Touaregs Kel Ferwan</i> .. .. .	57-67
BRONISLAW ANDRZEJEWSKI	
<i>Alliteration and scansion in Somali oral poetry and its cultural correlates</i> .. .. .	68-83
CHRISTIANE SEYDOU	
<i>Comment définir le genre épique? Un exemple: l'épopée africaine</i> .. .. .	84-98
ELISABETH GUNNER	
<i>New wine in old bottles: Imagery in the izibongo of the Zulu Zionist prophet, Isaiah Shembe</i> .. .. .	99-108
KEVIN DONNELLY and YAHYA OMAR	
<i>Structure and association in Bajuni fishing songs</i> .. .. .	109-122

BRONISLAW ANDRZEJEWSKI

ALLITERATION AND SCANSION IN SOMALI ORAL POETRY  
AND THEIR CULTURAL CORRELATES

INTRODUCTION

In the study of cultural phenomena it is often difficult, if not impossible, to establish chains of cause and effect with a clearly defined direction such as have been arrived at by experimentation in physics or chemistry. Nevertheless it seems that various degrees of interconnectedness, reminiscent of those found in ecological systems, can be observed in the cultural phenomena which occur in a particular society.

In the oral poetry of various societies there are wide variations in the systems of versification: some impose demanding formal constraints on the language which poets use, while others are very lax in this respect.<sup>1</sup> The question arises as to whether such variations can be correlated in any way with other cultural phenomena present in the particular society, and although the answer could only be arrived at by a thorough examination of a large number of societies and would require the cooperation of several researchers, I hope that one day such an inquiry will be carried out. In this paper, as an initial step in this direction, I shall examine what I believe to be the cultural correlates of the system of versification in Somali society, restricting myself to the classical genres, i.e. the traditional poetry of the public forum, thus excluding the miniature genres and modern poetry.<sup>2</sup>

The information concerning both the poetry and its cultural correlates is derived partly from my own observation and partly from the sources, published and unpublished, referred to throughout this paper. I was very fortunate in that my researches in Somalia began in 1950 when the traditional way of life in the

pastoralist interior was not yet affected by the rapid changes of the late 1950s and the years which followed. This was the time before radio sets were found in large numbers among the rural population and before the transistor revolution offered cheap portable tape-recorders to poetry reciters as a highly effective aid to their memory powers. It was over twenty years before the official orthography was introduced in Somalia and mass literacy campaigns took place.

## RULES OF VERSIFICATION

### Alliteration

The traditional Somali poetry of the public forum had a system of versification which consisted of alliteration and quantitative scansion patterns.<sup>3</sup> The rules of alliteration were as follows:

- A. In poems with short lines, which had no caesura, each line had to contain one alliterative word.
- B. In poems with long lines, which were divided into two hemistichs by the caesura, each hemistich had to contain one alliterative word.
- C. In poems of all types the same alliteration had to be used in all the lines and hemistichs of a poem.

Rules A and C are illustrated in the poem given below, where the alliterative words are marked by the use of capital letters. The authorship of the poem is attributed to Faarax Garaad Xirsi, nicknamed 'Wiilwaal' ('The Mad Youngster'), who died in 1864. He distinguished himself, apart from his poetry, by restoring the chieftainship of Jigjiga to its former sovereignty and splendour through his skill and prowess in warfare and his autocratic methods of government. He is particularly remembered for his victory over the Oromo chief, Guray ('The Lefthanded').

The transcript of the poem was taken from a poetry reciter some time in the late 1970s by Sheekh Caaqib Cabdullaahi Jaamac.<sup>4</sup>

1. WAR yar oo igu saabsan
2. Haddaan WEEDH ka caddeeyo
3. WAA inaad WADARTIIN ba
4. Idinkoon i WAGLIILIN
5. WAA runtaa i dhahdaan
6. WAAGAAN WIIL yar ahaa
7. Rag anoon WAX la qeybsan
8. WACDI sheekyo WANAAGSAN
9. WAALIDIINTA gabowday baan
10. WADDADA diinta WANAAGSAN
11. WACDIGAY hadlayeen baan

- \* 1-2. *If I present plainly in a few sentences a little account of myself,*
3. *you will have, all of you,*
4. *with none of you contradicting,*
5. *to say to me, 'You are telling the truth!'*
6. *When I was a young boy*
7. *and had yet no share in the affairs of men,*
8. *with the preaching of good sheikhs*
9. *and of my old parents,*
11. *and with the words of guidance they spoke*
10. *about the path of the holy faith*

\* In the English translation some lines have been transposed in order to maintain normal English word order.

- |                                 |  |
|---------------------------------|--|
| 12. Ku WEELEEYAY dhegtayda      | 12. <i>I used to fill my ear as if it were a vessel.</i>                   |
| 13. Anoo WAANSAMAY oo           | 13. <i>Thus rightly guided</i>   |
| 14. WADAAD fiican ahow leh      | 14. <i>I wanted to become a good cleric;</i>                               |
| 15. WEYSADA iyo Kitaabka iyo    | 17. <i>I got for myself the implements of true piety,</i>                  |
| 16. Masalle aad u WANAAGSAN iyo | 15. <i>The vessel for ablutions, the Holy bo</i>                           |
| 17. WEELKA daacadda qaatay baad | 16. <i>And a very good prayer-rug;</i>                                     |
| 18. WIILWAAL ii bixiseen        | 18. <i>And yet you gave me the name Wilwaal 'The Mad Youngster'!</i>       |
| 19. WEERARKAAD ku jirteen baa   | 19. <i>The fighting in which you were engage</i>                           |
| 20. WALBAHAAR ficilo            | <i>Planted in me the desire</i>  |
| 21. WADNAHEYGA ku beermay       | 20-21. <i>To outdo all others.</i>   |
| 22. Haddaanan WEYRAX jareysan   | 22. <i>Had I not put the bridle on Weyrax 'The Enraged One', my horse,</i> |
| 23. WARMIHII cadcaddaa iyo      | 25. <i>Had I not carried with me</i>                                       |
| 24. Gaashaankii WIYILEED        | 23. <i>The shining spears and</i>  |
| 25. Anoo WAAJILAYA oo           | 24. <i>The rhinoceros-hide shield,</i>                                     |
| 26. WAAR kacaay idin leh        | 26. <i>Had I not said to you, 'Onward, men!'</i>                           |
| 27. Kolkuu WAAGU iftiimay       | 27. <i>When the light of dawn broke</i>                                    |
| 28. Intaan WEERAR ku qaado      | 28. <i>As I launched an attack,</i>  |
| 29. Guray WAAXYAHA goynin       | 29. <i>Had I not hewn Guray into quarters -</i>                            |
| 30. Cadow baa WADDANKEENNA      | <i>The enemy would have</i>  |
| 31. La WAREEGI lahaa            | 30-31. <i>Taken over our country!</i>                                      |

Rules B and C are illustrated by another poem, a lament on the tribulations of old age, which is attributed to Raage Ugaas Warfaa, a celebrated poet contemporary with Faarax Garaad Xirsi. The transcript of the poem was taken from a poetry reciter by Shire Jaamac Axmed<sup>5</sup> some time in the late 1950s.

The caesura is marked by a comma in each line.

1. Inta khayli DHUUGYAHA cas iyo, DHEEG wiyil ah qaatay
2. Ee DHALLANKA Aadnigu u baxo, sidatan la ii DHAWRAY
3. Kolkii hore ba DHERERKIImiyaa, DHABARKI soo gaabtay
4. Ma ka DHAXAY DHAWAAQ uubatiyo, DHEELMITAAN gibin ah
5. DHABBE reero qaadeen miyaa, laygu wada DHAAFAY
6. USHAN DHAABIN mooyee hubki, ma iska wada DHIIBAY
7. Raggaan DHALAY raggu DHALAY miyaa, DHARABO ii diiday
8. Kuwi aniga ii DHAXAY miyaa, DHIMASHADAY dooni
9. DHUUNIGA i siiyaay miyaa, sida DHALLAAN ooyey
10. Waxan DHAWRSAN jiray ceeb miyaa, igu DHARAAROWDAY

1. *Once I wore a fine red-brown mantle and carried a rhinoceros-hide shield*
2. *I was looked upon with esteem as one among the best of humankind.*
3. *But then my backbone grew short and shrank, did it not?*
4. *I even had to stop for a night's rest - did I not? - when travelling a distance so short that shouting voices could have spanned it*

5. *I was passed and left behind on the way - was I not? - by everyone along the route which trekking hamlets take*
6. *I had to give up carrying weapons altogether - did I not? - except for a stick to support myself.*
7. *The men begotten by men whom I begot refused to lend me support, did they not?*
8. *The women who were married to me wished me dead, did they not?*
9. *'Give me food!' I shouted - did I not? - weeping like a child.*
10. *The shameful things against which I had guarded myself have now come upon me, clear as the light of day, have they not?*

Alliteration in Somali poetry is probably of great antiquity, since it is used in proverbs, including those which are archaic in their vocabulary and grammatical forms. Alliteration is also found in invocations and blessings, some of which appear to be of a pre-Islamic character.<sup>6</sup>

### Scansion

Traditional Somali poetry of the public forum has scansion rules which are applied simultaneously with those of alliteration. Within each genre the lines have a prescribed quantity pattern measured by morae, i.e. time units. Short syllables are treated as having one mora and long ones as having two morae, and the length of the syllable is determined by the length of its vocalic component, i.e. its vowel or diphthong. There are various additional rules concerning the distribution of morae and syllables within the overall pattern of the line, and some constraints on the grammatical structure of the lines.

Although Somali oral poets had applied these rules intuitively from time immemorial, no one had analyzed or had any conscious knowledge of their nature until the middle 1970s, in spite of efforts on the part of various researchers, including myself, to discover them. It was then that two Somali scholars, Cabdilleahi Diiriye Guuleed and Maxamed Xaashi Dhamac 'Gaarriye', working independently, made the discovery.<sup>7</sup> They were no doubt helped by the introduction of the national orthography for Somali in 1972,<sup>8</sup> which made more poetic texts available for research and made it possible for them to publish the results in their own language, creating their own terminology and testing their findings with well-informed Somali opinion through publication of their results.

It should be noted, however, that the introduction of the orthography created some obstacles to research into scansion since it standardized the spelling of certain very frequently occurring words which have optionally variable length, such as the pronouns *aan/an* 'I', *aad/ad* 'you' (sg.), *uu/u* 'he' etc., the definite articles *kii/ki*, *tii/ti*, the negative particle *aan/an* 'not' and the focusing particle *baa/ba*. The orthography



also tends to avoid the contractions between words ending in short vowels and an immediately following conjunction which may be optionally used instead of their uncontracted forms, such as *geeliyo fardaha* instead of *geela iyo fardaha* 'the camels and the horses'.

The variations in length of words which result from the use of these options are very helpful to poets in adjusting their oral texts to the requirements of scansion, but transcripts, published and unpublished, which are made in the official orthography tend to follow the orthographic conventions on the assumption that the reader will make the necessary adjustment as he applies intuitively the rules of scansion appropriate to the genre.

These obstacles did not substantially impede research and now we have at our disposal published information on Somali scansion which in its main tenets is incontrovertible. The discoveries of the two Somali scholars, which first appeared in Somali, were then made accessible to the outside world by John W. Johnson, who not only described the findings but added to them some original formulations.<sup>9</sup>

There were three main genres in the poetry of the public forum: the *gabay*, the *jiifto* and the *geeraar*. The most important was the *gabay*, since it was particularly favoured as the vehicle of public debate in a leisurely style and in poetic exchanges and messages. One could venture to say that perhaps 90 per cent of all classical poetry was composed in this genre. The *jiifto* had similar uses to those of the *gabay* but was rare, while the *geeraar* was traditionally an equestrian poem chanted on horseback and was regarded as appropriate for subject matters of urgency, especially in face-to-face confrontations.

In the present state of research it is the rules of scansion applicable to the *gabay* that are best known, and they appear to have been rigidly observed by poets. The *jiifto* is near to the *gabay* in that respect but the *geeraar* still presents some problems, since the rules so far evolved do not account for deviations from the pattern of the majority of the lines and it seems that there may be a set of sub-rules which still awaits discovery.

It would be beyond the scope of this paper to provide detailed accounts of the rules for each genre and these can be found in Cabdillaahi 1980 and Johnson 1979 and 1980. To illustrate what is involved in the Somali scansion rules a metric analysis of a *gabay* poem is given below, where semicircles represent syllables of one mora and dashes those of two morae. Single vertical lines show the place of foot boundaries and the caesura is indicated by a comma.

The rules applicable to the *gabay* genre are:

- A. Each line consists of two hemistichs divided by a caesura.
- B. The first hemistich normally has 12 morae, with an optional but rare possibility of anacrusis, consisting of one additional mora at the beginning of the line.
- C. The second hemistich always has eight morae and contains two long syllables.
- D. Foot boundaries do not occur in the middle of a long syllable.
- E. The caesura coincides with a word boundary.
- F. Line boundaries do not cut across major syntactic components of a sentence.

The poem is attributed to Cilmi Boodhari, a famous poet who is said to have died of unrequited love in 1941, and in it he describes how the woman he loved appeared to him in a dream. The transcript of the oral text was taken from a poetry reciter in the early 1970s by Rashiid Maxamed Shabeelle,<sup>10</sup> the biographer of the poet.

1. Ma samaynin waayahan tixdii, saaniga ahayde  
   U U - U | - U U U | - - U | U U - U
2. Waataan ka saahiday tan iyo, sabanki dayreede  
   - - U | - U U U | U U U | - - U
3. Xaluun ba saqdii dhexe hurdada, wax i salaameene  
   U - U U | - U U U | U U U | U U | - - U
4. Aan sifeeyo inanti tiriig, saxan la moodaayey  
   - U - | U U U U | - U U U | - - U
5. Ilka sadaf la moodiyo wajiga, lagu saruuraayo  
   U U U U | - U U U | U U U | - - U
6. Timaha basari baan subkinee, saaran garabkeeda  
   U U U U | U - U U | - - U | U U - U
7. Sanka iyo indhaha iyo afkaa, sida sabeedaad ah  
   U U U U | U U U U | - U U U | - - U
8. Suniyaal madoobeey qalbigu, saakin kaa noqoye  
   U U - U | - - U | U U - U | - U U U
9. Soomaali iyo Carab Hindiga, Sooya laga keeno  
   - - U | U U U U | U U U | - - U
10. Inta samada hoos joogta waad, ugu sareysaaye  
   U U U U U | - - U | - U U U | - - U
11. Soo soco Sidciyo qaaliyey, saanad baad tahaye  
   - U U U | U U - U | - - U | - U U U

1. *I have not in recent times composed my perfect verses,  
as I used to do.*
2. *From the midsummer rains till now I have abstained from  
them completely.*
3. *But last night someone greeted me in my sleep at midnight,*
4. *So let me describe her, the girl who was like a bright lantern;*
5. *Her teeth were like seashells and her face brought joy;*
6. *Only a sluttish woman does not put oil on her hair - hers was  
oiled and reached her shoulders.*
7. *Her nose, her eyes and her mouth were fragrant like musk.*
8. *O you who have black eyebrows! It is through you that my  
heart achieved rest.*
9. *Among Somalis and Arabs and the Indians who are brought from  
afar,*
10. *Among all who dwell under the sky, you are the topmost.*
11. *Come near, O precious Sidciyo - in value you are as a firearm!*

#### CULTURAL CORRELATES

The combined rules of alliteration and scansion were obligatory in the traditional Somali society and put severe constraints on the poets. It seems unlikely that rules which were so demanding could have been maintained unless they were in some way correlated with other cultural phenomena present in the traditional society. Some of these cultural correlates were direct while others were indirect, and in the former immediate interconnectedness can be observed while in the latter the links can only be established via direct correlates.

A list is given below of both these types of cultural correlates (CC), each bearing a serial number, and in the following section the grounds for linking each with the rules of versification are stated.<sup>11</sup>

CC1. *The goal of verbatim memorization*

Poetry reciters were expected to memorize and reproduce the oral text of a poem word for word; to delete, to substitute or to add any new material was discouraged. As a concession to the frailty of human memory some degree of deviation from this rule was acceptable provided that it was not attributable to the wilful intention of the reciter.

CC2. *Archaic vocabulary*

The oral poetry contained a very large number of archaic words, not used in the ordinary language. In this respect the vocabulary differences between poetry and prose were comparable to those between 15th-century English and that spoken today.<sup>12</sup>

CC3. *The use of certain proper names as common nouns*

The proper names of women, horses and camels were often used as common nouns and were frequently descriptive through their etymological associations, e.g.

*Ugaaso*, name of a woman which suggests that she is like an *ugaas* 'a chieftain' or like the daughter of one; in poetry - a woman of quality.

*Weyrax*, name of a horse which suggests that it becomes angry when frightened, cf. *weyrax* 'become angry and attack when frightened' (applied mainly to cattle); in poetry - a horse useful in battle.

*Xiito*, name of a she-camel which suggests that it is as watchful and alert as *xidin xiito* 'ringed plover' (a nocturnal bird); in poetry - any she-camel, or camels in general.

CC4. *Fictitious place names*

Poets were allowed to make up fictitious place names to denote some unspecified place, especially if it suggested remoteness.

CC5. *Neologisms*

Poets were allowed to exploit the derivational system of the language to coin new words.

CC6. *Length of poems*

Oral poems were seldom very long. One hundred lines was regarded as normal, though much shorter poems were common; very few extended over five hundred lines. Long epic poems did not exist.

CC7. *Methods of composition*

Very few poets improvised their poems during performance. Most prepared them over many hours, and then memorized the final version. Improvization of a long poem was regarded as a sign of genius.

CC8. *Great prestige of poets*

Poets were highly respected, far more than poetry reciters.

CC9. *Supernatural powers attributed to poets*

In popular beliefs the power to compose poetry came from some mysterious source outside the poet himself. Some poets were also thought to have the power of effective cursing and blessing, clairvoyance and prediction.

CC10. *Oral postal service*

The Somali people occupied a large, sparsely populated territory and most of them were transhumant pastoralists. Kinship, marriage, alliances and trade linked people who were separated by distance, and before the introduction of a modern postal service and mass literacy, the oral message was the main medium of communication. It was carried by travellers or special messengers, and a custom existed which made it a serious moral obligation to deliver a message with accuracy and all possible speed. The sender of an oral message sometimes asked the carrier to memorize it verbatim, especially if it was in a code not known to the carrier. Often messages were in the form of a poem, with the opening lines addressed to the carrier.

CC11. *Poetic exchanges*

Polemics in verse between two, or a number, of poets, often across great distances, were common. It was considered particularly elegant to compose one's rejoinder in the same metre and alliteration as one's protagonist.

CC12. *Storage of historical information*

Most of the poems in the classical genres were topical, i.e. commented on current events or aimed at influencing the listeners to take a particular course of action. With the passage of time they became sources of historical information, for the reciters usually provided accounts in prose form of the circumstances in which the particular poem was first composed, with biographical details concerning the poet and a description of the events relevant to the understanding of the poem, which otherwise might have become opaque.

CC13. *Division into poets and reciters*

Some poets both created their own poems and recited those of others, but more frequently the two roles were divided. Poets usually recited only their own poems, while some never did this publicly but taught reciters their oral texts. Many reciters did not compose any poetry of their own: their talent did not lie in creativity but in prodigious powers of memory storage, in some cases up to twenty hours of 'playback' time.

CC14. *Unwritten copyright law*

It was a strict obligation on every poetry reciter, when he memorized the text of a poem from the poet or from another reciter, to thereafter state the name of the poet at each recital. Any breach of this custom was severely censured. An intentional misattribution was regarded as an act of dishonesty and an unintentional one as a sign of negligence.

CC15. *Personal responsibility of the poet*

A poet was held responsible for his work, even when it was transmitted by poetry reciters. Cases of assault or even assassination occurred in revenge for defamation through poems, and panegyric poems were rewarded by gifts or favours.

CC16. *The ranking of poets*

Public opinion assigned different ranks to poets, in the same way as happens in written literatures. Those of higher ranks enjoyed enormous prestige, even posthumously. This fact was noted by, and caused astonishment to, the early foreign travellers Sir Richard Burton and his near-contemporary Luigi Robbetti.<sup>13</sup>

CC17. *Performance: emphasis on the oral text*

Poems of classical genres were usually chanted, without any instrumental accompaniment, at a slow speed with each line being normally repeated. Although a reciter with a good voice was appreciated, the audience were more concerned with the oral text than with its performance. Any form of mimetic accompaniment to the recital of a poem was regarded as improper.

CC18. *Popularity of oral poetry*

Poetry was one of the chief sources of popular entertainment and was a social equivalent of the modern mass media.

CC19. *Rapid dissemination of poems*

Poetry reciters travelled widely and learnt poems from each other. Poems often spread across vast distances with such speed that this was sometimes attributed in popular belief to supernatural intervention.

CC20. *Social importance of poems*

Poets were entitled, and expected, not only to comment on events of public concern but to influence them by presenting particular views or recommending a course of action. They were often engaged in propaganda, both in local affairs and national politics, and it is known that very often this propaganda was very effective.

#### GROUNDS FOR POSTULATING CULTURAL CORRELATES

##### *Direct correlates*

It is assumed here that CC1-9 were directly correlated with the system of versification on the grounds set out below:

CC1: The versification served as a highly effective mnemonic device in a situation where the goal of verbatim memorization was aimed at. Such a goal could hardly be achieved without a mnemonic device of some kind.

CC2-5: The rules of Somali versification were very demanding and imposed severe constraints on the phonological characteristics of the words used by the poet. His lexical repertoire had to be augmented by sources which lay beyond the limits of the language of practical communication.

CC6-7: Clearly, under the constraints of the system of versification long poems would be extremely difficult to compose. An epic poem alliterating in the same sound would hardly be feasible. It was also very difficult to improvise under those constraints.

CC8-9: The demands of the system of versification acted as a selecting device. Only persons with an unusually high command of the language, both in its vocabulary and grammatical structure, could practise the art of poetry. Such a command was regarded in the traditional Somali society as a sure sign of superior intelligence. Some people were so amazed by the ability of some poets to compose relatively long poems or to improvise without breaking the rules of versification, that they attributed it to supernatural intervention. The obscurity of the poetic diction often produced an aura which confirmed that impression, and some poets made explicit claims of being in direct contact with supernatural beings. In the view of some of their audiences such a contact opened up for the poets the possibility of receiving help from supernatural beings in other spheres as well.

#### *Indirect correlates*

The grounds for regarding CC10-20 as indirectly correlated with the system of versification are as follows:

CC10-11: Sending messages or engaging in poetic exchanges requires at least some degree of fidelity in their transmission, and this would hardly be possible without CC1. The efficiency of communication would have been seriously impaired if the carriers were allowed to take liberties with the oral text: it would be comparable to allowing telex operators in a modern industrial society to introduce variations and improvisations into the messages entrusted to them.

CC12: The credibility and the sense of authenticity in the historical information contained in once-topical poems depends on CC1. If a number of different poems concerned with the same historical events was available, the dovetailing of information provided additional corroboration.

CC13: Most of the poetry reciters were people endowed with prodigious powers of memory, which were highly desirable in view of CC1. Such gifts, however, seldom coincide with poetic talent in any culture and this fact accounts for CC13.

CC14-16: Individual authorship of an oral text could hardly be established without CC1. If poetry reciters made changes at will and improvised on the received oral text they would be its co-authors and would then share the responsibility for it as well as the rewards of fame.

CC17: In view of the existence of CCl poetry reciters were regarded merely as channels of communication. They kept a low profile, thus giving prominence to the oral text rather than to its performance.

CC18-20: In view of CC8 and CC9 poets were regarded as persons worth listening to whether in face-to-face situations or through the performances of poetry reciters made authentic by CCl. This caused poetry to be eminently suitable as a vehicle of influencing public opinion in matters of local and national politics, and since these subjects were of immediate concern and interest to the public, this in turn provided additional attraction and assured the poets or their reciters of large audiences.

Travelling formed part of the traditional way of life in Somalia for most people, and this included poetry reciters. They were given a warm reception wherever they went, and at wells, watering ponds and markets they always found appreciative audiences, among whom other poetry reciters were also found and who were keen on memorizing topical items or adding to their repertoire of old poems so that they could recite them themselves on other occasions. Thus the oral copy was multiplied through a series of relays.

In Somali society the events of past history often affected relationships between various ethnic and territorial subgroups of the nation. This added to the attraction of the older poems, which in view of CCl were regarded as authentic sources of information about the past.

#### CONCLUSIONS

The versification systems in the oral literatures of African societies are of interest in themselves, and research into them is highly relevant to the general world-wide study of literature, oral and written. Such research, though it must initially deal with the formal aspects of versification, may provide new perspectives if it widens its scope to the study of correlated cultural phenomena. The Somali example suggests that it may offer a fruitful line of inquiry.

The study of cultural correlates of versification may also throw some light on its absence in the poetry of some societies. It is possible that among the correlates of the absence of versification may be found the emphasis placed in a particular society on the musical or mimetic aspects of the performance of poetic texts.



## NOTES

1. For a general account of the prosodic features of oral poetry see Finnegan 1977.
2. Information concerning the genres of Somali poetry can be found in Andrzejewski and Lewis 1964, Cerulli 1964, Johnson 1972 and 1974 and Muuse 1968. Extensive bibliographies concerning Somali literature are Johnson 1969 (supplemented in Johnson 1973) and Lamberti 1982.
3. For information about alliteration see Andrzejewski and Lewis 1964, Cerulli 1964 and Johnson 1974 and for scansion Cabdillaahi 1980 and Johnson 1979 and 1980. Johnson 1979 also gives a complete bibliography of publications of Cabdillaahi Diiriye Guuleed and Maxamed Xaashi Dhamac "Gaarriye" on scansion, written in Somali.
4. Caaqib 1977, p.10. Line 8 of the original which runs *Wacdi sheekh iyo wanaagsan* has been amended here on the assumption that it contains a typing error. For information about Sheekh Caaqib Cabdullaahi Jaamac, a well known poet and collector of oral literature, see Andrzejewski 1970. While translating this poem and the other two poems given in this paper I received help and advice from Maxamed Cabdillaahi Riiraash, of the Curriculum Department of the Somali Ministry of Education, now on a postgraduate studies secondment in London. His assistance, which I gratefully acknowledge, was particularly useful since he is both an historian and a poet.
5. Shire 1965, p.46. The text here follows the original except for the adjustment of the spelling to the official orthography. For information about Shire Jaamac Axmed, a well known collector of oral literature, writer and scholar see Andrzejewski 1975.
6. Cabdisalaan 1977.
7. This discovery is described in Johnson 1980; see also Note 3.
8. See Andrzejewski 1978.
9. Johnson 1979. See also Antinucci 1980 for the aspects of scansion related to linguistic structure.
10. Rashiid 1975, p.50. In Lines 4, 6 and 7 the original transcript, which is orthographic, has the forms *inantii*, *subkine* and *afka* instead of *inanti*, *subkinee* and *afkaa* given here. The final vowels in these forms are of variable length and have been adjusted to the oral rendering by Maxamed Cabdillaahi Riiraash (see Note 3). The words *basri* (Line 6) and *hoose* (Line 10) of the original transcript have been amended to *basari* and *hoos*

since they are almost certainly typing errors. For further information about Cilmi Boodhari (also known as Cilmi Bowndheri) see Andrzejewski and Maxamed 1967.

11. For works relevant to the cultural correlates described here see the References.

12. The difference between the language of poetry and that of ordinary communication is not a recent development. It was noticed by Burton who, referring to Somali poetry, wrote: 'Many of these compositions are so idiomatic that Arabs settled for years among the Somal cannot understand them though perfectly acquainted with conversational style' (Burton 1856, p.116).

13. See Burton 1856 and Robecchi 1889.

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Since surnames are not normally used in Somalia the names of Somali authors are given in their customary order and are not inverted. All Somali names are given in the official orthography and if their spelling differs from that used on the title page they are cross-referenced; the symbol = indicates that the variants refer to the same author. This is done in accordance with the recommendations presented in Andrzejewski 1980 which have now been adopted by libraries with major holdings in the Somali field.

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