



## **Crafting modern Somali poetry: Lyric features in *Fad Galbeed* by Gaarriye and *Xabagbarsheed* by Weedhsame**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This article presents two Somali poems in the *jifto* metre: *Fad Galbeed* 'Evening Cloud' by Maxamed Xaashi Dhamac 'Gaarriye' and *Xabagbarsheed* 'Royal Jelly' by Xasan Daahir Ismaaciil 'Weedhsame'. Each is recognized as a fine example of modern Somali poetry, and this article seeks to understand some of the reasons why this is so. The particular features considered are the use of address and apostrophe in *Fad Galbeed* and how this relates to the lyric present in each of the two parts of the poem. In *Xabagbarsheed*, on the other hand, I concentrate on sound-patterning looking at two sections in particular, one which displays assonance and another which displays interesting crafting of sound features which, it is suggested, foreground the sound of the alliterating consonant in a particularly appealing way. The discussion is centred on the poems themselves making detailed reference to the language used and how this contributes to the features and effects discussed. It is thus on the one hand a contribution to the study of the craft and aesthetics in Somali poetry. On the other hand, the manifestations of these aesthetic aspects coincide with what is presented in work on lyric. The article makes reference to this and, without going into detail on the theoretical aspects, seeks to begin to make a contribution from Somali poetry to this field of literary study.

**KEY WORDS:** Somali, poetry, lyric, poetics, alliteration





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### **1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

In this article I consider two fine examples of modern Somali poems: *Fad Galbeed* 'Evening Cloud' (1978) by Maxamed Xaashi Dhamac 'Gaarriye' and *Xabagbarsheed* 'Royal Jelly' (2007) by Xasan Daahir Ismaaciil 'Weedhsame'. The article concentrates on detailed analysis of address and time in *Fad Galbeed* and sound-patterning in *Xabagbarsheed*. The analysis is presented in a manner that, hopefully, allows the poems to speak for themselves with respect to these stylistic features but also with a view to bringing them to the wider discussion on 'lyric', to which, I suggest, Somali poetry has much to offer. The conceptualization and discussion of lyric here draws particularly on CULLER (1977 and 2015), BLASING (2007), SMITH (2007) and WOLF (2005).

Although these works concentrate on European languages there is nevertheless acknowledgement that the ideas may be relevant to other poetic traditions: CULLER (2015: 355 n.6) states 'There are, of course, very rich lyric traditions in other cultures, which I am not competent to address.' BLASING (2007: 20 n.12) goes so far as to say: "The lyric is a universal genre and it is the foundational genre in diverse languages." The consideration of lyric as a genre which is fundamental in many languages and cultures is discussed, among others, in MASLOV (2018) and MINER (2000). Although I don't discuss their ideas here, it is with these and similar works in mind that what follows is offered. The features of address and sound-patterning are chosen because they are generally agreed to be fundamental concepts relating to lyric in the literature, and these poems provide particularly interesting displays of these.

### **2. Somali poetry: some general comments<sup>2</sup>**

Somali poetry is heard poetry. Writing is now used both in the composition of poems and in publishing them but its appreciation is predominantly through listening. Poems are generally first presented not by written publication but

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Gaarriye and Weedhsame for their help in fully understanding these poems and to two anonymous reviewers for the constructive comments on the initial submission of this article.

<sup>2</sup> For readers unfamiliar with the Somali alphabet, most letters indicate sounds which are, more or less, the same as in English with the following exceptions: 'c' is the voiced pharyngeal fricative (ع in Arabic), 'dh' is the voiced retroflex plosive, 'kh' is the voiceless velar fricative (خ in Arabic) and is only found in Arabic loanwords phonologically, 'q' is the uvular plosive (ق in Arabic) and 'x' is the voiceless pharyngeal fricative (ح in Arabic). Note 't' and 'd' are dentals and not alveolars thus are articulated more as they are in Italian or French than English, though 't' is heavily aspirated (as also is 'k').



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through direct performance, which in most cases is by the poet herself or himself. These days, this may often also involve recording the performance, which is then made available on YouTube or other social media websites. Writing is making greater inroads into disseminating poetry both in print and on line, but listening still predominates in experiencing poems. This is important since sound and its effects in poetry are to be heard, and the dominance of listening means people are experienced in hearing these effects directly. It is also important with regard to the conceptualization of 'voice' in the poem and whether or not it is perceived by listeners as the voice of the poet or more abstractly as the voice of the poem, the lyric 'I'. This issue may be of particular interest for a poetic tradition such as Somali which, until relatively recently, was essentially an oral-poetic tradition and which, for many people, still is very much that. This is a big issue which will not be specifically dealt with here, though references to voice in the poems are made.

Another fundamental characteristic of Somali poetry is that it is all systematically patterned; it is all metrical and alliterative.<sup>3</sup> The two poems discussed here are in the *jiifto* metre, one of the most commonly used metrical patterns, particularly from the 1970s onwards. Somali metre is quantitative and patterns long- and short-vowel syllables and syllable-final consonants. The *jiifto* metrical pattern is given below in which the symbol  $\smile$  indicates a short-vowel syllable position, and the symbols  $\underline{\smile}$  and  $\overline{\smile}$  indicate positions which can be filled by either a long-vowel syllable or two short-vowel syllables. There is, however, a crucial difference between the two: a syllable-final consonant is not allowed at the end of the first short-vowel syllable when a position indicated by  $\underline{\smile}$  is realized as two short-vowel syllables. A syllable-final consonant is, in contrast, possible at the end of the first short-vowel syllable in the metrical position indicated with  $\overline{\smile}$  at the beginning of the line when this is realized as two short-vowel syllables. Geminate consonants are also restricted in the same way as syllable-final consonants, as are a group of consonants referred to as virtual geminates which are 't', 'k', 'f', 's', 'sh', 'j', 'w' and some instances of 'y' (see ORWIN and MOHAMED 2010).<sup>4</sup> Word endings cannot occur in the positions which do not allow syllable-final consonants. What may be considered hypermetric

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<sup>3</sup> There are some poems and parts of poems which do not alliterate or alliterate differently to the description here but this need not concern us here. See ORWIN (2011) for further details on alliteration in Somali poetry.

<sup>4</sup> Although the sound 'j', the palato-alveolar affricate, which is heard both voiceless and voiced, seems to pattern as a virtual geminate, it is possible it behaves a little differently. Further work is needed to determine precisely how it behaves in such contexts.



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lines are also found in which one, and only one, short-vowel syllable is present in one of the two positions given in parentheses.

The *jiifto* metrical pattern:

(◡) ◡ (◡) ◡ ◡ ◡ ◡

Open-syllable diphthongs at the end of certain words count as short, in particular the past tense ending *-ay* (which may also be written *-ey*) and the diphthong at the end of parts of the verb 'to be', specifically *ahay*, *tahay*, *yahay* and *nahay* ('I am', 'you are' or 'she is', 'he is' and 'we are' respectively). Other open-syllable diphthongs count as long such as the short form of the vocative suffix *-aay* (f.) and *-oow* (m.) and some may count as either long or short.<sup>5</sup> Diphthongs within closed syllables (those with a syllable-final consonant) always count as long. Vowels in some morphemes such as the remote/anaphoric defining suffix, *-kii* (m.) / *-tii* (f.), which are generally long in speech, may count as short in some circumstances (see BANTI and GIANNATTASIO 1996: 86-87 for further details).

Alliteration in poems following the *jiifto* metrical pattern works such that there must be at least one word beginning with the same sound in each line of the poem.

### **3. *Fad Galbeed* 'Evening Cloud' by Maxamed Xaashi Dhamac 'Gaarriye'**

Maxamed Xaashi Dhamac 'Gaarriye' (1949-2012) was born in Hargeysa in what was then the British Protectorate of Somaliland. Following primary school in Hargeysa and secondary school in Sheekh, he went to Lafoole College where he studied biology. In addition to his scientific interests he had a passion for poetry and soaked up poems in Somali from an early age. At school he studied Arabic poetry and continued to take an interest in poetry in that language.<sup>6</sup> After graduating he worked as a school teacher before returning to Lafoole as a lecturer in the Department of Somali Literature, of which he later became the director. He was the first person to write an analysis of the Somali metrical system, which was published in 1976 in a series of seminal articles in the national newspaper of the time *Xiddigta Oktoobar* (the first of these is MAXAMED

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<sup>5</sup> The literature on metre in Somali poetry says that open-syllable diphthongs may count as long or short with no constraints (see, for example, BANTI and GIANNATTASIO 1996: 86). Based on recent research, I now disagree with this more general assumption reaching the conclusion which is given here. It is intended that this work be published soon.

<sup>6</sup> In discussing this with him, he mentioned in conversation that some of his poetry from the 1970s onwards was influenced by poets writing in Arabic whom he particularly admired such as Abū al-Qāsim al-Shābbī and Nizār Qabbānī.



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1976). Some of his most famous poems are political in nature such as *Dugsi Ma Leh Qabyaaladi* 'Clannism Is No Shelter' which he wrote at the end of 1979. The poem alliterated in 'd' and set off a chain of poems on the major political concerns of the time each also alliterating in 'd' hence the name of the chain: *Deelley* 'The One in 'D'".

*Fad Galbeed* was written in 1978 and alliterates in 'g'. I use the term 'written' deliberately here as Gaarriye did use writing to make his poems and always read them from the page rather than memorized them.

He can be seen performing the poem in two YouTube videos *Abwaan Maxamed X. Dhamac (Gaarriye) (Maansada fadgalbeed)* 2014 and *Gaarriye Iyo Saddex Maanso* 2012.<sup>7</sup> The poem was prompted by a particular experience that is described in MAXAMED (2007: 222) and which he always recounted before reading the poem publicly.<sup>8</sup> It was the month of Ramadan and he was driving with Cabdi Qays, another famous poet, on the road between Lifoole and the nearby town of Afgooye (both not far from Mogadishu) which runs through a major agricultural region. They passed some young women who were harvesting fruit, and the woman he describes as the most beautiful in his written introduction was caught unexpectedly by the wind with a gust blowing her clothing aside revealing the top part of her body. In that moment, the woman saw that the two young men had witnessed this and was embarrassed by it. As he describes, she bent down covering herself with her clothes looking at them out of the corner of her eye and biting on her finger nails. Gaarriye was struck by the scene, in particular by the beauty of the woman, which, as he writes in his introduction, was increased by her shyness and modesty in that instant. It was early evening and he sensed in that moment that the sun was setting more quickly than usual. This whole experience prompted the poem. The Somali text is as edited in MAXAMED (2007: 222-224).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> These show performances in two different contexts. The first is a recording made in Djibouti by Radiodiffusion Télévision de Djibouti some time in the early to mid-1990s. In this one he begins the introduction at 0:30 and begins the poem at 5:45. The second seems to have been made in Hargeysa (possibly some time in the 2000s) and the introduction to *Fad Galbeed* begins at 12:22 and the poem begins at 16:10.

<sup>8</sup> This is in-keeping with the practice of presenting poems in Somali. The account of what prompted a poem is very often given both before one is recited and also when it is published in written form.

<sup>9</sup> I have made only one emendation. The word *Waxaan* in line 46 reads *Waxan* in the original. This makes no difference to the arguments here, nor does the change make the line unmetrical. It simply replaces the short form of the pronoun *an* with *aan*, which is the form generally used in this context and, for readers who know Somali, makes the discussion clearer below. The form



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|----|--|----|--|
| 5  | <i>Gabbal-dhaca cadceed-yahay<br/>U sii faano-guratee,<br/>Casar gaaban liiqii<br/>Godka weeraraysaa!<br/>Go'e fuley miyaad tahay?<br/>Waa maxay garmaamadu?</i>         | 35 | <i>Goolli-baadh fallaadhaha,<br/>Shafka kaga garaacdee<br/>Isu rogay guduudkee,<br/>Dhiiggooda gobo'liyo<br/>Giirgiirka caadka leh,<br/>Ku sibbaaqday guudkiyo<br/>Garab-saar-dabtoodii<br/>Maxaa maanta gaasirey?<br/>Miyey kugu giriifeen?</i>   |
| 10 | <i>Ma googooska sagalkiyo<br/>Gamasyada shucaacaa,<br/>Gaade kaa horreeyiyo<br/>Gurigaad ku hoyan layd<br/>War ku gubay ka soo direy?</i>                                | 40 | <i>Mise waxay ka giigeen<br/>Gobaad haybaddeediyo,<br/>Gantaalaha jacaylkiyo<br/>Kal-gacaylka beereey<br/>Indhaheedu ganayaan?</i>   |
| 15 | <i>Mise gabadhan dhoolkiyo<br/>Gu'goo shaalka xaytiyo<br/>Fad galbeed la moodaa,<br/>Kolkaad gelin is-dhugateen<br/>Guluubkaagi shiikhoo<br/>Dib-u-guradku waa baqe?</i> | 45 | <i>Afartaa siddiri-gam<br/>Waxaan gocanayaa weli,<br/><br/>Tiiyoo gareyskiyo<br/>Marta debec u gunuddoo<br/>Guranaysa hoobaan,<br/>50 Oo aan geyaankeed<br/>Geesaha ka filanayn,<br/>Dabayshii gadooddee<br/>Uurkayga garatee<br/>Gaadmada ku qaaddee,<br/>55 Gosha iyo horaadkiyo<br/>Gaaddada u fayddiyo,<br/>Garba-duubka maraday<br/>Durba 'geb' isku siisiyo,<br/>Gabbashada xishoodka ah</i> |
| 20 | <i>Mise ganac-jabkaagiyo<br/>Waxaad galabta mudataad<br/>Intay goori goor tahay,<br/>Dayax soo lug-gu'i laa<br/>Sii war-geli is-leedahay?</i>                            | 60 | <i>Gorodday lulaysiyo<br/>Ugubnimo-gandoodkii.</i>   |
| 25 | <i>Gedgeddoonka hirarkee<br/>Iyagoo garaaro leh,<br/>Gaatin-socodka laafyaha<br/>Xarragada u gaarka ah<br/>Goonyahaaga tiiciyo,</i>                                      |    |  |
| 30 | <i>Gaardiga daruuraha<br/>Kugu gaaf-wareegee,<br/>Gumucaad ridaysiyo</i>   |    |  |

I have decided to present translations both of this poem and of *Xabagbarsheed* which are more literary than literal, which means that the translations do not follow the originals line for line. Given Somali syntax and the way lines relate to

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*Waxan* could, potentially, be confused with being derived from *wax+kan* 'this thing' which is not grammatically possible in this context. Line 19 begins with *Waxaad* which is analogous differing only in the use of the second person pronoun *-aad*, thus also provides a precedent for the emendation in line 46.



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each other, more literal translations can become very unwieldy (especially for poems in short form metrical patterns) and detract from an appreciation of the translation as one of a poem. It is for this reason that the lines in the translations are not numbered. References to lines and words with their meanings in the discussion of both poems will hopefully allow readers who don't know Somali to follow it readily along with the translations.

Setting sun you're stepping  
from the fading day  
heading for your hole  
Hey! Are you a coward?  
What's the hurry?

Did the flurry of dusk's  
red flare, its rays,  
its shining spears bring  
scorching news –  
an ambush waiting –  
from the house where  
you would spend the night?

Or is it this young woman  
who seems a cumulus,  
a breeze in spring  
that lifts the filmy shawl,  
a rain cloud in the evening?  
You glimpsed each other  
your brilliance dimmed,  
do you retreat for fear  
that she outshines you

or to tell the moon  
of her before it rises  
of your indignity, of what  
this afternoon you deserved  
so it won't stumble like you?

The swirling stratus-waves  
slow-marched with swaying limbs,  
an elegance unique to them;

the ceremonious ranks of clouds  
surrounded you, and the bullets  
you loosed and arrows you aimed  
pierced their chests, they turned  
to red, their blood dripped;  
what made the cirrus  
splashed with colour  
shy away today  
from shouldering their arms?  
Are they aggrieved with you?  
Or do they hold back  
from Gobaad's prestige,  
from the missiles of love  
and ardour her eyes  
released and planted in them?

Those lines now said:  
what I still recall is her,

plucking ripe fruit,  
her dress and *gareys*  
tied loose at her waist,  
not expecting the glance  
of her suitor from anywhere;  
the stirred wind realizing  
the feelings inside me  
surprising her,  
revealing her body and breast;  
her haste in holding  
the clothes to herself;  
modestly turning her face;  
a gazelle dipping her head;  
the shyness of virginity.

Notes: A *gareys* is a brightly coloured cloth worn by women. *Gobaad* is a proper name which is used here to refer to the woman picking fruit (see below). I have translated the noun *gandood* as 'shyness', though there is more to the word than



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this. In my understanding, it expresses a shyness or embarrassment which comes out of annoyance at a situation but which is expressed in a quiet manner. The translation as 'shyness' seems to work best, and I did have the opportunity of asking Gaariye, who knew English very well, about words such as these at various points in the past.

#### **3.1 Fad Galbeed: structure, apostrophe and lyric time**

In this section I present an analysis of the structure of the poem and discuss in particular the striking instance of address to the sun and how this relates to the second part and the notion of time in the whole. In so doing, I draw on ideas presented in CULLER (1977 and 2015: Chapter 5) and SMITH (2007) all of which deal with the concept of apostrophe. The reference to critical ideas which are based on the study of poetry in European languages needs to be handled carefully when considering a poetic tradition such as Somali which is quite distant linguistically and culturally.<sup>10</sup> However, the characteristics of the use of address as apostrophe in this poem resonate in interesting ways with what has been written in the literature on lyric with respect to this trope.

The poem is in two main parts. In the first (lines 1-44) it addresses the sun and asks first why it is hurrying and then why the clouds, which are described as the sun's guard of honour, do not shoulder their arms as they would normally. The second part describes the scene witnessed, which itself prompts both the address to the sun and the making of the poem.

The first line addresses the sun directly, ending with the vocative suffix *-yahay* on the noun *cadceed*; it is the only use of the vocative in the poem.<sup>11</sup> Following this address, the poem presents the perception of the sun setting more quickly than usual and questions why this should be. The haste is expressed first in the line *Godka weeraraysaa* which literally means '[who] is attacking the hole'.<sup>12</sup> The hole refers to the place into which the sun is setting, a somewhat mundane term for the home of the sun, which adds a hint of irony. The use of *weerar* 'attack'

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<sup>10</sup> This is apparent in considering apostrophe in Somali poetry more widely (which I don't do here). If we take the distinction between oratorical and lyrical apostrophe made by SMITH (2007: 413), for example, examples from Somali could prove interesting, especially given the wider conceptual framework within which Wolf couches these ideas.

<sup>11</sup> The vocative form used is the feminine long form *-yahay*. The shorter feminine form is *-aay* which we shall see used prominently in *Xabagbarsheed*. The vocative is commonly used in Somali poetry from early poems to the present day and the addressee may be a person (real or imaginary), an animal, a bird or some inanimate entity as here.

<sup>12</sup> Note there is no relative pronoun in Somali.





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implies the speed of the sun's setting, since an attack in conflict would be undertaken swiftly. The initial consonant and vowel of *godka* 'the hole' is echoed in the first word of the next line, *go'e*, an exclamatory particle which can imply disapproval or scorn. The linking of *godka* with this particle through the sound parallelism seems to add some strength to the ironic tone, as does the fact they are the alliterating words in their respective lines and are also the first words in each line. *Go'e* is then immediately followed by the question 'are you a coward?'. The use of *fuley* 'coward' to refer to the sun following the use of *weerar* 'attack' continues the ironic tone.

The next line asks directly 'What's the hurry?' and is followed by three line-groupings which present suggestions to the sun. The first is that it might be *War ku gubay*, literally 'news which has burned you' from home, possibly of a group of attackers who are hiding ready to ambush, a meaning inherent in the term *gaade*. This would be a reasonable explanation of why the sun was in a hurry and contrasts ironically with the suggestions in the next two line-groupings in which the 'real' reason is offered.

The first of these asks plainly if it is the woman who has caused the sun to set quickly. She is described in images of clouds and the potential for rain: *dhool* 'the white top of a cloud which is shedding rain', *gu* 'the main rainy season' and *fad galbeed* 'afternoon cloud', which Gaarriye chose to be the title of the poem.<sup>13</sup> The *gu* season is described as '[lifting] the filmy shawl' which prefigures the action of the wind later in the poem. These are all captivating images, the like of which are commonly used in Somali poetry. They also contrast with the sun which, although it brings light and is generally seen as magnificent, especially at dawn and dusk, also brings heat and dryness to the land.<sup>14</sup> This line-grouping continues with reference to the sun and the woman glimpsing each other which leads to the sun's brilliance dimming.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> The word *galbeed* here comprises the feminine noun *galab* 'afternoon' and the suffix *-eed*, which has been described as a type of genitive ending but which is now generally thought possibly to play another role. There is a masculine noun *galbeed* 'west' which also resonates in the meaning here.

<sup>14</sup> It must be remembered that in the Somali territories the threat of drought is very real and life-threatening, thus references to rain, clouds, lightning and thunder are very positive and appealing.

<sup>15</sup> The word *guluub*, used to refer to the sun's waning brilliance, means 'light bulb' and is the alliterating word. The use of alliterating words in ways which is just beyond their more specific use is quite common in Somali poetry. See ROPER (2012) for discussion of the concept of *semantic stretch* in relation to alliteration.



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Following this, the suggestion is presented that the hasty retreat is due to fear, echoing the use of *fuley* 'coward' above. A final possible reason is offered next with the thought that the sun may be hurrying in order to warn the moon that someone more beautiful than them is present in the world.

There follows an extensive image of the clouds and the sky at sunset. The clouds are anthropomorphized and presented as the guard of honour to the sun, and the imagery includes reference to blood spilled by the bullets and arrows which the sun normally fires at the clouds, thus offering a vivid picture of the sky at sunset. The question that concludes this imagery is what made them 'shy away today / from shouldering their arms?' The poem asks if they are aggrieved by the sun or are they in awe of the woman, *Gobaad* – the alliterating word and a proper name derived from the word *gob* – which conveys the sense of 'noble, fine woman'. We then hear how the clouds have had *gantaalo* 'missiles' of love and passion planted in them by her, all the more striking given that we hear just beforehand that the sun normally only musters bullets and arrows. The clouds are thus presented as turning away from the sun because they are more enamoured of the woman they have now seen.

The address to the sun can be considered an instance of apostrophe. In using this term, I take it here to be as expressed in WATERS (2012: 61): "Poetic address, esp. to unhearing entities, whether these be abstractions, inanimate objects, animals, infants, or absent or dead people." Whilst this provides us with a general definition of the term, the way it functions and behaves in poems is presented in greater detail in the work of Culler and Smith mentioned above, and *Fad Galbeed* presents a particularly interesting example of the trope with respect to their ideas.

One such feature relates to the "second level of reading the function of apostrophe" (CULLER 1977: 63) such that:

"to apostrophize is to will a state of affairs, to attempt to call it into being by asking inanimate objects to bend themselves to your desire. In these terms the function of apostrophe would be to make the objects of the universe potentially responsive forces: forces which can be asked to act or refrain from acting, or even to continue behaving as they usually behave. The apostrophizing poet identifies his universe as a world of sentient forces." (CULLER 1977: 61)

Thus, when poems 'address natural objects they formally will that these particular objects function as subjects' (CULLER 1977: 62, see also CULLER 2015: 215-216). When the apostrophe is made in *Fad Galbeed*, however, it is not with a will to render the sun a subject, an animate entity, since the apostrophe acknowledges the sun already is that. It is already the agent of its own behaviour



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having become a subject when it caught sight of the woman gathering fruit. The taunting tone of the apostrophe expresses recognition of the sun's response: its fluster and embarrassment in seeing someone more beautiful than itself. What is more, the sun's and the poet's attention is caught by the same sight, in the same moment, a moment brought about by another force of nature, the wind as presented below.

SMITH (2007) discusses a feature of 'lyrical apostrophe' (see footnote 10 above) which he terms 'denial': 'The claim I make for apostrophe follows from the premise that address in lyric is always and necessarily denied. By "denial," I mean the nonresponse of the "you" as a structural feature of lyric' (SMITH 2007: 415). It is interesting to consider this in the context of *Fad Galbeed*. The sun responds to the sight of the woman in the poem (and thus indirectly to the action of the wind) but not to the apostrophic gesture. There is therefore a 'denial', in Smith's terms, towards the lyric voice but a response, nevertheless, to a figure and occurrence present in the poem.

Line 45 is where the poem turns: *Afartaa siddiri gam*. This line has no role other than a structural one acting as the pivot between the two parts of the poem. The word *afartaa* literally means 'those four' and is an established way of referring to what has preceded in a poem, however many lines there may be. The words *siddiri gam* are the name of a dance performed by women (see AADAN 2013: 1311) and has no further specific relevance. Following this pivot, we hear *Waxaan gocanayaa weli* 'what I still recall [is]...'. We are immediately aware the poem is no longer addressing the sun, indeed this line has the effect almost of setting aside the preceding apostrophe. If what follows is what the lyric voice recalls, it as if the whole drama of the sun hurrying away, warning the moon, the clouds shying away etc. is no longer remembered. This has the effect of separating the two parts highlighting the apostrophe as a distinct poetic act.

I suggest the syntax used supports this interpretation. In this second part, there is no vocative, and the lyric voice is expressed directly with *aan* 'I' on the focus marker *waxa/waxaa*, which focusses what follows the verb. The focussed noun phrase begins at line 47 and extends to the end of the poem.<sup>16</sup> This is a single syntactic unit comprising a number of sub-noun phrases coordinated by the conjunction *oyo*, which only joins noun phrases, not clauses. This whole syntactic unit is therefore a list of things remembered that runs to the end of the poem.

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<sup>16</sup> In general it is what immediately follows the verb that is focussed by *waxa / waxaa*. In this case, the adverb *weli* 'still' at the end of line 46 immediately follows the verb *gocanayaa* and the focussed noun phrase begins on the next line.



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The first item in the list is *tii*: expressed as 'her' in the translation, this is the feminine remote/anaphoric defining suffix used pronominally and is modified by a sequence of relative clauses. The second thing remembered is *dabayshii* 'the wind' at line 52, though there is no conjunction linking this with the previous item.<sup>17</sup> Such slight anomalies and ambiguities in syntax are found in Somali poems though the sense is still clear. The defined noun *dabayshii* is also modified by relative clauses but these are introduced in a way that is subtly different to those on *tii*. The relative clauses modifying the pronoun *tii* are introduced by the conjunction *oo* which indicates non-restrictive relative clauses and is used here because we know who the pronoun *tii* refers to. The first relative clause on *dabayshii* 'the wind', on the other hand, has no conjunction and the rest are joined by the conjunction *ee*, all of which indicates restrictive relative clauses when modifying a defined head noun. This suggests a specificity to the wind: it wasn't just any wind, but the specific wind that was stirred and knew the feelings of the poet. The other things remembered are the woman hastily holding the clothes to herself, her turning her face in modesty, her hanging her head and the final line *Ugubnimo gandoodkii* 'the shyness of virginity'.

In this second part, there is no vivid imagery, no great use of figurative language. The lines also express something akin to narrative, but the section is short and syntactically subdues this narrative-like quality by being a single noun phrase. The tense of the verbs is, for the most part, not apparent also. It is only the past progressive negative form *filanayn* in line 51 which clearly displays the tense; the endings of the other verbs are obscured by the conjunctions at the end of lines 48, 52, 53, 54, 56, 58 and 60.<sup>18</sup> This elision of verb-final inflection caused by conjunctions is a feature of poetry, particularly in this position in the *jiifto* metre, rather than a general characteristic in the language. We hear, then, what is essentially a list of noun phrases, of instances remembered. They are in a specific order but are linked by coordinating conjunctions.

As such, this single noun phrase does not convey a syntactic narrative sense of time. The sense of time as expressed through the syntax may be regarded as

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<sup>17</sup> The word *dabayshii* is the noun *dabayl* 'wind' with the remote/anaphoric defining suffix *-tii*. The use of the *-ii* suffix rather than the non-remote ending *-a* will not be pursued here, but could be interesting to consider with respect to deixis in poetry.

<sup>18</sup> The part of the verb 'to be', *ah*, at the end of line 59 is in the present tense but this is because it is the copula in the relative construction on *gabbashada* and thus does not play a temporal role in a narrative sense. The fact that *filanayn*, a negative past tense form, cannot 'hide' its tense is due to the fact that the suffix ends in a consonant and so is not a form in which the final vowel can be elided by a conjunction.



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close to a single moment even though the order of the instances hints at something like narrative.

It was mentioned above that the apostrophe in the first part is not offered with any intent to make the sun a subject since it is already presented as the agent of its own reaction. In the second part on the other hand another force of nature, the wind, without being addressed, *is* moved to react in response to the feelings said to be within the poet, that is within the voice of the poem. There is no appeal and no drama in how the wind's reaction is expressed; it is said merely to be stirred and to know the poet's feelings. It is then the reaction to what the wind does which causes the woman gathering fruit to be seen both by the sun and the lyric voice, thus causing the sun's reaction and, in the same moment, the germ of the poem. The sun was not aware of the woman prior to this moment, but in the moment in which the poem is conceived it does become aware, reacts and the poem addresses it.

CULLER (2015: 226) states: "The fundamental characteristic of lyric, I am arguing, is not the description and interpretation of a past event but the iterative and iterable performance of an event in the lyric present, in the special 'now,' of lyric articulation." In *Fad Galbeed* we experience just such an event, the iterability seems not only to inhere in its memorable form and striking imagery but also in the interaction of the lyric presents expressed in each of the two parts of the poem. The first, the apostrophe to the sun, places the lyric present in the moment of the occurrence related. As the poem then turns, the lyric present becomes the moment of address to the audience, and the voice recalls what it was that caused both the sun's reaction and the poem's conception.

The mocking of the sun and the emphasis on the woman's modesty may be considered in-keeping with the general tone of other poems by Gaarriye from this time. In *Fad Galbeed* the action of the wind, based as it is on the poet's feelings, might be regarded as somewhat salacious, but the tone which recounts this in the poem is not that. The poem's expression of what was seen thus highlights the woman's modesty and what is mocked is the reaction of the 'powerful' sun as it responds to the beauty of the woman in that vulnerable moment. Some of Gaarriye's most memorable poems are centred on characters who are not powerful but whose lives are affected negatively by the politically powerful. *Kabocaseeye* 'Shoeshine Boy' is a good example. It is innovative in that he ironically uses the metre of a children's song to describe a shoeshine boy living in the streets of Mogadishu who is taken away suddenly, along with other such children, by a soldier. This is so that visiting dignitaries do not see these children as they arrive for an international conference as part of the United Nations International Year of the Child in 1979! Although not a socially



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motivated poem and lighter in tone than *Kabocaseeye*, *Fad Galbeed* nevertheless has overtones of concern through the way the woman's experience is presented.

#### **4. *Xabagbarsheed* 'Royal Jelly' by Xasan Daahir Ismaaciil 'Weedhsame'**

Weedhsame was born in 1982 in the village of Kalabaydh to the west of Hargeysa. In the late 1980s, as a result of the civil war, he and his family fled as refugees to Ethiopia returning home in 1992. Following school, he studied mathematics at the University of Amoud in Boorame, which had just been founded following the conflict. He is quite a prolific poet and also uses writing to make his poems. Many of these are lyrics which are intended for setting to music, mostly love songs.<sup>19</sup> He is well known also for his longer, more serious poetry. One such example is *Mudduci* 'Plaintiff' which he wrote in February 2017 and concerns corruption. It alliterates in 'm' and quickly became widely heard via the internet throughout the Somali territories and in the diaspora. Others responded to it, beginning a chain of poems known as *Miimley* 'The One in 'M'' after the alliterating sound. He was mentored by Gaarriye, whom he first met in 2000.

The poem I consider here is one which was not made to be set to music and was written in 2007. The text presented here was provided to me by the poet as a written document and has been edited only for spelling. He considers this to be the poem in which he first really displayed his skills in poetry, although he had been making poems for some years beforehand. He mentioned to me in an email (13 October 2019) that when he showed it to him, Gaarriye had said: 'after this one, I realised that you are mature enough to go your way'. He also wrote in the email: "The first day Hadraawi heard it, he asked me to recite it. I did it then he asked me again and I did it till he asked me to recite it almost five times."<sup>20</sup> There is a strong sense with this poem that he is creating a masterpiece, to use the term in its original meaning: a piece which displays how well the apprentice has mastered the craft. Everyone I have spoken to about this poem finds it particularly beautiful and appealing, as do I, which is a major factor in choosing to consider it here.

In keeping with common practice, he introduces his poems before reciting them. The prompting of this poem was the sight of a *sogsog* tree (an acacia species) in the Xero Awr district of Hargeysa in which a trailing vine species was growing,

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<sup>19</sup> See WOOLNER (2018) for a treatise on the role love songs play in people's lives, which includes discussion of some of Weedhsame's work.

<sup>20</sup> I quote the email with Weedhsame's permission. We normally communicate in Somali but occasionally use English and he wrote those parts of the email in English. Hadraawi is considered by many to be the greatest living Somali poet.



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*xayaab*, which was in flower and made the tree particularly attractive. This prompted him to think about the imagery used in poems for beauty and how women are described in love poems. In the introduction in the YouTube video *Abwaan Weedhsame Maansadii XABAG BARSHEED 2014*, he points out that if a poem makes reference to particular attributes of a woman then another woman might reject it if those attributes are not suitable in describing her, and so he set out to make a poem in which the imagery used can refer to any woman to whom it might be addressed.

- |    |                                 |    |                                |
|----|---------------------------------|----|--------------------------------|
|    | <i>Xays galab hillaacaay</i>    |    | <i>Xamashkiyo ugbaadkuna</i>   |
|    | <i>Xiisaanka sagalkaay</i>      |    | <i>Intay dharabki xaynkiyo</i> |
|    | <i>Xiddo shaalku leeyiyo</i>    |    | <i>Xusulada ku qaateen</i>     |
|    | <i>Xiddigtii dagaaraay.</i>     |    | <i>Hoostiisa xaadheen,</i>     |
| 5  | <i>Xilli moodda galabeed</i>    | 35 | <i>Qorraxduna xanjaadkiyo</i>  |
|    | <i>Xinjiraha guduutiyo</i>      |    | <i>Xabadkeeda fayddoo</i>      |
|    | <i>Xaradhyada sibaaqa ah</i>    |    | <i>Xagal fiiqan kaahii</i>     |
|    | <i>Ku dul xidhatay caadkaay</i> |    | <i>Kaga soo xugaysaay</i>      |
|    | <i>Jeegaan is xayddoo</i>       |    | <i>Xamar geenyo uguboo</i>     |
| 10 | <i>Midabada xariirta ah</i>     | 40 | <i>Geel lagu xabaadhiyo</i>    |
|    | <i>Kala xayashadoodii</i>       |    | <i>Xarumaha colaadeed</i>      |
|    | <i>Mid waliba xijaabkiyo</i>    |    | <i>Xaasha'e ka dhega loo</i>   |
|    | <i>Iska fayday xuubkaay</i>     |    | <i>Xaalufiyo abaariyo</i>      |
|    | <i>Dayaxoo xinaystoo</i>        | 45 | <i>Weli aan xuluul mudan</i>   |
| 15 | <i>Intuu xooray daahii</i>      |    | <i>Oo loo xil qaba oo</i>      |
|    | <i>Cirka xero ka ootoo</i>      |    | <i>Xidh biyuhu fadhiisteen</i> |
|    | <i>Xaadiisi muujoo</i>          |    | <i>Xarfo dharab ku yuururo</i> |
|    | <i>Dhulka xubin madoobayd</i>   | 50 | <i>Xasilooni miratoo</i>       |
|    | <i>Ku xorreeyey nuurkaay</i>    |    | <i>Sarbi lagu xanuunshiyo</i>  |
| 20 | <i>Ama geed xayaaboo</i>        |    | <i>Aan xawd ku dhicinoo</i>    |
|    | <i>Mahiigaan xalay da'ay</i>    |    | <i>Sabarkeeda xaaddii</i>      |
|    | <i>Xubnihiisa maydhoo</i>       |    | <i>Iska xoodday feedhaha</i>   |
|    | <i>Xashiishka iyo boodhkii</i>  |    | <i>Xaamxaamanaysoo</i>         |
|    | <i>Daad-xoortu qaaddoo</i>      | 55 | <i>Xubnaheeda oo idil</i>      |
| 25 | <i>Calcalyada xareed ihi</i>    |    | <i>Xayndaabay farawgii</i>     |
|    | <i>Xididkiisi aasnaa</i>        |    | <i>Oo loo dal-xiis tago</i>    |
|    | <i>Xaradhaaminaysoo,</i>        |    | <i>Xaadhintay ku nooshoo</i>   |
|    | <i>Xagga sare caleentiyo</i>    |    | <i>Sida xayga dayreed</i>      |
|    | <i>Ubaxyada xintamayaa</i>      | 60 | <i>Dhaayuhu xaggeedaa</i>      |
| 30 | <i>Xadad kala samaysteen,</i>   |    | <i>Xasilaad ku dheehdaan</i>   |
|    |                                 |    | <i>Quruxdeeda xeesha leh</i>   |
|    |                                 |    | <i>Adaa xuuralcayn yahay</i>   |
|    |                                 |    | <i>Xusuliyo badh dheeroo</i>   |



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|---|--|
| <p>65 <i>Sida xidid halbawlaha</i><br/><i>Ka xamaala dhiiggaad</i><br/><i>Xiddigyahay naftaydii</i><br/><i>Ugu xeel fogaatoo</i><br/><i>Xujadii kalgacalkaay</i><br/><i>Xisku wuxu jeclaystaa</i><br/>70 <i>Xilo inaad u noqotaa.</i></p> <p><i>Waxa xiise guuniyo</i><br/><i>Igu beeray xadantada</i><br/><i>Xurmadiyo samaantiyo</i><br/><i>Xishoodkiyo dulqaadkiyo</i><br/>75 <i>Xil-kaskiyo aqoontaa</i><br/><i>Rabbi kuu xambaarshoo,</i><br/><i>Waxaad tahay xaqqiidii</i><br/><i>Gacal iyo xigaalaba</i><br/><i>Raalliyo xaq-dhawrtiyo</i><br/>80 <i>Qaryad xeer ku dhaqantoo</i><br/><i>Mukur laga xorreeyee,</i><br/><i>Xudduntii af-tahankaay</i></p> | <p><i>Xigmaddiyo sarbeebtiyo</i><br/><i>Haasaawe xulahoo</i><br/>85 <i>Xoodaansha maankaad</i><br/><i>Isku daba xidhaayoo</i><br/><i>Sida xadhiga soohdaa!</i><br/><i>Xalladiisa hadalkaad</i><br/><i>Xeel-dheeri unugtaa!</i></p> <p>90 <i>Anna xabagbarsheedaay</i><br/><i>Xilligaan is baranaan</i><br/><i>Kasha kugu xariiqee</i><br/><i>Waxaan dedo xogtaydoon</i><br/><i>Xafidoon adkeeyaba</i><br/>95 <i>Hilow baa xasayntii</i><br/><i>Xamilkeedi gooyoo</i><br/><i>Xaaxigii jacaylkaa</i><br/><i>Xeeliga i keenee</i><br/><i>Caawaba Xayaadaay</i><br/>100 <i>Caashaqa xilkiisii</i><br/><i>Xero ma u yagleelnaa?</i></p> |
|---|--|

As mentioned above, the translation here is more literary than literal. It also differs a little from the translation of *Fad Galbeed* in that, although the poem is in the same *jiifto* metre, the rhythm in the English translation is subtly different in parts. This arises from my own sense of the rhythm and flow of language in the lines in the original poems which informs the translation.<sup>21</sup>

O lightning-flash rain  
O scarlet sash of dawn  
O Dagaari nebula  
frill of its shawl.

O sunset cirrus  
the rain-promise bloom  
swathes, dyed  
blood-red above.

O risen rainbow  
whose scarf lifts  
revealing stripe

by stripe the spectrum's  
silky sweep of colour.

O hennaed moon  
haloed by a mist-  
soft glow, the veil  
is shed and you free  
a darkened corner  
of the world with light.

O tree in blossom,  
the cloudburst cleansed  
last night its branches,

<sup>21</sup> ORWIN (2018) is a short personal essay on my process of translation which addresses some issues related to this.





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the foaming flood  
cleared the dust,  
and fresh-water lappings  
tended its roots;  
now leaves and petals  
vie and tussle,  
across their bounds;  
while verdure and shoots  
take up the moisture  
at waist and elbow  
and sweep its trunk  
so the sun's spine,  
and chest emit  
acute-angle rays  
of light it urges  
through the breaking day.

You're a chestnut mare  
who hasn't heard  
the call to the camel raid  
the quarters of conflict;  
hasn't suffered dry  
drought-laden land  
nor dregs of pasture;  
she's cared for and grazes  
at night in the bush  
where the pond sits  
and dew crouches  
among the grass;  
never hurt by a whip  
nor touched by a stick,  
her downy fur smooths  
over her ribs and limbs;  
fenced-off in her hollow,  
people arrive to view  
the filly at home  
their eyes turn gently  
like white spring flowers  
toward her striking form:  
you are more beautiful

than the houris by far.  
Like the arteries that carry  
the blood to the depths  
of the body, you, a star,  
reached the core of my soul;  
you're the proof of love;  
my whole being wishes  
you become my wife.

What sowed the yearning  
the desire in me  
was your virtue, patience  
knowledge, modesty,  
the conscientious  
respectful nature  
God has placed in you.  
You are the truth;  
with friends and family  
you show the highest  
virtues of women.  
Free from caprice,  
O navel of eloquence:  
like spinning a rope  
you tie together  
wisdom and metaphor,  
you excel in composing  
the sweetness of speech.

O royal jelly!  
When we met, I  
etched you in my chest;  
kept it secret,  
hidden, held tight;  
now longing has broken  
the burden of concealing  
and waves of desire  
have brought me to shore:  
Hayaad, this evening  
for a home and passion  
shall we prepare the ground?



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#### **4.1 Xabagbarsheed: structure and sound-patterning**

This poem is structured around address with thirteen instances of the vocative suffix, including two in the long form (in lines 62 and 66). Each instance of the vocative is suffixed to a nominalized phrase or noun that represents the imagined addressee except for the final instance which is suffixed to a proper name. In the first part of the poem (lines 1-19) these vocative expressions gradually become longer. The first two are single lines followed by a two-line phrase, then ones of four, five and six lines. Below are the endings of these lines divided into the individual vocative expressions ending in *-aay*.

1 *-aay*  
2 *-aay*  
3 *-iyo* / 4 *-aay*  
5 *-eed* / 6 *-iyo* / 7 *-ah* / 8 *-aay*  
9 *-oo* / 10 *ah* / 11 *-ii* / 12 *-iyo* / 13 *-aay*  
14 *-oo* / 15 *-ii* / 16 *-oo* / 17 *-oo* / 18 *-ayd* / 19 *-aay*

I suggest that using these parallelistic syntactic structures leads to an expectation on the part of the audience for further vocative phrases and that the technique allows for particularly long instances of these to be built later in the poem. Once line 20 is heard, the listener expects a vocative expression and holds this expectation for the following 18 lines before the resolution is reached at the end of line 38 with the suffix *-aay*. Somali poems can be quite long overall, but such longer poems are often constructed of discernable parts. These parts are not always consistent in the number of lines, indeed any such consistency would, I suggest, stand out.<sup>22</sup> One way in which they are made discernable is through the use of syntactic parallelism, as here.<sup>23</sup> They may also present consistent imagery, such as the single image of the tree in this instance. Then, in addition, particularly in short-line metrical forms, the syntax and imagery may be supported by threads of sound-patterning. This may be more overt, such as the

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<sup>22</sup> A type of poem in which consistency of line numbers within sections seems to be generally more prevalent is modern lyrics made specifically to be set to music. Parallelism still often plays a role but the consistency of numbers of lines in sections is done deliberately knowing they are to be set to music. There are also *gabay* poems which use groups of lines of consistent length, perhaps the most famous examples of which are those of Sayid Maxamed Cabdille Xasan who made poems in the *saddexley* 'triplet' form.

<sup>23</sup> This technique was also used by Maxamed Ibraahim Warsame 'Hadraawi' in his poems 'Beledweyne' and 'Jacayl Dhiig ma lagu Qoray?' which are based around a series of questions, negative in 'Beledweyne' and positive in 'Jacayl Dhiig ma lagu Qoray?'. See ORWIN (2006: 17) for some brief comment on this. Parallelism is common also in long-line forms, such as the *gabay*, but it is individual lines rather than groups of lines which tend to be parallel (see ANTINUCCI 1980).



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striking examples of assonance and alliteration considered below, or more subtle such as some of those we hear in lines 20-38 which we shall look at first.

The image presented in this section is that of a tree with *xayaab* growing in it (line 20), just like the one in Hargeysa which prompted the poem. The line begins with the conjunction *ama* 'or', which is used in statements and which brings the expectation of an image or set of images different to what has come before. This expectation is met in that we are brought down from the imagery in the previous lines of stars, rainbows, the moon etc. to the tree.

Before looking at the sound patterning which resonates within this section on its own, we might consider sounds which echo patterning in the first part. The word *geed* 'tree, plant' echoes secondary alliteration in lines 5 and 6 (*galabeed* 'of the early evening' and *guduutiyo* '[which] turned red+iyo') as well as consonance in lines 2 and 4.<sup>24</sup> In the following two lines (21 and 22) we hear secondary alliteration with *mahiigaan* 'heavy rain, cloudburst' and *maydhoo* 'cleaned+oo' which resonate with lines 17 and 18 in which secondary alliteration also occurs in 'm' and lines 10 and 12 in which the sound is heard at the beginning of the lines.

Within the second section, the use of the conjunction *oo* in lines 20, 22 and 24 sets up both syntactic and sonic flow and after two other lines we hear the next instance in line 27: *Xaradhaaminaysoo* 'treating kindly, tending+oo'. The use of this conjunction at the end of lines in the *jifto* metre is quite common and, given that its use prompts the expectation of another clause, adds a certain drive to the flow of the lines. Aside from its syntactic role, the sonic character of *oo* at the end of lines may also play a role in experiencing the flow of the language.<sup>25</sup>

Line 31 *Xamashkiyo ugbaadkuna* 'the fresh grass and the shoots' begins the next sub-phrase. The clausal clitic conjunction *-na* links it syntactically with what has preceded. The word *ugbaad* 'shoots' in line 31 displays a sound parallelism with *ubaxyada* 'the flowers' in line 29 both with respect to alliteration and assonance.<sup>26</sup> The two nouns in line 31 are subjects, apparent in the subject marking *-ku* on *ugbaadku-na*, and the next line begins the clause of which they are the subjects with *intay* (comprised of *in-ta* and *-ay*). Without going into the

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<sup>24</sup> I use the term consonance here to describe the use of the same consonant sound anywhere in the word, not just at the end.

<sup>25</sup> *Beledweyne* by Hadraawi provides a particularly strong example of this in the first parts of the poem.

<sup>26</sup> All the vowels alliterate together in Somali whatever the quality or length and as such it is generally considered to be glottal stop alliteration. The assonance here is in the vowel 'u' in the first syllable of each word.



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details of the syntax it means ‘as they’ followed by *dharabki xaynkiyo / Xusulada ku qaateen / Hoostiisa xaadheen*: ‘took up the dew in the clothes-fold and elbow and swept its lower part (its trunk)’ (for clarity, the translation here differs a little to the translation above).<sup>27</sup> The second verb, *xaadheen*, has no conjunction linking it to the previous clause, thus is an instance of parataxis. This lack of the conjunction *oo* seems to slow the drive towards this verb, thus lending a sense of settling down.

The imagery has also reached a sense of settling at this point. The tree has been cleansed by the rain in the night, its roots are able to soak up fresh water, the leaves and blossom are fluttering in playful competition and now the trunk has been wiped by the growing grass and shoots.<sup>28</sup> The next four lines strike a sense that all of this was in preparation for what is expressed in them: the sun rising to shed light on the tree, which resonates with the image of the moon at the end of the previous section freeing ‘a darkened corner / of the world with light’. The reference to *xagal fiiqan* ‘acute angle’ is novel in Somali poetry and points to the sun’s rising. In the performance on YouTube, Weedhsame interrupts the reading here and explains that he is being drawn to mathematics which, as mentioned above, he studied at university. He says what an acute angle is and that he used it here because, at such an angle, the sun’s rays shining through the tree’s branches and on the flowers bring out their colour and beauty more vividly than when the sun is overhead.

The patterning of syntax and sound described up to now is the sort found in much Somali poetry in this metre. It seems to help raise the poem from the structural underpinnings and offer the listener an aesthetic experience of the materiality of language. There is, however, another sound thread which runs through this section and extends beyond, namely assonance in the long vowels ‘oo’ and ‘aa’.

Taking ‘oo’ first, most instances of this are the conjunction placed at the end of lines. In addition to the conjunctions, we hear ‘oo’ in four other words: *boodhkii* ‘the dust’ in line 23, *xoortu* ‘the foam’ in line 24, *hoostiisa* ‘its lower part (trunk)’ in line 34 and *soo*, the venitive deictic particle, in line 38. There are five lines in which both ‘aa’ and ‘oo’ are present together (lines 17, 20, 24, 27 and 34). This may not seem particularly remarkable given the many words which contain long

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<sup>27</sup> The word *xayn* means a fold in clothing at the waist in which something is carried. It is the alliterating word in line 32.

<sup>28</sup> It is to be remembered that the tree which we might assume prompted this description was seen in the city and so will have been more dusty and dirty than a tree growing in the countryside, which would be the more common context for any tree referred to in poetry.



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'aa' and 'oo' and the presence of the conjunction, but when we consider this patterning in relation to the following sections in the poem an effect becomes apparent.

The following section (lines 39-70) has 'oo' and 'aa' present together in four lines out of the 32 (lines 42, 50, 53 and 57). In the section which follows that (lines 71-89) however, we find 'oo' and 'aa' together in seven out of the 19 lines, a greater proportion. There are also instances of either 'oo' or 'aa' in all other lines except for the first two in the section (71 and 72) and the three in the middle (81, 82 and 83). Line 82, the central one of these three, ends in a vocative suffix: *Xudduntii aftahankaay* 'O navel of eloquence'. This line is followed by *Xigmaddiyo sarbeebtiyo* which also does not display the assonance. The first of these words, *xigmad*, is the alliterating word and means 'wisdom', a loan from Arabic rather than the Somali *murti*; the second, *sarbeeb*, is a generic term for 'figurative language' which includes concepts such as metaphor, simile and other tropes (for which there are specific terms in Somali). These concepts are central to poetry in Somali (as indeed in other languages) but are not based on sound. The lack of assonance in these lines, set among ones within which it chimes so regularly seems iconic. The concepts of eloquence, wisdom and figurative language, in which sound does not necessarily play a role, stand out precisely because they lack the sound patterning that has been set up.

Following these lines, we return to the assonance in quite a dramatic manner. Lines 84-87 are repeated here with the assonance highlighted in bold small capitals:

<i>HAASA</i> Awe xulah <b>OO</b>	the choicest words
<i>XOODA</i> Ansha mAAn <b>KAAD</b>	that soothe the mind
<i>Isku</i> daba xidh <b>AAyOO</b>	that you tie together
<i>Sida</i> xadhiga <b>sooh</b> dAA	like spinning a rope <sup>29</sup>

The two lines which then follow each end in an instance of 'aa' at the end and round off this section.

The final word in this sequence is *soohdaa* 'you weave, spin, twine' and the assonance itself weaves through these lines such that it seems sonically iconic of the process of twining which metaphorically represents the skills imputed to the addressee. The words describing her skill enact it and reflect a comment by Culler, who, with reference to a discussion by BLASING (2007: 100-101) of the poem 'Death of a Naturalist' by Seamus Heaney, mentions that:

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<sup>29</sup> The order of lines in the full translation is different since they are set within the wider context of the translation of the poem.



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“A particularly intriguing feature of lyric is the paradox [...] that the more a poem foregrounds vocal effects, as here, the more powerful the image of voicing, oral articulation, but the less we find ourselves dealing with the voice of a person.” (CULLER 2015: 176).

In these lines of *Xabagbarsheed*, the vocal effects, in conjunction with the metaphor, are an image of voicing. It is as if only the lyric voice, and not the ‘voice of a person’, can express something that matches the skills of the addressee.

This may also be regarded as a subtle example of poetic self-reflexivity which is presented by Wolf as:

“a special case of self-reference that mobilizes the cognitive activity of the recipient: it makes him or her ‘reflect’ on the text as such, on its textuality, fictionality etc. by various explicit or implicit means (thus metapoetic statements, referring to poetry, versification or the right choice of metaphors...)”<sup>30</sup> (WOLF 2005: 27 n.19)

Referring to a poem from within itself is a common feature in Somali and may be achieved in a number of ways, one of which is reference to the alliterating sound of the poem. Such reference may also include, in some instances, overtones, or overt expression, of confidence on the part of the poet with respect to the level of skill they are displaying. In *Xabagbarsheed*, the fact that it is the addressee’s skill which is being presented precludes such overt reference. It is only in the implicit skill exhibited in such fine crafting of the sound and metaphor that the lyric ‘I’ is able to voice what is imputed to her. The study of self-reference of different types in Somali poems, given its prevalence, and also its use in *silsilado* ‘chain poems’, in which poets respond to each other, could prove a very fruitful exercise with respect to this feature of lyric poetry.

Turning to the final section, this might be considered to continue such self-reflexivity, again, not in any overt way, but in the sonic crafting of the concluding lines in which the alliterating sound seems to stand out significantly.

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<sup>30</sup> For WOLF (2005) self-reflexivity is ‘a special case of self-referentiality’ (WOLF 2005: 26) which he uses as a hypernym for “all kinds of internal references or relations within one and the same system (the extent of the ‘system’ can vary and refer, e.g., only to a given poem, in which rhymes are self-referential features, or to the genre ‘lyric’, or to literature as a whole, in which ‘intertextuality’ operates as one form of literary self-reference)” (WOLF 2005: 26-27 n.19).



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#### **4.2 Xabagbarsheed: *highlighting systematic alliteration***

I have heard this poem recited a number of times by the poet at events in Hargeysa and in London (which he visited in 2016 to take part in the annual Somali Week Festival) and have also listened to it on YouTube many times.<sup>31</sup> The final few lines have always struck me as being particularly rich in terms of the sheer sound, a response which is echoed by others I have talked to about this.<sup>32</sup> The sonic quality is such that the acoustics of the alliterating sound ‘x’ seem to become more prominent in a manner that is very appealing to the ear and enhances the end of the poem in a notably satisfying way. In discussing this here, my aim is not to introduce further details of how alliteration is used systematically, rather to present what I perceive to be a particularly interesting way in which the sound of the systematic alliteration is creatively used in an unsystematic way.<sup>33</sup>

FABB (2015: 135) points out that “though alliteration is unsystematically used in many traditions, systematic use of alliteration is much less widely attested than systematic use of rhyme.” The prevalence of systematic alliteration in Somali and the fact that it functions such that the same sound is used throughout the poem begs the question to what extent the systematically alliterating sound is used unsystematically.

One obvious way is for it to be used much more than is required, a feature labelled over-alliteration by AÐALSTEINSSON (2011: 144). A strong example of such use is at the beginning of *Samadoon* (1995) ‘Seeker of Good’ by Cabdulqaadir Xaaji Cali Xaaji Axmed in which the insistence of the alliterating sound, ‘d’, at the beginning is iconic of him hammering home the message in a very powerful

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<sup>31</sup> I have also read it myself in Somali and in translation on behalf of the poet both in Hargeysa and in London when he was not able to be present himself.

<sup>32</sup> I am particularly indebted to a conversation on this topic, some time in late 2019, with Dr Jama Musse Jama, Director of the Hargeysa Cultural Centre.

<sup>33</sup> More could be said of the way in which systematic alliteration in Somali compares with other languages in which it is used. Perhaps the most prominent feature of any such comparison would be the way in which alliteration holds across the whole poem in Somali. This contrasts with systematic use such as that in Old English, in which alliteration functions within lines (across the two parts of the long line, see FABB 1997: 123-125) or in Icelandic where it can hold within couplets (see ÁRNASON 2011 and AÐALSTEINSSON 2011). A language in which alliteration holds across lines for sequences longer than couplets, though not always in the same way as Somali, is Mongolian (see KARA 2011 also FABB 1999: 231-2). There is an interesting use of a consistent consonant sound, the *rawiyy*, in *qāfiyah* ‘rhyme’ in Classical Arabic, a language linguistically and culturally closer to Somali and which is also important with respect to religion (see ORWIN 2019: 350-351 for a brief discussion of this).







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Even to a reader who doesn't understand Somali, the heavy use of alliteration is apparent in the written lines. In these thirteen lines there need to be at least 26 alliterating words (one in each half-line) but we hear 41 and, in addition to that, 17 instances of the sound within words (instances of consonance in 'd'). This insistence is also supported by the syntactic structure, but I shall not discuss that further here.

The examples mentioned above are in the long *gabay* form which, given the length, allows more space for over-alliteration to be used. The affordances within the short *jiifto* line are different. One way in which the systematic alliteration may stand out is for it to be used at the beginning of lines such as we hear in the first seven lines of *Xabagbarsheed* as well as in some lines below. In the final lines of *Xabagbarsheed* though another technique is used. The final seven lines of the poem (95-101) are repeated below.

- |     |                              |                              |
|-----|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 95  | <i>Hilow baa xasayntii</i>   | now longing has broken       |
|     | <i>Xamilkeedi gooyoo</i>     | the burden of concealing     |
|     | <i>Xaaxigii jacaylkaa</i>    | and waves of desire          |
|     | <i>Xeeliga i keenee</i>      | have brought me to shore:    |
|     | <i>Caawaba Xayaadaay</i>     | Hayaad, this evening         |
| 100 | <i>Caashaqa xilkiisii</i>    | for a home and passion       |
|     | <i>Xero ma u yagleelnaa?</i> | shall we prepare the ground? |

The only words which are not either a noun or a verb in this section are *baa* (the focus marker), *i* (the first person singular object verbal pronoun 'me'), *ma* (an interrogative particle) and *u* (a preverbal particle meaning here 'for').<sup>35</sup> Of these nouns and verbs, all of them begin with the consonants 'x', 'h', 'c', 'g', 'k', 'j' or 'y'. The fricatives are the most prominent both in number and impressionistically, at least for this author, when the poem is heard.

The laryngeal 'h' begins the sequence. Hearing this at the beginning of the line, the listener, having already heard something phonologically and acoustically close to the alliterating sound, nevertheless still expects the alliterating word, which here is *xasayntii* 'the concealing'. The next three lines all begin with 'x' thus foregrounding the alliteration in that way. Strikingly, the middle of these three lines begins with *xaaxigii* in which the alliterating sound is heard twice in

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<sup>35</sup> Other grammatical particles are present in the lines, but are appended to the nouns and verbs becoming part of those words in the context of the poem. They are all at the end of lines and are: the conjunction *oo* (line 96), the focus marker *baa* (line 97) and the conjunction *ee* (line 98). The only words which can alliterate in Somali are those with some lexical substance: verbs, nouns, adjectives and adverbs. Grammatical particles, pronouns etc. are not considered suitable for systematic alliteration.



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succession. The word *xaaxi* means ‘waves’ but specifically waves as they break on the shore and so it brings not only the visual imagery to bear but also echoes of the sound of breaking waves. The image of the lyric ‘I’ then being brought to the shore by these waves is particularly vivid.

The two lines following these three begin with ‘c’, the voiced equivalent of ‘x’, which thus strongly echoes the alliterating sound (as was the case with ‘h’ in line 95). The listener then expects the alliterating sound itself, which is realized by *Xayaadaay* ‘O Hayaad’ and *xilkiisii* ‘its sake’ in each line respectively.<sup>36</sup> What is more, these sounds are heard in the same metrical positions and the lines are rhythmically parallel: ‘c’ is at the beginning of the line and ‘x’ is at the beginning of the short-vowel metrical position in the centre of the *jiifto* line. This can be shown diagrammatically:

c — ∞ x — —

In addition to the patterned use of pharyngeals and laryngeals, the lateral ‘l’ and the velar stops ‘k’ and ‘g’ display an interesting consonance. In each line except for 99 we hear ‘l’: 95: *hilow*, 96: *xamilkeedi*, 97: *jacaylkaa*, 98: *xeeliga*, 100: *xilkiisii* and 101: *yagleelnaa*. In lines 96, 97 and 100 it is immediately followed by the voiceless velar stop ‘k’ and in line 98 the next consonant, after the vowel ‘i’, is the voiced velar stop ‘g’.<sup>37</sup> In the final word, this lateral-velar order is reversed: *yagleelnaa* ‘we prepare the ground’, in which there is a further instance of ‘l’. The consistency which these instances of consonance bring to the sound might be considered to allow the pharyngeals to stand out more than if a greater diversity of consonant sounds were used around them.

Turning from the consonants to consider the vowels, assonance is also heard here. In contrast to the patterning of ‘oo’ and ‘aa’ discussed above (there is only one instance of ‘oo’ in these lines) we hear a patterning of ‘i/ii’ and ‘a/aa’. This is particularly prominent in the rhythmically parallel lines 99 and 100 and can be made clear by extracting the vowels: aa a a a aa aay / aa a a i ii ii. As if in anticipation of this, the vowel in the central obligatory short-vowel syllable in

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<sup>36</sup> The translation as ‘sake’ does not give a full sense. The word *xil* has meanings of ‘responsibility’ and also ‘modesty’ which I have found challenging to introduce into the translation. As the alliterative word, the sense of semantic stretch also seems to play a role here.

<sup>37</sup> The ‘g’ here is the consonant at the beginning of the defining suffix *-ka* which is voiced following the vowel *-i* at the end of the noun as the result of a regular phonological process.



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each line in the sequence alternates ‘a’ and ‘i’: *Hilow baa xasayntii / Xamilkeedi gooyoo* etc.<sup>38</sup>

The prevalence of consonants which are in some way close to the alliterating sound and the intricate way in which they are patterned in these lines may be heard as supported by the repetition of ‘l’ and the velars and also the assonance. It is a striking quality bringing as it does a very specific acoustic appeal to the poem’s end within which is couched the final instance of the vocative: *Xayaadaay*. The word *Xayaad* is a proper name and is derived from the noun *xay* which refers to a ‘white flower’. There is a sound parallelism here with the word *xayaab* which is the name of the flowering vine growing in the tree which prompted the poem and is mentioned in line 20.<sup>39</sup>

The final line is a question in which the subject is first person plural ‘we’, and, following the vocatives used throughout, and in particular the final *Xayaadaay*, can be considered to confirm the poem as apostrophic gesture. This wills the addressee to bring about a state of affairs in the company of the lyric voice. The fact that this final address is made in such rich-sounding language lifts it beyond the rest of the poem acoustically and provides a memorable ending which, if my own experience and that of others I have spoken to is to go by, leads strongly to the wish to hear it more than once.

In this presentation of *Xabagbarsheed* I hope to have highlighted some features of sound-patterning it displays and which contribute to making it such a fine example of Somali poetry. As Blasing points out of lyric poetry:

“Above everything else, it is a formal practice that keeps in view the linguistic code and the otherness of the material medium of language to all that humans do with it – refer, represent, express, narrate, imitate, communicate, think, reason, theorize, philosophize. It offers an experience of another kind of order, a system that operates independently of the production of the meaningful discourse that it enables.” (Blasing 2007: 2)

Somali poetry has systematic sound patterning as its foundation – metre and alliteration – and so the materiality of the linguistic code is used in this way to make an artefact that stands out as being of a particular type: a poem in a

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<sup>38</sup> The ‘-i’ in line 96 is an instance of the remote defining suffix vowel *-ii* counting as short as mentioned above in the brief introduction to metre in Somali.

<sup>39</sup> In conversation I did ask Weedhsame (who knows Arabic very well) if he intended any hint of the Arabic word *حياة* (*ḥayāt*) ‘life’ which he said he did not. Having said that, I do find, personally, that I can’t help but hear resonances of this word here. Note the name *Xayaad* is formed from *xay* in a manner analogous to *Gobaad* in ‘Fad Galbeed’ being formed from *gob*.



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particular metre. In *Xabagbarsheed*, as in other poems, the materiality of that systematic patterning is in turn crafted further to make an artefact which is aesthetically rich. It appeals to the ear at the same time as it appeals to the inner eye through the vivid imagery, all of which supports it as a lyric and an apostrophic act.

**5. *Fad Galbeed* and *Xabagbarsheed*: concluding remarks**

In this article I have presented some analysis of how two modern poems in Somali have been crafted. The main features considered in *Fad Galbeed* by Gaarriye have been address and the expression of the lyric present and how these relate to the bipartite structure of the poem. In *Xabagbarsheed* I concentrated on sound-patterning with some reference to address also. Both are poems which are popular with audiences when heard and the analysis hopefully contributes to explaining part of what it is that appeals so much. The manifestations of aesthetic aspects of Somali poetry as exemplified in these two poems coincide with features of lyric presented in the works cited. The analysis of the two poems is, thus, offered as a contribution to the study of lyric more widely.



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