

The Worldly and the Unworldly in *Jacayl Dhiig Ma Lagu Qoray* by Maxamed Ibraahim Warsame “Hadraawi”

MARTIN ORWIN

ABSTRACT

This paper considers the worldly and unworldly in the famous Somali poem *Jacayl Dhiig Ma Lagu Qoray* by Maxamed Ibraahim Warsame “Hadraawi.” The poem alternates between worldly and unworldly perspectives, each of which is a side in a dialectic questioning the nature of love. These different perspectives are reflected in references to time, people and landscape. A comparison is drawn with the way in which such references are presented in the poem *Beledweyne*, a more conventional love poem by Hadraawi, suggesting an intertextual relationship between the two poems.

In the early 1970s the famous Somali singer Xaliimo Khaliif Magool performed at a concert in Khartoum. A Sudanese man was present in the audience who, it seems, fell in love with the singer. Some time after she returned to Somalia, Magool received a letter in Arabic, but as she was not able to read it, she passed it to the poet Hadraawi for him to read for her. As he read, he noticed that the letter was written in what seemed to be red ink; however, from what was written, he came to know that the letter had not been written in ink at all, but in the man’s blood! He had extracted his own blood with a syringe and used that to write the letter as a sign of his love for Magool. This famous story is what led to the writing¹ by Hadraawi of his modern *hees* poem *Jacayl Dhiig Ma Lagu Qoray*, which I have translated as *Has Love Been Blood-written*.² In his book *Hal ka Haleel*, Maxamed Baashe has quoted Hadraawi talking about how this poem came about:

ma garanayo sidii ay ka yeeshay Xaliimo warqaddaas iyo in ay rumaysatay wixii ku qornaa, hase yeeshee waxa ay aniga arrintu Hadraawi ahaan igu yeelatay saamayn ballaadhan, waayo waxaan dareemay in jacaylka oo aniga cayaayir ama dheer dheel iigu muuqan jirey uu yeelan karo halista intaas le’eg, gaadhina karo heerkan sidaas u sii sarreeya.

I don't know how Xaliimo [Magool] felt about this letter or whether she believed what was written in it, but the matter had a deep effect on me, Hadraawi, because love, which had seemed to me to be a more amusing and light hearted matter, could bring about something so serious and reach this level which was higher than [what I had previously thought]. (52)³

The poem was made popular by being sung by Magool herself, although I have also heard a recording of it being sung by the famous singer Xasan Aaden Samatar. The text referred to here is that found in Hadraawi's anthology *Hal-Karaan* and can safely be regarded as authoritative (see Orwin for the issue of definitive text in Somali poetry.)

This article is a critical analysis of the poem that I came to know well during the process of translation. The poem is the poet's human response to the extraordinary story of the letter and his reflections on the nature of an emotion familiar to all humanity. The interpretation is based on the text of the poem itself and the cultural and literary context in which the poem was, and still is, experienced by Somalis. I have looked to convey the power of the message of the poem through examining in particular the use of time references and references to people and imagery. The subject could not only have been addressed in Somali but could be handled by a poet in any language. The manner in which the theme is presented and the way in which it is written, however, is dependent on the language and poetic traditions of Somali. In the following discussion I shall focus upon the unworldly or fantastical qualities found in the poem, and shall contrast these with more "worldly" references here and in another poem by Hadraawi, a conventional love poem called *Beledweyn* (Maxamed Ibraahim 88–91).

Among the poems composed by Hadraawi, love poems are an important group. Not all, though, are love poems in the conventional sense. One that is a conventional love poem is *Beledweyn*, in which the poet meets a woman in the town of that name, describes her beauty and that of the surroundings in which they meet, and then expresses grief at not being able to meet her again due to his having to leave with the theater troupe with which he has traveled. Other love poems are political allegories in which the beloved is symbolic of the Somali people who have been abused by the regime. In *Jacayl Dhiig Ma Lagu Qoray*, however, he is writing philosophically on the nature of love, a concern that was prompted by the extraordinary story of the Sudanese man's letter to Magool. I suggest that Hadraawi presents this theme dialectically within the poem. He achieves this through his presentation of the notion of time, the people present in the poem, the imagery and metaphorical references all of which come together in a rich tapestry of different threads that question and interact with each other. The dialectic is then explicitly expressed in the conclusion of the poem. Although there is no historical link between the two traditions, the metaphorical nature of the dialectic in the main part of the poem is somewhat reminiscent of the manner in which the metaphysical poets in English presented their thoughts in their poems in the seventeenth century.

The poem is structured in a typical fashion with an *arar* (introductory section) and a *gebagebo* (concluding section) surrounding the major part of the poem.⁴ In the *arar*, the topic is introduced with direct reference to the letter of the Sudanese man: "has love been blood-written?" (line 1).⁵ The theme of blood is then built

upon firstly with a stark, somewhat gruesome, reference to peeling flesh from the body (ll. 4–5) and then with reference to actually sharing blood, drinking it like fresh milk (ll.13–17). The reference to fresh milk here is something that must be understood in the Somali context. Camel's milk is sustenance *par excellence* to Somali nomads and the symbolism of the camel and its milk, and hence properties of sustenance to human beings both literally and metaphorically as here, is very strong. It is in this extension of the idea of a person extracting his or her own blood that we see the rhetorical questioning of whether the man reached “for the highest level” (l. 183) explicitly mentioned at the end of the poem.

Following the *arar*, the main section of the poem may be divided into two parts. In the first, the two people at the heart of the poem meet and the way they interact is described. The second part describes the way in which they then become the heart of a termite mound that is built up around them and how that termite mound is viewed by people in the countryside. Within the whole of this main section is the dialectic expressed through a tension between a worldly and a fantastical or unworldly manner of presenting human experience and interaction. This may be seen to represent the two kinds of love that Hadraawi is exploring, and the tension between them. The worldly manner had been his way of viewing love prior to seeing the letter by the Sudanese man, as we learn in the quotation from *Hal ka Haleel* given earlier; and the more unworldly manner represented in the blood with which the letter had been written. Following this, the *gebaggebo* sets out in an argumentative manner the theme of the poem and explicitly asks the question implicit in the rest of the poem. Having started in the *arar* with the blood of the letter, the *gebaggebo* thus brings the listener back to the man who wrote it: “did he strive for the highest level?” (l.183). This questioning nature of the poem as to what love is, is directly reflected in the syntax in that the whole comprises a sequence of questions.⁶ This questioning acts as a grammatical embodiment of the illocutionary intent of the poem. In reading or listening to the poem, the reader/listener⁷ asks in turn, through the experience of the poem itself, the questions asked by the poet.

The poem is written in the *jifto* metre, the pattern most commonly used for modern *hees*-type poems, and the alliterative sound is *dh*,⁸ which reflects the word *dhiig* “blood” that is at the core of the incident that motivated the poem.⁹ As with so much of Somali poetry, these stylistic features are not irrelevant conceits but are integrated into the core material of the poem. One particularly striking instance of this is found in the line *naxariis ma dhidideen* (l. 36 in the Somali, “did they sweat compassion” l. 46 in the English translation). The striking juxtaposition of the normally intransitive verb *dhidid* “to sweat,” made transitive by the presence of a direct object, is an instance of poetic license prompted by stylistic requirements but used creatively to pursue the theme of the poem.

There are a number of time references in the poem that mark the worldly and fantastical nature of the presentation of the two notions of love in the poem. Two frames of time reference reflect the tension between worldly, day-to-day love and a “higher” level of love hinted at by the letter in blood. The two time streams in the poem are the passage of one “real” day and night and, simultaneously, the “unworldly” passage of ten days, a year and a thousand nights.

Following the *arar*, the woman and the man who are at the core of the metaphorical dialectic are introduced. They appear in a scene from the countryside

evocatively presented as the early morning when there is a low-lying mist after morning rain. This is the first specific time reference in the poem: "one morning have two / after first soaking rain" (ll. 21–22). The morning introduces a day in which the two become "aware of each other's rustle" (ll. 27–28). The unworldliness of their encounter (what would they be doing on their own in the middle of the countryside with no one else around?) is further emphasized in that their meeting seemed like a "mirage" (l. 32) or a "vision" (l. 30); as though in some intermediate state of wakefulness, they are referred to "from time to time / as if suddenly waking / out of a dream" (ll. 33–35). Here we see a direct reference to an oscillation between the state of dreaming and waking, hinting at the two notions of love and giving the listener the sense of moving one way and the other across the boundary between these two notions. Once the two people are clearly aware of each other, they attempt to communicate, but "did words elude them" (l. 40). Their first attempts at communication are thus not spoken, and yet "did spots of ceaseless rain / emotion's tears / spill from their eyes" (ll. 41–44). In a context in which speech would be so pertinent¹⁰ there is none, and yet the relation between them stirs such a profound emotional response. Again we see a tension between what, objectively, would be the most likely worldly way in which two people would speak and interact with each other in such a context and the more fantastical manner in which they are presented as interacting in the poem. When they are eventually able to speak, however, it is not just later in the day introduced by the morning as above; rather it is "ten days later" (l. 54) that they are able to speak, greet each other, and talk. No mention of the passing of night and day interrupts these ten days. Following this, we learn that they spend a year listening to each other with their love being their nourishment, a reflection of the milk earlier and a further reflection of the unworldliness of their encounter. Just prior to this reference to a year, however, we gain some sense of this year being at the same time "worldly" in that "time after time / [did they] drag the enclosure's / night-time gate" (ll. 73–75). We may then imagine a scenario in which they talked for a whole year while still continuing with the daily chores and "seeing nothing harmed the other" (l. 77), an imagining that at once reflects something of a worldly, day-to-day existence and at the same time reflects something which is more fantastical.

The next reference to time is in lines 80–85: "did the talking end / did they then spend / half a day / in this silent way / as the daylight fell." The contrast here of the calmness of the half-day spent in silence as the daylight fell with the activity of the year of talking and dragging the night-time gate foregrounds the night that follows. Here we learn of their "staring gaze" (l. 85) and their "inflamed thoughts" (l. 86), which suggests the desire to consummate their love during the night, a reflection of the worldly aspects of love. However, they endure the night "of cold and dark" (l. 90) like camel herders and this endurance continues beyond the night. The next day is introduced with "did the dawn then glow / and the sun call out" (ll. 93–94). This time reference seems to follow from the reference to parts of the day before. It is as if along with the references to ten days and a year, the single day that began when they met had also been carrying on and in this new, following day, the endurance they sustained over the night continues and lasts "a thousand nights" (l. 113). This unworldly time reference comes at the end of a section in which the experience of not consummating their love mentioned above is referred to directly, e.g., "avoiding the step / of moving closer / resisting the

play-touch / the youthful way" (ll. 102–05). The reference to a thousand nights gains its strength from these preceding lines but also from the play on the worldly and unworldly time references discussed above. The tension and dialectic presented through these time references reaches a conclusion here, anticipating as it does the conclusion of the lives of the two lovers in the next section. The interweaving of the worldly and unworldly or fantastical time references is something we see only in relation to the two lovers. With their death, this ends and time seems to continue in its normal manner, with the only reference being to the daytime heat during which people rest in the shade of the termite mound (ll. 153–54).

The weaving of these two streams of time, the worldly and the unworldly, in this section of the poem thwarts any attempt by the listener to gain a singular sense of temporal specificity. The listener is led to the experience of the two people in the real world, and also to the abstraction of that experience from everyday life. Given the theme of the poem, we can read these two time streams as rendering the very down-to-earth aspects of the nature of love set against a more unworldly sense in which the experience of time is quite different. This leads to a sense of dialectic between the two different notions of love that are the theme of the poem and a questioning of the differing expressions of love: the worldly "youthful way" (see l. 105) and that which goes beyond that. In the passage from day to night to day we experience the "real," and in the other time stream the idealized, metaphorical expression of love. It is this which Hadraawi is questioning: was it this that was being expressed in the Sudanese man's letter to Magool? Later in the poem, this unworldly sense of time is solidified: as the two are standing before each other, the termites build a mound around them. And so from movement in time in two streams, the two eventually reach unworldly permanence, emphasized by the strength and solidity of the termite mound.

Having considered how time is represented in the poem, I shall now look at the way in which people are represented. No one is named in the poem. The people are not individuated; they are symbolic figures around whom the theme of the poem is played. The following people¹¹ are present in some way or another in the poem: the poet-narrator, the Sudanese man, the two who love each other, and the nomads who pass by the termite mound. This constellation of people reflects the complexity of the poem's theme, with each playing a role in the dialectic. The poet guides everything. It is his considerations that are paramount. He is questioning the nature of love and the others play out this questioning. The Sudanese man who wrote the letter and instigated the thoughts that led to the poem is referred to in the introduction, the *arar* (l.1). The poem then comes full circle in the final four lines when the poet asks if he, that is the Sudanese man, strove "for the highest level / of fulfilment of love / that closest to honour / or is something still missing" (ll. 183–86). No unequivocal answer to the question is given; rather, the poet presents the listener with the question and with notions of what is important, in his view, when considering the notion of love (ll. 165–66). This lack of an answer sustains the mystery of the notion of love.

The next people present in the poem are the two lovers, who, as seen above, enact the tension between the worldly and the fantastical, the earthly and ideal notions of love. The bond between them is supported in the verbs of which they are the subject. Every one of these is in the plural; there is no reference to any action that they do not share. Following a series of such joint actions, the conclusion of

their relationship, however, is stasis. This permanent state is reached following the interaction described in the previous section and a further intermediate section in which the termites consume their bodies (ll. 114–22). This consumption is combined with their deaths of which the poet questions—“did they welcome it / with their whole body and a smile” (ll. 127–28)—and is followed by a striking section of the poem in which he asks whether they presented something to each other “to taste / as the last earthly food of love” (ll. 138–39). This gift they exchange is the sweet, red liquid, the nectar, from a flower in which the “stamen and stigma / entwine like a rope” (ll. 134–35). The image here is one that conjures the sense of the consummation of their love in a physical sense, a worldly sense, but presented in a metaphorical and unworldly manner. What is more, if they did present this to each other, if they did “place at the other’s ear / the word which was missing” (ll. 140–41) they did this within the process of their becoming the heart of a termite mound. One way in which we may read this is to see it as an idealization of the physical aspects of love, a reaching for that higher level referred to at the end of the poem. This idealization then results in a “structure of wonder / [. . .] / famed for its thickness and strength” (ll. 149, 151). This expression seems to anticipate the “enduring legacy / the building of a house upright / children and earthly sustenance” (ll. 164–66) that is explicitly presented as the positive aspects of the loving relation between two people in the following and final section.

Despite this, whatever the mystery of the ways in which love may be expressed, in the final section the poet states his views explicitly. In this section, the scenario of the two lovers is left behind and other people are mentioned. The poet presents the idea of men behaving like hyenas “snatching / a girl of good repute” (ll. 171–72), stating that such behavior is a “lying illusion / this does society harm” (ll. 181–82). Then, following this section, as mentioned above, the Sudanese man is invoked and the question as to his actions presented: “did he strive for the highest level / of fulfilment of love / that closest to honour / or is something still missing”.

The landscape context in which the poem is set is very definitely the countryside in the Somali territories, but unlike other poems by Hadraawi, there is a lack of the specificities of what lies in that landscape, a lack of detailed description. Reference is made to the nomads and their lifestyle throughout the poem, but the sense of the countryside is more implied than explicitly given. This serves to downplay the specific details and leads to the listener having a vaguer sense of scene. In conjunction with the ambiguities of time reference and the way in which the interaction of the two lovers is presented, this locational opacity reinforces the feeling of unworldliness. An example of this is in the reference to the early morning when they merge into the scene. Later in the poem, the morning is evoked again in the section concerning the flower: “there’s a flower which blooms / after morning’s compassion / has refreshed it with dew” (ll. 129–31). In the same way in which the first morning rain heralds the coming together of the two lovers, the “morning’s compassion” heralds the flower’s production of its nectar. Thus the two scenarios reflect each other; two beginnings of the relationship are represented.

The termites build a mound around them, which represents the solidity of the love between the two. A whole society of termites will live in this building, this home they have built by themselves through their own industry and cooperation. This foreshadows the *gebogebbo* of the poem in which the building of a home, the

creation of a family, and the communal concerns are presented as the goal of a properly founded love between two people.

As mentioned above, *Beledweyn* is a love poem of a more conventional type, and when we contrast the way in which the poet expresses himself in that poem with the manner of expression in *Jacayl Dhiig Ma Lagu Qoray*, we see a clear difference. With regard to time, reference in *Beledweyn* is very worldly and specific. The time when the poet went to Beledweyn is clear: it was the *gu'* season, the main rainy season and the time when the river was in flood, feeding the crops in the surrounding agricultural areas: *sow berisamaadkii / Beledweyne maan tegin* "was it not at that time of plenty / that I went to Beledweyn." The "good times" of that season as experienced in the town are described in detail, a metaphor for the happiness that he subsequently experiences in meeting the woman on the bridge. We even learn the date and time of day when they meet: *sow goor barqa ahoov / bishu ay siddeed tahay* "was it not in the late morning / on the eighth [day] of the month." The time when they are next to meet is given as direct speech by the woman in the poem: *berri joog imay odhan* "did she not say to me, 'Be [here] tomorrow.'" Three lines later his companions then say to him: *maantaa la baxayaa* "we're leaving today." In *Beledweyn*, time is easily understood by the listener: the narrative of the poem is given a specific context in time.

Another aspect of time mentioned above in relation to *Jacayl Dhiig Ma Lagu Qoray* is the issue of the greeting between two lovers. For ten days they could not speak but then related their news to each other for a whole year. In *Beledweyn*, as soon as the two meet, they share their greetings: *sow bariidadaydii / iyo bedashadeedii / buundada ciyaartee / beledweyn ku taallee / biyo lulala guudkood / badhtankeeda ma ahayn* "were there not my greetings / and her replies / in the middle of the swaying bridge / in Beledweyn / above the lapping water." Aside from the specific time reference here, we see also the specific reference to the place in which the two met. There is nothing fantastical about these references—we know exactly when and where the meeting took place and where and when they plan to meet again.

There is also a contrast between the two poems with respect to the people in the poems. *Beledweyn* is written in the first person, thus presenting the voice of the poet directly as part of the scenario presented in the poem. Others mentioned in the poem, namely, the other members of a theater troupe, have a real impact on him in that they state that they are to leave. These characters contrast with the nomads in *Jacayl Dhiig Ma Lagu Qoray* who have no interaction with the two lovers other than resting their backs and taking the shade offered by the "famed" termite mound in which the two are entombed. As to the woman in *Beledweyn* she has a name, Beerlula,¹² a symbolic name, but it individuates the woman. Furthermore, Hadraawi describes her beauty, albeit somewhat hyperbolically, and does this immediately after the wonderful description of the time of plenty in the town.

Beledweyn is then a conventional love poem in which the people and the time references are clear and reflective of the real world, in contrast to those presented in *Jacayl Dhiig Ma Lagu Qoray*. *Beledweyn* was also a very popular poem, particularly as sung by Xasan Aaden Samatar, and there is a clear contrast between the two poems in the way in which the poet handles time and the interaction between people. The contrast draws attention to the deliberateness of the divergence and suggests a search for its significance.

In conclusion, I hope to have shown some of the ways in which this remarkable poem presents its theme so powerfully and imaginatively. The internal dialectic between the worldly and unworldly representations of love contributes to a combination of powerfully evocative images and a philosophical questioning reinforced by the ambiguities and unspecificities of time, place and people. I do not know if the "Sudanese man" ever knew what his letter eventually provoked, but he is assured of anonymous fame now among all Somalis through Hadraawi's beautiful poem.

Jacayl Dhiig Ma Lagu Qoray

by Maxamed Ibraahim Warsame "Hadraawi"

translated by Martin Orwin*

- | | | | |
|----|---|----|--|
| 1 | Jacayl dhiig ma lagu qoray
weli dhuux ma loo shubay
qofna saanta dhabarkiyoo
ma u dheegey feedhaha | 1 | Has love been blood-written
has marrow yet
been poured for it
a person peeled |
| 5 | dhabanada cad laga jaray
hadalkii ma lagu dhigay
xinjir aan is dhalan rogin
midabkeedu dhiin yahay
laga dhuray halbowlaha | 5 | the skin from their back or ribs
has expression of this
been offered in flesh
cut from the cheeks
has blood extracted |
| 10 | weli dhiil ma lagu shubay
laba mays dhansiyeen
sida dhayda xoolaha
dhag dhag maw wadaageen. | 10 | its colour still red
uncoagulated
been scooped from the arteries
poured into a milk vessel |
| | Weli laba is dhaarsaday | | have two people offered it |
| 15 | beryo dhacan nasiib iyo
dhul ku kala cillaalaa
subax dharabku kowsadey
dhedaduna cuddoon tahay
cidla aan dhir mooyee | 15 | one to the other
as they would fresh milk
have they shared it happily
time-separated in spirit
in body as by a thorn fence |
| 20 | wax dhaqaaqayaa jirin
jabaq maysku dhaadeen | 20 | sworn to each other
one morning have two |
| | Kulankii dhabta ahaa
riyo dhiifi keentiyo
dhalanteed ma moodeen | | after first soaking rain
the damp mist dense
in an unpeopled place |
| 25 | sida ay dhadhabayaan
dhawr jeer ma seleleen
af dhabaan dhab jamashada
ma ka dhoofay hadalkii
bal dhaqaaq na kay tahay | 25 | where apart from the trees
nothing stirred
become aware
of each other's rustle
did that true meeting |
| 30 | dhihidii ma waayeen
ma ka dhabaqday xaajadu | 30 | seem a vision to them
brought by love's plight |
| | Ilma dhalatay xiisuhu
sida dhibic ma hiigaan
ma ka qubatay dhaayaha
ma ku qoyey dharkoodii
naxariis ma dhidideen | | or its mirage
from time to time
as if suddenly waking
out of a dream
did their speech |
| 35 | | 35 | |
| | Iyagoo dhanqalankii
dheel dheelli mooyee
dhegna aanay kaga jirin | | desiring utterance
pass from a mouth
if just a howl |
| 40 | kolba erey dhex roorkiyoo
dhumucdii ka maqantahay
dhitinaaye keligii | 40 | did words elude them
was the situation soured by this
did spots of ceaseless rain |

	ka dib toban dharaarood carrabkiyo dhanxanaggii		emotion's tears spill from their eyes
45	dhirindhirid ma ku heleen	45	did it soak their clothes
	Laba guul u dhalatoo isu dhiganta weeyee dabadeed dhabeeshii hanadkii ku dheeraa		did they sweat compassion disoriented with but a stutter of movement they were stuck
50	dhudi mays bariidsheen dhubbad qaadka sheekada qofba dhagarta caashaqa wixii dhaaxo soo maray ma dhex galay kalkiisii	50	each time a word no link with others lacking substance limped out alone
55	ma akhriyey dhambaalkii warka maysu dhiibeen.	55	was it ten days later their tongue and palate found strength for it
	Kalgacayl dhito ahaa dhamac iyo dab huriyeen dhuxuliyo ladh soo kacay		but they are born for success of equal standing parted for so long
60	hadba dhoon ma buuxsheen kolba dhacan ma jiiddeen dhacdadiyo u jeedada qofba dhaadashada guud qofka kale dhankiisii	60	did they greet one another exchanging stories did each for their part pass on the trials sustained through their love
65	inaan looga soo dhicin ma ku dhaabadeeyeen sannad mays dhegeysteen	65	did they read the message exchange their news love was a food store
	Ma dhammaaday hadalkii gelin mays ku dhaacdeed dhaygag iyo dareen shidan		which when it was heated with charcoal and fire the glowing embers of emotions stirred
70	gabbalkii ma ugu dhacay ma dhaxeen habeenkaas sida dhaan ma guuleen dhaxantiyo mugdiga jira	70	did they fill a large pot time after time drag the enclosure's night-time gate
75	dhabatada xanuunka leh ma u dhabar adaygeen.	75	each one with tender eyes
	Ma dhalaalay waagii dhag ma tidhi cadceeddii intay soo dhaqaaqeen		seeing nothing harmed the other did they listen thus for a whole year
80	iyagoon ka dheeraan dhaqankiyo xishoodkii dhaymana u jeel qaba iyadoo dhexdoodii	80	did the talking end did they then spend half a day in this silent way as the daylight fell
85	dhulka suxul bannaan yahay dhibta maysla taageen wax intaa ka sii dhow ma ku dhiiran waayeen dhayal laysu taabtiyo dhallinyaro habkeedii	85	from their staring gaze their inflamed thoughts did they pass that night like the camel herders in nocturnal endurance
90	ma ka dhega adaygeen	90	of cold and dark

	dhadhansiga miliilica isha mayska dhawreen.		difficulties bringing illness did the dawn then glow
	Dhabbaday is taageen qofba dhaabaddiisii		and the sun call out approaching each other
95	sara joog dhankiisii kun habeen ma dhererraa!.	95	not crossing the boundary of mores and modesty
	Dhudhummada aboorkii dhulka hoose kaga baxay dhilashada jidhkoodii		longing for a balm with a mere forearm between them did they stand
100	ma dhanbalay sartii guud ma dhammeeyey hilibkii xididdada ma dhaawacay ma u dhaafay seedaha lafta hoose maw dhacay.	100	bodies held straight opposite each other avoiding the step of moving closer resisting the play-touch
	Dhiilluu ku geliyaa ama waad dhalliishaa dhagartiyo wedkaagee dhimashada kal iyo laab ma ku soo dhaweeyeen		the youthful way the taste glimpsed in the distance did they just behold each other through their eyes
110	dhoolaha ma ka qosleen.	110	they stood on the spot
	Ubax dheelka subaxdii naxariis ku dhaashtoo afka dhiin cas mariyoo dhaddigiyo labkisii		each one gazing standing upright did it last a thousand nights the legs of the termite
115	laba dhude isugu maran ma is dhaafsadeenoo dhaxal maysu siiyeen dhuuni kawlka caashaqa maysu sii dhadhamiyeen	115	emerged from the earth breaking the surface skin did it peel their bodies consume the flesh did it wound the veins
120	ereygii dhinaa hadal dhegta maysu saareen.	120	pass to the nerves persisting
	Dhafan dhaaf aboorkii ma dhufsaday cammuuddii ma u qaatay dhoobada		to the very inside of the bone the bad news it places in you
125	dhab-dhabkiyo kabbabiddii labadaba ma dhalan rogey dhismo kale ma soo baxay ma ka dhigay wax yaabliyo dudun dherer ku caanoo	125	that you look on with fear is the trials and your death did they welcome it with their whole body and a smile there's a flower which blooms after morning's compassion
130	dhumuc iyo laxaad weyn.	130	has refreshed it with dew
	Dhalan dhoolka maantii dadku dhacarta jiilaal ma hadhsaday dharaartii ma ka dheelmay galabtii		it brings forth a red liquid for the mouth to sip its stamen and stigma
135	iyadoon la dhaadayn sheekada dhabteediyo	135	entwine like a rope was it this they exchanged

- dhabar weyntan hooska leh
in dhexdeeda laba ruux
runta kaga dhur sugayaan.
- 140 Haddaan laysu dhamanayn
nafta laysu dhiibayn
ama dhaxal tis qaadiyo
dhismo aqal la taagiyo
ubad iyo dhaqaaliyo
- 145 dhaqan reer la kala sugin
dhunkashiyo u jeedadu
tahay dhaayo guudkood
waabay la dhabaqsado
dhereg iyo markaas qudha
- 150 ama sida dhurwaayada
hilbo gabadh dheg roonoo
higlo loogu dhuuntoo
dhakhso loogu kala baxo
ninba waxa dhabbacashada
- 155 dabinkiisa ugu dhaca
dhidar iyo xabaashii
sharaf lagu dhabcaaliyo
dhawrsooni laga tegey
dhalanteedka beenta ah
- 160 bulshadaa u dhaawacan!
- Hab jacayl u dhaqan galo
ma holladay ka ugu dheer
maamuusna ugu dhow
mise weli wax baa dhiman.
- offering as a legacy
did they present it to taste
as the last earthly food of love
- 140 did they place at the other's ear
the word which was missing
the termite gathered up
sand and detritus
forming clay diligently
- 145 rendering and plastering
did it transform those two
did a building arise
did it mould from them
a structure of wonder
- 150 a lofty termite mound
famed for its thickness and strength
roaming in the sun-heat
of daytime did people
in the dry season grazing lands
- 155 rest in its shade
then move away in the evening
unaware of the reality
of the story that deep inside
this shady backbone support
- 160 two souls await the outcome of truth
- if self sacrifice is not made
the breath of life not exchanged
if one does not wait
for an enduring legacy
- 165 the building of a house upright
children and earthly sustenance
then the kisses and intentions
are nothing but superficial
a poison sipped to satisfaction
- 170 in that one same moment
like hyenas snatching
a girl of good repute
as they hide themselves
in the *higlo* tree
- 175 to pounce out quickly
each man is expectant
for what will fall to him
a hyena and his grave hole
the honour he has trampled
- 180 the modesty he has snatched
the lying illusion
this does society harm
- did he strive for the highest level
of fulfilment of love
that closest to honour
or is something still missing
- 185

*Reprinted with permission from
Modern Poetry in Translation, Queen's
College, Oxford, OX1 4AW, UK.

NOTES

1. I use the term writing advisedly here as Hadraawi always uses writing when making his poems.
2. The translation was published in Watts's *Mother Tongues*. It is also available via the worldwide web at the following URL: <http://www.poetrymagazines.org.uk/magazine/record.asp?id=12338>. The original text and a recording of the poet reading the poem are available at the following URL: mercury.soas.ac.uk/users/mo1/appendices.htm.
3. Translation by Martin Orwin.
4. The central section of a poem is sometimes referred to as *dhextaal*. However, this also has the meaning of a small section linking major sections of a poem.
5. Since I assume the majority of readers of this article are not familiar with Somali, all the references to lines in this article are to the line numbering of the English version of the poem given in the appendix. Those who know Somali will easily be able to refer to the original version from these line numbers even though they do not always correspond exactly.
6. This is a device used in other poems by Hadraawi. In *Beledweyn*, for example, he uses a series of, in this case, negative questions in the poem.
7. I shall refer in the rest of the article just to the "listener" since the main way in which this poem was and continues to be experienced by Somalis is through listening to it rather than reading it.
8. A voiced retroflex plosive.
9. All Somali poetry is metrical and alliterative. The alliterative sound refers to the initial sound of a word and in each line (or half-line depending on the genre) there is at least one word beginning with the alliterative sound. The interested reader will see this clearly in the original Somali text in the appendix.
10. This is especially so in the Somali context where, when people meet in the countryside, after initial greetings, the passing on of news is the most important consideration.
11. I use the term people here rather than voice in that each of the "characters" brings something to the poem, although not all of them are given voice. The third person is used throughout and so the only "voice" that is experienced by the listener is strictly that of the poet. As this narrating voice he is also one of the "people" somehow present in the poem.
12. The meaning of this name might be translated as "liver-quiverer," the liver being the seat of the emotion felt by the poet and thus representative of the impact she has on him.

WORKS CITED

- Maxamed Baashe Xaaji Xasan. *Hal Ka Haleel*. London: Bashe, 2004.
- Maxamed Ibraahim Warsame "Hadraawi." *Hal-Karaan*. Kleppe: Den Norske Soma-liakomiteen, 1993.
- Orwin, Martin. "On the Concept of 'Definitive Text' in Somali Poetry." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 66.3 (2003): 334-47.
- Watts, Stephen. *Mother Tongues: Non English-Language Poetry in England. Modern Poetry in Translation* 17. London: Kings College, 2001.

Copyright of *Research in African Literatures* is the property of Indiana University Press and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.