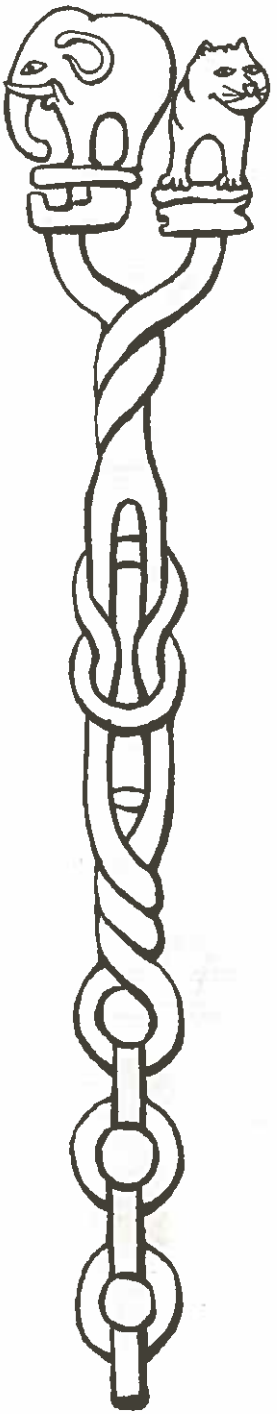
GENRES, FORMS, MEANINGS

Essays in African Oral Literature



GENRES, FORMES, SIGNIFICATIONS

Essais sur la littérature orale africaine

Edited by

Textes réunis par

VERONIKA GÖRÖG-KARADY

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GENRES, FORMS, MEANINGS :

Essays in African Oral Literature

Papers in French and English

Edited by

VERONIKA GÖRÖG-KARADY

With a Foreword by RUTH FINNEGAN

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CONTENTS

KEVIN DONNELLY and YAHYA OMAR

STRUCTURE AND ASSOCIATION IN BAJUNI FISHING SONGS

The Bajuni people live on islands off the Somalia-Kenya border, and speak kiGunya, a northern dialect of Swahili.[1] This paper[2] gives a preliminary translation and structural discussion of 63 lines[3] of Bajuni fishing songs, and suggests that certain aspects of their structure may be comparable to those found in other types of literature.

Three main questions are asked:

i. how do we describe the poetic language, metrical form, meaning and (to use Prof. Andrzejewski's term) cultural correlates of these songs? We will preferably be able to relate these attributes to those documented for other Swahili songs (cf. Dr. Knappert's contribution).

ii. what method of composition does the singer use? This should be taken to refer not only to a bald distinction 'memorised/improvised' or some such, but also to the deeper questions of how the singer brings his composition into being.

iii. can we draw parallels with other literary works, which might illuminate our understanding of both these songs and literary processes in general?

Each of these three questions will be discussed in turn. First, however, we will give the songs, with translations, and notes where necessary.

Song IA:

1. *As-salamu alaikum / waialaihi 's-salani*[1]
   Peace be to you / and to you peace

2. *sala nda wenye inde / hodi nda wenye ndani*
   the salaam is for those outside / the hodi is for those inside
3. *na sala hii nda zitja / msione ni amani*
   and this greeting is for war / don't think it's for peace
4. *sasa twataka tjia p'efu / tjutamwitja shehe gani*
   now we'll burn incense / what learned man will we call?
5. *tjutamwitja mfirado*[2]*/ wa pili mkoyamani*[3]
   we'll call an Mfirado / then a man from Koyamani
6. *p'embe ni uvezo wangu / hula kwa magego ndani*
   a horn is my [sign of] strength / I eat with molars inside.

Song IB:

7. *Alihamdu li 'l-lahi / nishukuriye manani*
   Praise be to God / let me thank Providence
8. *alihamdu li 'l-lahi / duniya ni k'itju gani*
   praise be to God / what sort of place is the world?
9. *walokuva na majumba / eo huringa angani*
   those who had mansions / now wander about in the open air
10. *walokuva na minazi / eo tjembo hutamani*
    those who had dhows / are now turned back from the shore[4]
11. *walokuva na minazi / eo tjembo hutamani*
    those who had coconut trees / now long for [a sip of] palm-wine
12. *p'embe ni uvezo wangu / hula kwa magego ndani*
    a horn is my [sign of] strength / I eat with molars inside.

Song IIB:

13. *Mwana mavua kitesi / akisari mai a p'wani*
    Child, the killer is something that makes you laugh[7]/ and the worst is the water at the shore
14. *huvua akipaliza / itje haliyi kanwani*
    it kills as it makes you cough / the saliva does not come into your mouth
15. *hubika mayi mak'anda / huvuya makapwani*
    you embrace the water / but it leaks out under your arms[8]
16. *k'itaka kunena kweli / mtj'u duli hendi nae*
    if I must speak truly / don't be friends with a lowly person
17. *duli hwenda kwa kifua / simbo kapatja zitjani*[9]
    the lowly person goes around with his chest [stuck out] / and gets blows in a quarrel
18. *duli hwenda na ntj'obwe / na msuwaki*[10] *kanwani*
    the lowly person goes about with a club / and a piece of wood

in his mouth

19. *hubika mayi mak'anda / huvuya makapwani*
he embraces the water / [but] it leaks out from under his arms

20. *duli hwenda na saumu / nifundie ramazani*
the lowly person is always fasting / let me fast for Ramadhan only

21. *k'enda wagala walele / k'avambia amkani*
when I went [there] the Gallas were sleeping / I told them: waken up!

22. *nguvo zao n zirinda / na zigudi za mafani*
their cothes are kilts / and shorts that reach up to their armpits (?)

23. *mtumbayi wa kisima / urewewa mayi hanwi*
the well-digger / was refused water and didn't drink[12]

24. *urewewa mayi kunwa / na kutjia k'oyamani*[12]
he was refused drinking-water / to put in his gourd

25. *t'angu*[5] *uliye kiyovo / t'asi*[6] *ni mashuwarani*
the t'angu has bitten the hook / the t'asi is in the still waters.

Song VA:

26. *Shela shakuwe*[13] *simama / na majadi simamani*[14]
Shela [son of] Shakuwe stand up / and grandfathers stand up

27. *shela*[15] *mlango wa shela / kiyacho hungia ndani*[16]
Shela, the entrance of Shela / what approaches must enter inside

28. *shakuwe jenga ulingo / uyalinde mayi p'wani*
Shakuwe, build a platform / that you may keep an eye on the water at the shore

29. *mayi p'wani ni mazitjo / hunivuya kwa nyongani*
the water on the shore is dangerous / it passes under the crotch

30. *safiri kwa majira / bahari ni sultani*
travel with the tides / the sea is king[17]

31. *aso kayisi dunia / naenge mai ya p'wani*
whoever does not know the [ways of the] world / let him watch the water at the shore

32. *akifuma hwenda inde / akiyaa hwenda ndani*
at low tide it goes out / at high tide it comes in

33. *nawene kinifumie / wala hakimo uvutjani*
I find I have been struck [by an arrow] / and it had not been in a bow.

Song VIIA:

34. *Nalitjuza likatjua / lisende luku na huku*
I fixed it, and it became still / and didn't go from side to side

35. *bahari k'afanya ndia / mwitju k'afanya utuku*
on the sea I made a path / in the forest I made a market

36. *kipitjacho hanunua / hata maziwa ya k'uku*
I bought whatever passes / even hen's milk

37. *nitamanie iziwa / na ng'ombe mweusi wa pate*
I longed for milk / and a black cow from Pate

38. *sitaki la utukuni / wazanyalo wanawake*
I don't want [milk] from the market / the stuff the women sell

39. *nataka lake mtunga / yapo lingawa itjatje*
I want the herdsman's [fresh milk] / even if there is not much of it

40. *muata ngalawa yake / hwenda uli mwana mayi*[18]
the one who deserts his outrigger canoe / will be [only] a sailor [for ever]

41. *ku shuwari baharini / p'wani kulifile humbwi*
there is a calmness on the sea / the chameleon has died on the shore

42. *kufile p'apa mkuu / bahari itje mienge*[19]
the big shark has died / while the sea shines like a torch (?)

43. *nyuwani mato muenge / musiyafumbe maozi*
raise your eyes and look / don't shut your eyes

44. *hapa k'wa watuma ganga / ndivo wayuwao ngezi*
here is the place of those who use magic / it's they who know about honey-wine

45. *kokotja ngove*[20] *kokotja / gange liwaze maini*
drag the pole, drag it / let the punt move in the water

46. *aloiba gange langu / rabi utambaini*
whoever steals my punt / Lord, you will expose him

47. *utampa shiri ndovu / na wa maini*
you will give him small fish[21] / and a sting-ray[22]

48. *luvia akimtojofa / hamuwasi kwenda p'wani*
if the sting-ray stings him / he will not let him get to the shore

49. *hamuwasi kutja mbizi / mayi kutjia kitwani*
he will not let him dive / or the water close over his head

50. *hamuwasi urafiki / usahibu na wendani*
he will not let him [have] friendship / companionship or comradeship

51. *rabbi tjuvuse tjuvuke / kana ndovu kisimani*
Lord, save us so that we may be saved[23]/like an elephant in a well.[24]

Song VIIIA:

52. *Huu mame nc nyawe*[25] *si sawa / isi hwendae karani*
Ho! my mother and yours are not alike / let us go to the clerk[26]

53. *huu mame ni ntji wa p'embe / ule nyawe n nusu 'l-mani*
ho! my mother is a staff of ivory / that mother of yours is [only] half a mani[27]

54. *uzanyiwa kwa tambuu / na tumbaku a mayani*
she was sold for tambuu[28] / and leaf tobacco

55. *shifu wanawake shifu / tjumpembe kivumani*
hum, women, hum / let us serenade this child who roars all the time

56. *k'impemba hanyamai / nimpapo titi haamwi*
if I sing a lullaby he doesn't stop crying / if I give him the breast he doesn't suck

57. *huliya kwa bilashii / alomponda ni nyani*
he cries for no reason / who was it who hit him?

58. *alomponda ni ishe / humrewa kwenda p'wani*
it was his father who hit him / to prevent him from going to the shore

59. *humrewa kutja mbizi / mayi kutjia kitwani*
he was prevented from diving / [and letting] the water close over his head

60. *humrewa urafiki / usahibu za wendani*
he was refused friendship / the companionship of comrades

61. *mponde aliye / ishe asikie*
beat him so that he cries / so that his father may hear

62. *kamu ugurie / takuya myumbani*
if he has left the house / he will come back

63. *p'ambe harusi ya mwana / mwinyi harusi n nyani*[29]
decorate the child's bridge / who is having the wedding?

Notes on the texts:

1. The usual form is *as-salati*; the final -CV has been changed to fit in with the rhyme. *Sala* (2) is a corrupt form of *salamu; hodi* is a request to enter a house - the equivalent of a knock on the door in our culture.
2. This originally means 'one who is separate, unique' - compare the name Farida (Monica). It is now the name of a Bajuni clan descended from the Somalis, who do not fish,

but have otherwise become integrated with the Swahilis. They live mainly on Chovayi island, but are also found in more northerly areas.

3. Koyamani is one of the two biggest villages on the island of Koyama, the other being Gedeni.
4. They cannot afford now even to pay for a ferry.
5. A type of fish.
6. A type of scaleless fish, also called *t'afi*, whose flesh is highly esteemed, although it gives off an unpleasant odour.
7. The sea has a deceptively pleasant appearance.
8. This refers to the threshing of a drowning man - he tries to grab the water to hold on to it, but it escapes beneath his arms.
9. Or: 'the lowly person goes about bare-breasted [i.e. unarmoured] / and obtains his weapon [*fimbo*, a stick] during the battle [i.e. not before it]'.
10. The wood from which toothbrushes are made, or the toothbrush itself. The Somalis, it is said, go about sometimes with a piece of this wood in their mouths, to quench thirst, and the Swahilis joke that they always look as if they have just got up.
11. This contradicts the well-known proverb which says that the well-digger is never refused water.
12. There may be a pun on the village name Koyamani (see n.3).
13. Or: 'ancestors and grandfathers'.
14. The Bajuni often invoke the ancestors to intercede for the supplicants (cf. Omar and Donnelly 1981), something similar to the Catholic doctrine of Purgatory. The ancestors are appealed to as a prelude to the recital of the Qur'an at weddings, funerals, etc., so that reverence for deceased ancestors is incorporated in Islam.
15. Lit. 'gap', hence 'mouth of river, entrance to harbour, etc.'. The most famous Shela is on the island of Lamu, with a nearby village of the same name, where in the 1840s a great battle was fought between the armies of the Lamu and Mombasa city-states. If a child has lost a tooth, he is teased by being called Shela.
16. Ships travelling north to the islands must pass through the entrance.
17. Because it is powerful and fickle.
18. Or: 'will have to learn to swim'.
19. Or: 'when the sea was calm'.
20. Sacleux 1939 gives this as a hooked stick used for beating down fruit from trees; here it would refer to a hook used for pulling the boat along a shallow creek.
21. Which would be of little value.
22. To punish the wrongdoer.
23. From the dangers of the sea. Literally, *-vuka* means 'cross, come through', but in this usage it undoubtedly overlaps with *-vua* 'fish out, save'.
24. The elephant can escape from a trap only through God's will.
25. *mame* 'my mother', *nyaŵe* 'your mother', *inya* 'his mother'.

26. In order to verify the woman's ancestry. This is an insult, insinuating that the woman is not free-born.
27. A *mani* is a measure of weight (about 1 kg.). This line again insinuates that the woman is 'less'.
28. The leaf of the betel-plant, which is spread with lime and chewed. It is quite refreshing, but tends to stain the teeth red. This implies that the woman's brideprice was a mouthful of betel (which is passed around at marriages, much like cigars or chocolate here), and that the woman is therefore 'cheap'.
29. Or perhaps 'who is paying for the wedding?', implying that the child's father is not known.

These songs are a selection from the 16 songs in the earlier version of this paper: for reference purposes, however, the same song numbers have been retained. The A or B refers to the fact that each two successive songs have the same last line, as a kind of refrain; eg. IA and IB both end with

p'embe ni uvezo wangu / hula kwa magego ndani (6, 12).

In most cases the refrain's relevance to the subject-matter of the songs is unclear, though sometimes (e.g. in VIIA) it does fit in reasonably well. Apart from this refrain, each pair of songs seems to have little else in common.

The songs show a strict metrical structure. There are usually 16 syllables in the line, divided by a caesura (marked /) into two hemistichs of 8 syllables each. This structure is sometimes disrupted by exclamations such as *huu*! ('ho!'), e.g. 52, 53. The lines usually rhyme in *-ani* (exceptions are 16, 34-44, 61), but the first hemistich does not rhyme. The metrical structure is comparable to that associated with many other Swahili songs or poems (cf. Knappert 1971), but the Bajuni songs differ from the mainstream of Swahili poetry by their high frequency of non-metrical devices such as parallelism, linking, lead-ons, puns, etc. The imagery of the songs is derived from everyday life, and particularly the sea, the source of livelihood. The fickle sea is seen as a metaphor for the changing fortunes of the world, the best example being perhaps VA. It will be best to comment individually on each song in order to make explicit its themes and associations, and to draw attention to the non-metrical devices used therein.

IA is an introductory song. Note the forms *salani* and *sala*, both variants of *salamu*. There is end-linking from *salani* (1) to *sala* (2), and front-linking from this to *sala* (3). Note the converse parallelism in

sala nla wenye inde /
hodi nda wenye ndani (2).

3 shows a recurrent feature of the songs, namely, a reversal of what might ordinarily be expected: *na sala hii nda zitja* (3) reverses the common meaning of *salamu*, 'peace'. The reciter, perhaps because of the word *amani*, 'peace' (note reverse end-link with *zitja*, 'war') in 3, goes on to the idea of supplication, during which incense would be burnt (4a). There is cross-linking

of *tjutamwitja* (4b, 5a). The connection of the refrain (6) is unclear.

IB carries on with the idea of praising God, and then says that by comparison the world is a treacherous place. 8a repeats 7a, and 7b repeats the sentiment of 7a, but using different words; it often happens that the second half of a line reiterates what the first half has said. 9a, 10a and 11a are parallel, and the second half of each line shows the reversal in people's fortunes because of the world's ways. Again, the connection of the refrain (12) is unclear.

IIB warns that the sea (world) is a dangerous place for the unwary, with the reverse of *mavua/kitesi* in 13a. The most dangerous situation is one in which you think everything is all right (13b), and this leads to the description of drowning (14, 15). The next association with fools is hard to understand, but the repetition of 15 as 19 gives the clue that just as a man is overwhelmed by the sea, so the fool is overwhelmed by the world. There is parallelism of *duli hwenda* in 17, 18 and 20. The idea of fools leads the reciter to poke fun at the Gallas. Note the reversal *walele/amkani* in 21. The association with the well-digger is unclear, but 23 is an implicit reverse of a well-known proverb (see n.11). There is a possible pun in 24 (see n.12). Note the parallelism of 23b, 24a.

VA starts with a pun, in that *shakuwe* (26a) can be a synonym for *majadi* (26b), 'grandfathers' (see n.13). Note the repetition of *simama* in this line. *Shela shakuwe* (26a) front-links *shela* (27) and *shakuwe* (28), and leads to the pun on Shela the place (27a), which in turn leads back to the idea of the sea. Here again the sea is used as a metaphor for the world, the seemingly calm water near the shore being most dangerous of all (cf. 13) - there may, though, be a double meaning in some of these lines. There may be a lead-on from *ulin(go)* in 28a to *u(ya)lin(de)* in 28b. Note the end-linking of *mayi p'wani* (28b, 29a, cf. also 31b). 30b makes the oft-heard point in Swahili poetry that the sea is like a monarch in its power and capriciousness - all we can do is travel with the ebb and flow of fortune. The implied equation sea = world is made explicit in 31, and 30a is then expanded into the converse parallelism of

akifuma hwenda inde /
akiyaa hwenda ndani (32).

The refrain seems to be a pun on *-fuma*, 'be at low tide', and *-fuma*, 'stab, pierce', and note the reverse between the two hemistichs.

VIIA is one of the longest songs, but also one of the most disjointed. Its departure from the usual rhyme-scheme may reflect this. 34 may refer to steadying a boat, but this is uncertain. However, such an interpretation would make the transition to the next line, which is parallel:

bahari k'afanya ndia /
mwitju k'afanya utuku (35).

The mention of 'market' starts off a few lines on this subject. These seem rather unconnected, and it may be that there is a

double meaning here, or that we are missing a vital association. Note the linking of *maziwa* (36) and *iziwa* (37). 38a and 39a are parallel - *utukuni* in 38a refers back to *utuku* in 35b. 40a seems to go back to 35a, after the tangent of the preceding lines. Note the reverse lead-on *baharini* to *p'wani* (41), and the linking *baharini/bahari* (42b), and *kulifile* (41b)/*kufile* (42a). 41 and 42 are cross-parallel:

the sea is calm / an animal has died
an animal has died / the sea is calm.

The next line seems to be based on the pun *mienge*, 'torches' (42b) and *-enga*, 'look' (43a). There is an echo between *mato* and *maozi* (43), both meaning 'eyes'. The next line's association is rather obscure, but it may lead to 45 through a pun between *ganga*, 'magic' (44a) and *gange*, 'punt' (45b). Note the linking of *gange* (45b, 46a), *luvia* (47b, 48a), and *hamuwasi* (48b, 49a, 50a), and the lead-on *urafiki* to *usahibu* (50), both meaning 'friendship'. The mention of the penalties God will visit on the person who steals the boat leads the reciter to supplication, and an instance where God's help is vital (51).

VIIIA starts off with a series of jibes comparing the speaker's mother with someone else's. There are many references in the songs to mothers, because the Bajuni hold their mothers in high regard - this makes these jibes all the more insulting. Note the front-linking of *huu mame* (52, 53), the linking of *nyawe* (52a, 53b), and the reverse/parallelism between the two hemistichs of 53. The association with the next section of the song is presumably that the woman is a bad mother, and therefore her child is always crying (55). The two halves of 56 are parallel in sentiment. The reciter then asks why the child could be crying, and comes up with the answer that his father had hit him to prevent him going to the shore and possibly drowning - perhaps we should understand 'to prevent him from coming off badly in his dealings with the world'. Note the linking of *alomponda* (57b, 58a)/*mponde* (61a) and *humrewa* (58b, 59a, 60a) - compare the last few lines with 48-50. Note that 61-62 have only 12 syllables in the line, with internal rhyme:

mponde aliye /
ishe asikie (61)
kama ugurie /
takuya nyumbani (62) - note the reverse in this line.

The refrain (63) may hark back to 52-54, being another jibe (see n.29).

This commentary raises the second question noted above, that of method of composition. The discontinuity of several songs (particularly VIIA), tangential development in some (e.g. VIIIA), and generally-occurring reiteration and echoing of certain ideas (e.g. 9-11, 48-50), along with the structural features of parallelism, linking, etc., tend to suggest an improvisatory nature for the songs. Yet the very strict rhyme-scheme and the surprisingly few examples of repetition of phrases[4] or even rhyming words tend to suggest a memorised nature - a canonical

form. These two views might be reconciled by suggesting that the singer improvises upon a set theme by selecting from a stock of lines. This would account for most of the features of the songs:[5] the discontinuity and tangential development would be due to the need to keep the song revolving round the same general theme while yet keeping to the same metrical form; since the form is common to almost all the lines, the non-metrical devices would show that the lines are intentionally associated by the reciter, and not just jumbled together; the devices would also have the effect of reiterating the theme, providing a connective chain[6] throughout the song, and perhaps in some cases giving the reciter an opportunity to collect his thoughts before going on to the next part of the song.

However, such a view also emphasises the importance of association as a factor in the composition of the songs. They are in some cases very difficult to understand and there are two possible reasons for this, both of them to do with association: i) awareness of the methods of association and allusion used by the composer are insufficient to make any more than surface sense of the songs; ii) the songs are to some extent fossilised and contain lines the exact reference of which is no longer understood. Whatever the reason, the problem shows that if the associative links pertaining to a piece of literature are not understood by the reader/listener or have been forgotten by the practitioners of the art, then the piece will no longer be fully intelligible and accessible in the way that it might originally have been.

The devastating effects of the loss of even a small associative link can be demonstrated by taking the English poem 'Sir Beelzebub' by Edith Sitwell (1887-1964):[7]

SIR BEELZEBUB

When
Sir
Beelzebub called for his syllabub in the hotel in Hell
Where Proserpine first fell,
Blue as the gendarmerie were the waves of the sea,

(Rocking and shocking the bar-maid.)

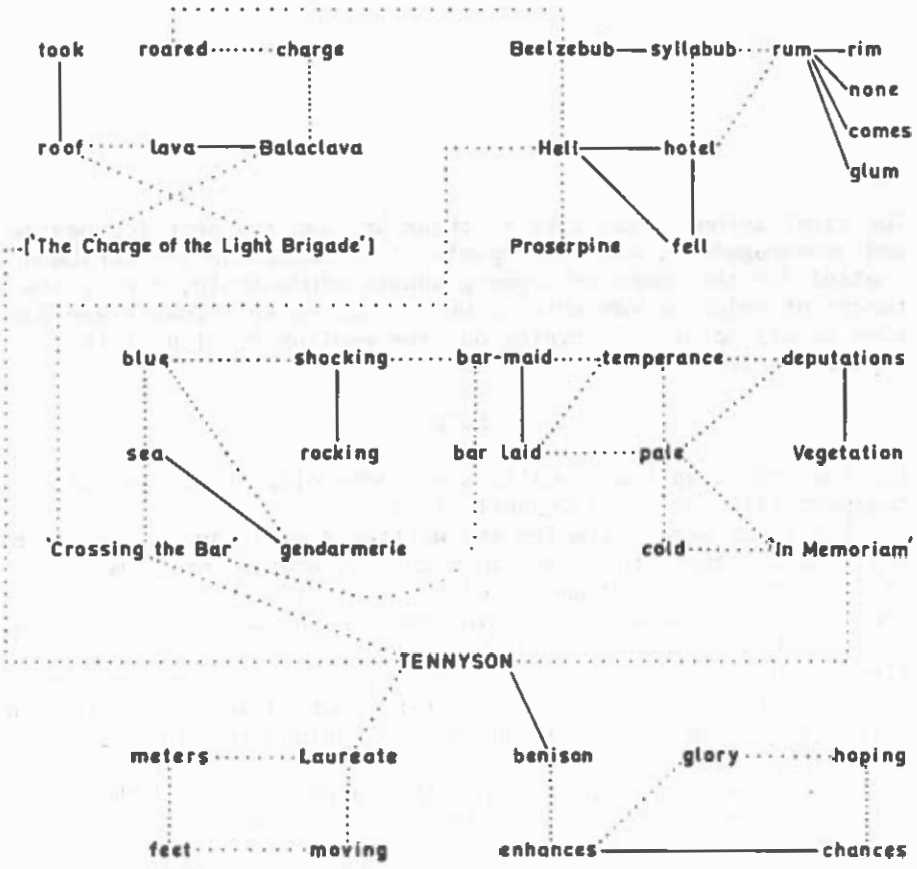
Nobody comes to give him his rum but the
Rim of the sky hippopotamus-glum
Enhances the chances to bless with a benison
Alfred Lord Tennyson crossing the bar laid
With cold vegetation from pale deputations
Of temperance workers (all signed In Memoriam)
Hoping with glory to trip up the Laureate's feet,

(Moving in classical meters) ....

Like Balaclava, the lava came down from the
Roof, and the sea's blue wooden gendarmerie
Took them in charge while Beelzebub roared for his rum,

... None of them come!

At first sight the poem seems to be a clever jingle and nothing else. However, if we know that Tennyson was a poet who wrote, among other things, 'Crossing the Bar' (sailing out to sea as a metaphor for dying), 'In Memoriam', and 'The Charge of the Light Brigade', then suddenly the poem leaps into new focus as a kaleidoscopic riot in the author's mind of images and associations based on Tennyson. If we take the key words of the poem, and write them out symbolising associations between them with a dotted line and rhyming between them with a straight line, we find a network something like this:



All that has to happen for this rich web of associations to dissolve into a pretty, if somewhat infuriating, jingle is for one piece of information to be lost: namely, 'Tennyson is a poet'. The three stanzas of the poem immediately lose their connection with each other. Of course, if the poems he wrote are also forgotten, we are left with very little more than surface meaning.

The difficulties of interpretation in the above songs may be due merely to the fact that certain associative links are as yet unknown to us. However, in certain other oral literatures (e.g. the praise-poetry of the southern Bantu) the links may be lost and irrecoverable, and this idea (along with those of loss of individual pieces of text and re-arrangement of lines) may help to account for the disjunctiveness and discontinuity frequently encountered in such literature.[8]

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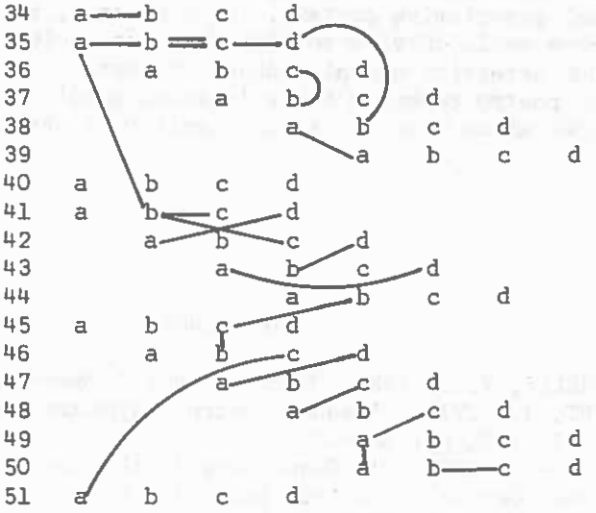
NOTES

1. For ethnographical details see Grottanelli 1955. See also Knappert 1970; Omar and Donnelly 1981.
2. The texts were collected and written down in Arabic script by the second author; they were then transliterated into Roman script, translated and annotated by both authors. The translations in some cases are tentative, for reasons which will be clear later. The structural description of the texts was done by the first author, who alone is responsible for any misinterpretations. The texts are part of a much larger body of Bajuni oral literature collected by the second author, much of which might otherwise have been lost.
3. The present paper is a much abbreviated version of the one originally presented at the Conference; this dealt with 156 lines of text.
4. 58-60 seem to be a mixture of 23-24 and 48-50; 19 is a repetition of 15.
5. It would also account for variation between different recitations of the songs. The version given above was written from dictation, but a tape-recording of another version showed variant wording and transposition of lines. The second author was told that the method of recitation in this tape-recording was reminis-

cent of the chants of the Egyptian Coptic Church, and to the first author's ears (and those of at least one Ethiopian) there are certain similarities with the Ethiopian *izl zema* ('solemn mode') chants. Neither of us are competent musicologists, but if there are resemblances, they might reveal something about cross-cultural influences and perhaps even about population movements.

6. This can be made clearer if we portray in schematic fashion the structure of one of the songs (VIIA), assuming 4 main topics (a,b,c,d) in each line, and using indentation to show tangential development:



7. This was published in 1925 in a collection called *Facades*, in which the author attempted, among other things, to capture the rhythms and movements of dances. The poems remarkable as instances of word-weaving, were in fact set to musuc by Sir William Walton.

8. The authors are grateful to several people at the Conference for their helpful comments on the paper, of which the following were the most pertinent:

It was noted that certain types of literature do not have to make cognitive sense; in Zulu nursery rhymes, for example, what is prized is the play on words.

B.W. Andrzejewski drew attention to techniques used by Somali scholars to decipher lines of Somali poetry whose meaning is not immediately obvious: they find other lines which contain some of the words and have what seems to be the same general sense, and then (rather like simplifying an equation) they work out what each unfamiliar word is likely to mean.

J. Carnochan noted that in some cases we do not need to know the exact meaning of certain phrases - it is enough to be aware of the general sense. In the Biblical sentence 'the wicked will flourish like a green bay-tree', for example, the exact connection between wicked people and green bay-trees is more or less irrelevant until we are called upon to explain it, when we must

confess we are not entirely sure of the exact meaning of the simile.

P.Ryan brought home very forcibly the importance of loss of allusive context when he recited the couplet:

Candy is dandy
But liquor is quicker.

Most of the people present had heard the couplet but could not give an explanation of its meaning - it in fact refers to different methods of wooing a girl. Dr. Ryan pointed out that the couplet is now remembered for its rhymes - it has come adrift from its original associative context. He suggested, however, that such a process would only be tolerated in non-serious poems.

Our attention was also drawn to certain structures in Amharic poetry referred to as 'wax and gold' - these are whole sentences whose meaning is not cognitively obvious.

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