

The Lion's Share

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FOR CENTURIES, poetry has been the most important instrument of “cultural expression” in Somalia.¹ Hence, Somalia is known as the nation of poets—poets who, through their poems, not only have served as bookkeepers of Somali history, due to some extent the language itself having no official or working scripts until the 20th century, but who also contributed immensely to the richness of the Somali language.

To illustrate this point, I have attempted to translate the celebrated poem, “the Lion’s Share,” by the legendary poet Xuseen Maxamuud Faarax (Xuseen-Dhiqle). Although my limited imagination in the English language have kept me aside from assigning ordered rhymes to the poem or conforming the whole poem to a specific form, I tried my best to translate the poem line by line only through rhythmical means—a move that proves difficult for capturing and conveying the entirety of the meaning, but nevertheless is challenging to undertake. What follows the translation is the original text of the poem in Somali for easier comparisons.

The title of the poem is taken from the Somali version of the flowing folktale, which serves as the principal metaphor of the poem:

The beasts of prey had one day captured and killed a big fat she-camel. Their king, the lion, appointed an elderly hyena to apportion the catch. The hyena concluded: “O chief lion, your share is half the catch and the remaining half will be divided equally among the rest of the beasts.” The lion was offended so much and he slapped the hyena on the face so hard that he knocked one of the hyena’s eyeballs out of its socket and remained

hanging. Then the lion called a jackal to take up the task of the humiliated hyena. The jackal began dividing up the meat and explained: "Half and half, half is for our king." She continued dividing up the meat of the she-camel into two halves, each time allotting one of these halves to the lion until there was no lunch for the rest of the beasts, including herself. Afterwards, the lion laughed approvingly and embraced the jackal, asking her: "My darling Dayo, who instructed you in dividing up the catch so intelligently?" To which she repaid, "The hanging eye of the hayena's!" And when the other beasts complained to the jackal for being not fair, she replied: "Not fair? Is there anyone among you who would dare not to fear the hand that almost killed the fool one, the elder hyena?"

The following brief introduction of the poem is given by the linguist B. W. Andrzejewski in his *An Anthology of Somali Poetry* with Sheila Andrzejewski:

After the defeat of the Dervish rising in 1920, and the death a year later of the Sayid its leader, some of his adherents sought asylum with the Arsi, an Oromo clan who lived in Ethiopian territory; among these refugees was Naado, a widow of the Sayid, Sheekh Yuusuf his brother, Jamaad his sister and the poet, Xuseen Maxamuud Faarax. The refugees had to surrender their weapons and possessions to their hosts, on whom they were entirely dependent for sustenance and safety. A member of the chiefly family of Arsi, called Cali Diniqo, married Naado, while the paramount chief, Nuux Maxamuud Daadhi, asked for the hand of Jamaad. Jamaad, wished to refuse him but her brother, who was her legal guardian, reluctantly consented to the marriage, since he knew Nuux's autocratic temperament and feared the consequence of rejection. He asked Xuseen, who deeply sympathized with Jamaad's plight, to deliver the message of acceptance, and since poets could say with impunity what

others could not, Xuseen was able to make it clear that the consent was given under duress. After he had heard the poem, Nuux magnanimously gave up his claim to Jamaad.²

The Translation of the Poem:

In addressing Nuux Maxamuud Daadhi, Xuseen Maxamuud Faarax begins by narrating the parable:

*O Chief! A lion had a hyena apportion a catch
Said he, "Take half of the meat for we're a lot"
Affronted he was so the lion beat the allotter*

*His blood poured as the lion swiped his eye out
There run the hyena with a disfigured face
He silently cried, cried and ever cried in silence*

*The lion seized a jackal and put her on the death raw
Trampled she was at his gnashing of the jaws
He said, "You with the bad hoofs, decide your fate"*

*"O my dear Uncle! Semi and a quarter, the thorax
All the fat, the burnt, the legs and the hump
Settled all for you O Islow, take the whole catch!"*

*The ones at loss begun to complain at the fox
They asked, "The lion has no clan so we are told
Then why we who are a nation receive no lunch?"*

*'As I saw the blow on the hyena's cheek I knew
His words, "Take half" were the basis of his fault
Likewise was my fate and I was troubled by it
For being so rude the elderly hyena was attacked*

*For I, my provisions are from Lord, thus I'd wait
Did I cause you to lose for fearing for my life?
Would've I lived when struck by the same swiipe?'*

Xuseen now turns to matter of the marriage:

*Such is the Lion's Share that I'm forced to face
To be laughed at by the people how I wish to avoid
O my misery! I did not come here for the worldly
If I lost the virtue of the Dariiqo, the riches I had
Of the only two ladies of our Qaafu who are left
And the more beautiful one is wedded to Cali
That she is the only one that maintains our house
Take her as well like the incense burning Naado*

The Text of the Poem in Somali³:

*Qiyaashow libaax baa dhurwaa, qaybi yiri soore
Wuxuu yiri hilibaha jeex bal qabo, qoon dhan baan nahaye
Markaasuu qabbabaalihii, qoonsaduu dilaye*

*Dharbaaxuu il kaga qaadayoo, hoor ka soo qubaye
Afqashuushle goortuu dhintuu, sii qataabsadaye
Qambaruursi iyo oohin buu, qoon dunuunucaye*

*Dawacuu kolkaa soo qabsaday, sida qisaaseede
Iyadoo qadhqadhi buu ilkaa, qoorqabkii xoqaye
Wuxuu yidhi qanjaafula xumeey, tali qaddaarkaaga*

*Adeer gacalle qaar iyo dalool, qaaxo iyo feedho
Qummud iyo baruuriyo legiyo, qawdhiihi kuruska
Kuu wada qorsheeyeye Islow, neefka wada qaado*

*Markaasuu wixii qaday qabsaday, qoobab kadafleeye
Wax la yidhi qabiil ma leh Dayooy, qayliyaha Aare
Innagoo quruun dhana maxaa, qado inoo diiday?*

*Qacdi hore haddaan dayey kobtii, weerku sii qulushay
Badh baa kuu qisma ah waa wuxuu, eeday Qaaryara e
Aniguna qudhaasaan aho, lay qulqulateeye
Duqi noo qab weynaa wakaa, qooqa loo dilaye
Qaddarkii Ilaahiyo Rabbaan, quud ka sugayaaye
Qudhaydaan u yaabaye miyaan, idin qasaarteyey
War ma'noon qudraba haynin baa, qamash ka soo waaqsan?*

*Anna qayb-libaax weeye taad, igu qasbaysaane
Dadka igu qoslaayyo kobtaan, ka qalbi diidaayo
Qadayeey adduunyo uma socon, waad i qaxarteene
Qadankii Dariiqiyo haddaan, qanimadii waayey
Labadii qofee nagaga hadhay, qaafadii dumarka
Tii quruxda roonnayd hadday, Cali la qooqayso
Qudhoo kaliya baa nagu hadhoo, qalabku noo yiile
Tanna qaata Naadaba ragbay, qaac u shidataaye*

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NOTES

¹ Words in quotes: Orwin, Martin. "Introduction to Somali Poetry." Poetry Magazine. Retrieved on June 17, 2012. <<http://www.poetrymagazines.org.uk/magazine/record.asp?id=12334>>

² Andrzejewski, B. W., and Sheila Andrzejewski. *An Anthology of Somali Poetry*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1993. Print.

³ Axmed Faarax Cali (Idaajaa). "Qayb Libaax." Barmaamijka Fanka iyo Suugaanta. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xB5loUIpSNw>>