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SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

College of Humanities, Language Studies, Journalism
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Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures

Literature as a Hydro-political Discourse: A Comparative
Analysis of Ethiopian and Egyptian Poetry

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Literature as a Hydro-political Discourse: A Comparative Analysis of Ethiopian and Egyptian Poetry

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**A Thesis Submitted to the Department of Foreign Languages and
Literatures in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree
of Master of Arts in Literature**

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School of Graduate Studies

This is to certify that the thesis prepared by Yewulsew Shitie entitled: Literature as a Hydro-Political Discourse: A Comparative Analysis of Ethiopian and Egyptian Poetry and Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Literature complies with the regulations of the university and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

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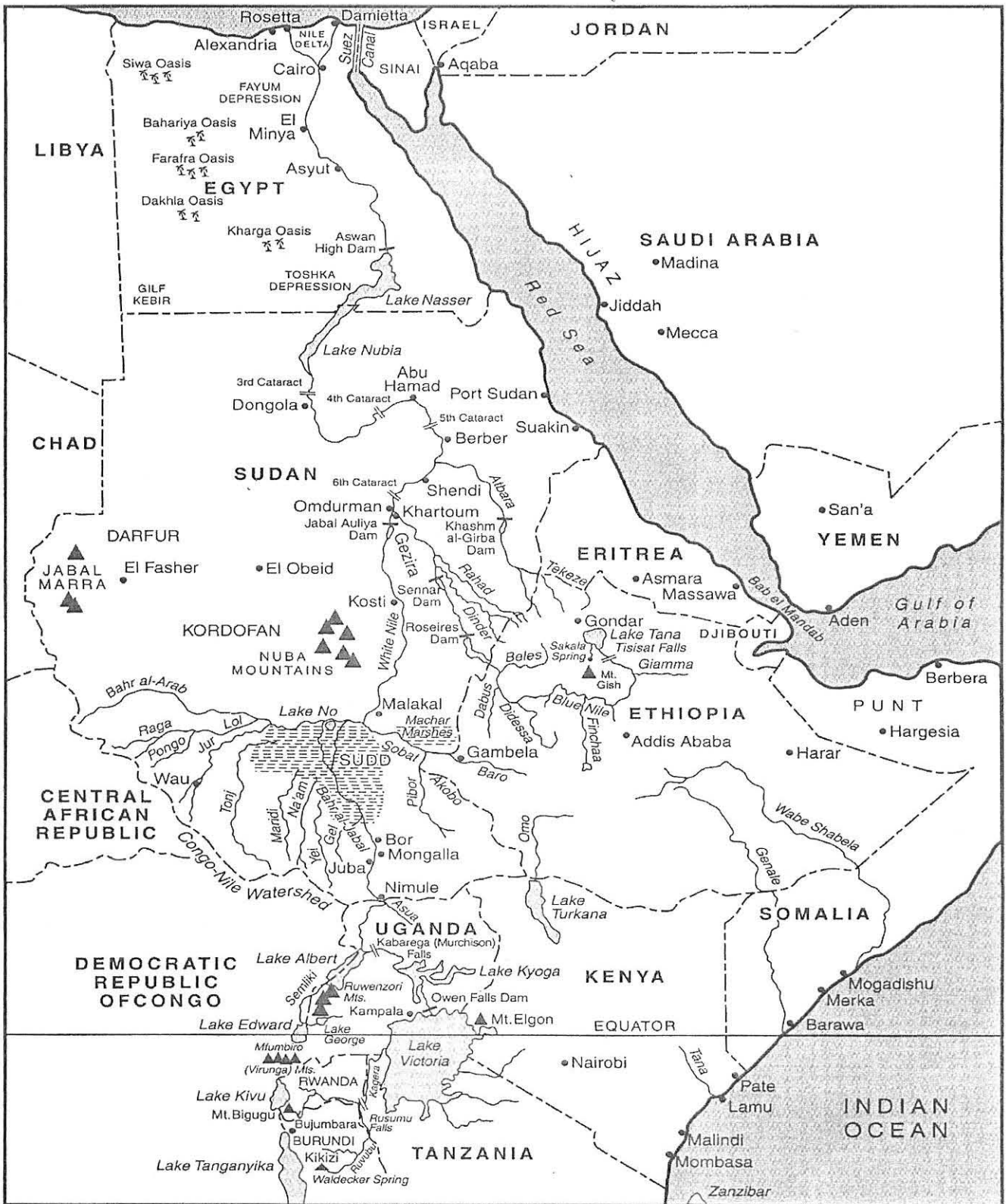
Thanks should also be due to Addis Ababa University for the financial support to conduct this study.



Dedication

In memory of my brothers

Atnafu, Tilahun and Workineh



The Nile Basin

Source: Collins, 2002

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Abstract

The Nile is a unique river in many respects. It is the longest river in the world that crosses different geographical, ecological and climatic regions. It is also unique in that its basin is the starting point of one of the earliest civilizations of the world. Along its long journey it connects and sometimes divides millions of inhabitants which otherwise do not have geographic boundary. Through this connection exists communication between and among the inhabitants of the basin.

This paper focuses on the comparative analysis of the hydro-political communication of the two riparian states of the Eastern Nile Basin. Ethiopian and Egyptian poetry are discussed as hydro-political discourse. The two countries being the source and receiver of the waters of the Nile respectively have long years of relationship which is reinvigorated by their strong tie of Christianity. Logical consideration of the poems of the aforementioned countries is also justified by the long-standing contention of water politics which has always been and will probably continue to be the greatest paradox of the basin. This paper seeks the root cause of this paradox and the key thereof. Egypt, an entirely Nile-dependent country, adopts a "historical right" to the waters of the Nile which is rooted in their long history of dependence and which is reiterated in the colonial treaties of 1929 and 1959. Ethiopia on the other hand, produces over 86 percent of the Nile waters, but as the least beneficiary of the river's bounty, depends highly on rain-fed agriculture and is bound to be hit by recurrent draught and famine. And thus Ethiopia adopts the "natural right." It demands a "fair share" of the river.

This paradox is articulated by literature of varying nature through the years. So the objective of this research is to find this discourse in the poems of Ethiopian and Egyptian writers and to make a comparative analysis. By so doing the study aims at filling the existing gap in the production of such literary analyses.

The method of study employed in this paper is interdisciplinary descriptive analysis of the selected texts based on certain thematic criteria of the poems to be compared. The discourses in the literatures are also checked for their hydro-political content.

The study has indicated that through a sharp contrast of the perceptions of the poets of the two countries, the national as well as regional interests of the people and the nations are somehow advocated by the poetries. The long-standing contention that bases itself on the "historical right" of Egypt and the "natural right" of Ethiopia is also aired. Finally, the poets have proved to be proponents of their national interests across the ages.

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Background for the Study

Africa is a land of great diversity, great range of climate and physical geography, as well as a huge endowment of natural resources. It is the birthplace of the human race (in Ethiopia) and one of the world's first great civilizations (in Egypt), and many other cultures and states that rose and fell over time. (www.Africafocus.library.wi.ed.) Africa has also many of the world's great rivers. Its diverse climate and geography have contributed to the extremely diverse water systems. Of these, the Nile is a river that draws a lot more attention. No other river in the world begins in volcanoes and mountains with glacial snow and ends in arid deserts than the Nile. (Collins, 2002)

Much has been said about the River Nile. Its international recognition emanates not only from the fact that it was a reality of geography, but, as Erlich and Gershoni (2000) observe, from the fact that it was an arena of multiple "human concepts", "myth", and "discourse" of various sorts. The Nile is the longest river in the world which flows from south to north, a distance of over 6000 km from its principal sources, Lake Victoria, in east-central Africa and the Lake Tana Region in Ethiopia. It passes through eleven sovereign states on its way to the Mediterranean Sea. From its remotest source, a mountain stream in Burundi, the river is 6,695 km long.

The Blue Nile and the White Nile are the two major tributaries of the Nile proper, the longest river system on earth. For the sake of clarity in this paper, unless stated otherwise, the names Abbay, Blue Nile and Nile refer to the Abbay proper (from source in Ethiopia until it leaves

Ethiopian territory which in some other literatures may be referred to as Blue Nile), the Abbay and Baro-Akobo sub basin, and the Nile proper (including the White Nile and Tekeze-Atbara). Consequently, Abbay emerges from Gish Abbay in Western Gojjam Administrative Zone, in the northwestern highland of Ethiopia. The river is known by the name of Gilgel Abbay and it traverses about 100 km before it joins Lake Tana. Abbay flows through Lake Tana and forms the famous Tis-Isat Falls. Then it wanders around for about 960 kilometers within Ethiopian territorial jurisdiction collecting the waters of many tributaries. The tributaries rise from the high plateau and flow into the deep canyons to join Abbay River.

The major tributaries of the Abbay are Dabus, Didessa, Fincha, Gudar, Mugar, Jama, Bashilo, Birr, Beles, and numerous other small streams. It is also joined by the Dindar and Rahad In the Sudanese territory. These rivers also originate from Ethiopia. (Mekonnen, 2004)

The White Nile emerges at Lake Victoria and crosses about six countries collecting waters from its tributaries. Considering the volume of water contribution of the two major tributaries (the White and the Blue Nile, over 86 percent (Gebresellase, 2006) of the water comes from the Blue Nile. The White and Blue Nile rivers get their names from the color of their waters. Although bright blue at its start, the Blue Nile gradually darkens as it picks up black, muddy sediment from the Ethiopian highlands, but the White Nile has much less of these. The two rivers meet at Khartoum in the Sudan and proceed to Egypt as Nile proper. The river finally empties into the Mediterranean Sea after its long journey.

However, it is not just the length, or as Rushdi Said cited in Collins (2002) observes, it is not its volume what makes the Nile distinct, but its “rich and colorful history, its profound role in

shaping human civilization in Africa, and the absolute dependency on the river and its vagaries of those who live in its basin” (2002:11)

There are eleven riparian states of the Nile River – namely, Ethiopia, Egypt, Eritrea, the Sudan (divided into Sudan and South Sudan in January, 2011), Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Burundi, Rwanda, and D.R. Congo, and over 160 million (Woldeghiorghis, 2009) people depend on the basin. Therefore, the question of the utilization of the Nile waters has assumed significance in contemporary political and economic discourse of the riparian states.

This paper is a modest attempt to shade some light on the perception of Ethiopian and Egyptian poets regarding Abbay and the Nile (proper) respectively through the years emphasizing the politics (hydro-politics, to be specific) in the literatures.

Politics in its broader sense refers to power relationships in specific field: that is to say the interrelationships between the people, groups, or organizations in a particular area of life especially insofar as they involve power and influence or conflict. Hydro-politics is one such relationship.

Hydro-politics is a relatively new term which generally refers to the politics that affects national and regional water management, or uses water availability as a strategic political resource.

According to Turton & Henwood (2002) because water is scarce, and because it is essential for life, health and welfare, it has become a contested terrain and therefore a political issue. They further argue that hydro-politics, as it is currently presented in most of the relevant literature, shows a certain bias. A detailed analysis of the literature reveals that there are four main

elements that seem to be present. Each of these elements impacts on the literature as a form of bias giving that specific section of the literature a distinctive pattern, context or focus. (Ibid.)

1.1.1 Elements of Hydro-Politics

The elements present in different literatures are:

i. Water and conflict

The first bias inherent in the current literature is that of water and conflict. A glance at the flourishing literature in this regard is instructive. In these writings, the state or components of the state are mostly used as the unit of analysis, or they focus on conflict and co-operation within the framework of the state. (Turton and Henwood, 2002)

ii. Water and the environment

The second body of literature is growing rapidly and seeks to place water within a broader environmental setting. As such, water is seen as being a component of the environment, with a variety of inherent conflict drivers. In this context, the scholars concerned see environmental goods as scarce resources, which are, in turn, contested. (Ibid.) A glance at this body of work is therefore also equally useful.

iii. Water and security

The third main focal area of hydro-political writing aims at drawing attention to the element of crisis within the water sector (or in its broader environmental setting), and as a result seeks to

politicize, and possibly even to 'securitize' the management of water (Turton cited in Ibid., Luzi, 2007)

iv. Water, society and culture

There is also a fourth category of literature that seeks to explore the social and cultural components of water and water-related issues, and as such tends to examine water in a more abstract and less empirically defined sense. (Luzi, 2007; Turton and Henwood, 2002)

In such a way, the above mentioned scholars, in their work gave examples of scholars who tend to focus on one or the other of the above elements of hydro-politics.

With the above hydro-political backdrop, this writer would like to use the working definition of hydro-politics in this study.

In this paper, hydro-politics refers to the socio-political dimensions determining: access, control, use and ownership of water and water dependent resources. The dimensions include the above elements, i.e., water and environment (specifically scarcity caused by water pollution), water and security, water and conflict/cooperation or diplomacy, as well as water and society and culture (domestic politics.)

Based on this truth, one could relate hydro-politics and talk about the significance of hydro-political discourse in literature at two levels.

a) National Significance:

Countries' inability to manage their water resources due to limited economic power or lack of political determination is taken as a predicament to development. (Arsano, 2007). In this case, people tend to express their political opinions like grievances about their economic, social or political dissatisfaction and about their domestic problems either explicitly or implicitly in their communications. In fact, according to Eaglton (1996) there is no need to drag politics into literary theory...it has been there from the beginning. That is to say political ideologies are depicted in literature consciously or unconsciously. *Water and environment*, and *water and culture* could be considered under this level.

b) Regional Significance:

Hydro-politics – as it is currently being written about in the mainstream literature – tends to focus on conflict at the international level in shared river basins. In that regard, according to Turton and Henwood (2002), it becomes evident that hydro-politics at this level is about:

- conflict and co-operation;
- involving states as the main actors; and
- taking place in shared international river basins.

1.1.2 The Public Perception of the Nile/Abbay

Many a singer, an artist, a poet, a novelist, etc. has paid tribute to this mighty river in their respective field. The Egyptians, for example, have produced about 11,000 proverbs about the Nile. (Wolliyou, 2002 E.C.)

This study does not have any data as to how many proverbs the Ethiopians have about Abbay, and published poetry and a couple of lyrics have been dealt with in the analysis part of this paper. Nonetheless, some words could be said about the folk and choral songs. In many of the songs, Abbay is boosted up as a source of civilization, about its might, about its being shelter for patriots and bandits alike, about its long and fascinating history as well as its association with the patriot Dejazmach Belay Zeleke, about the beautiful ladies and handsome gentlemen it has produced, and the sweetness of the love of the natives; about the attractive scenery of the river and the area, and so on and so forth.

Yet, in many others, Abbay is derided with lamentation, anger and sorrow about its uselessness, about its heedlessness and the psychological pressure it puts on Ethiopians, etc

1.2 Statement of the Problem

According to *African Journal of Environmental Science and Technology –AJEST (May 2010)*, the majesty of River Nile belongs to the world. That is why poets and writers from different parts of the world have reflected on the Nile. Countries from source to destination are one way or another connected to one another because of it, albeit some are more connected than others. But the river's management – stretching from [the sources] to the Mediterranean Sea, crossing many artificial boundaries – is the responsibility of a few countries that benefit directly from its largesse. (<http://www.academicjournals.org/AJEST>)

Accordingly, who controls the Nile has long been a source of conflict for the countries dependent on its waters. Of these, the researcher chose Egyptian and Ethiopian literatures for comparison for the following reasons.

Egypt claims historic dominance as it is a major dependent country of the Nile Basin:

- The Nile River, the only major source of water for the country, plays a crucial role in the life of Egypt. As compared to the other riparian states, Egypt is the only country that is heavily dependent on the Nile River waters. That is why Herodotus, the father of history called Egypt “the gift of the Nile.”
- The fact that the Nile is the principal artery of life and early civilization in Egypt does not apply to the same extent to the other riparian states. (Himdan cited in Hassan and Rasheedy, 2007). This absolute dependence makes Egypt vulnerable to any actions that would jeopardize the flow of the Nile.

Hence, according to Gladman cited by Kinfé Abraham (2004), Anwar Sadat declared: “any action that would endanger the waters of the Blue Nile will be faced with a firm reaction on the part of Egypt, even if that action should lead to war.”

Ethiopia, on the other hand, is a major contributor of the Nile Basin. More than 86 percent of the Nile waters come from Ethiopia.

Nevertheless, Ethiopia is recurrently hit by famine as it has failed to build anything significant on this great river - Abbay. The Grand Dam project of the present Ethiopian government on the Blue Nile River is also believed to have produced a major political discourse in the same way as the different government political rhetoric through the years.

Yacob Arsano (2007), like other scholars in the area, observes that religion is another “important” and “permanent” element in the relationship between the two countries. Since the

4th century A.D. Ethiopia used to receive Coptic bishops (Abuns) from the Egyptian Orthodox Church of Alexandria. Haggai Erlich metaphorically reinvigorated this notion when he wrote his book entitled *The Cross and the River: Ethiopia, Egypt and the Nile*(2002). The *cross* comes from Egypt, and the *River* goes from Ethiopia!

Studies about some aspects the Nile River come out as, legal institutions for equitable and fair exploitation of the resource, and hydraulic projects and works in the basin. Teferi Mekonnen observed that and in 2004 he came up with the hydro-political history of the river which is found to be very significant for this study. However, as far as the researcher's knowledge is concerned, thorough analysis of literary works on the Nile, especially the hydro-political aspect is non-existent. Even the ones that exist, either focus on some aspects of oral literature on Abbay in Ethiopia (to the best of the researcher's knowledge) or they do not make any comparison whatsoever on the perceptions of Egyptian and Ethiopian writers.

By way of a passing remark rather than a judgment, born and bred in the heart of Gish Abbay, the writer attached in many ways with the river has seen and heard much about both the spiritual and physical "splendor" of it. Apart from personal bias for the magnificence of the river, however, one needs to question the root cause of the river's fate of killing and healing at the same time. In so doing, one may attempt to figure out why/how millions prosper because of the river and look up to the land of millions "others" at times with respect and gratitude and at other times with contempt, suspicion and threat. And why/how those millions "others" who are providing the water with its accessories happen to die of hunger, thirst and war. Hence, a rigorous literary analysis of works of literature like folklores, poems, novels, lyrics, and so on is worthwhile. With the aim of filling the existing gap, therefore, this thesis is an attempt to make a

comparative analysis of poems, song lyrics, and excerpts by writers of the two countries within the broad context of the countries' long years of relationships and the individual countries' national issues.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

Given the background and the statement of the problem, the main objectives of the thesis are to show the perceptions of Egyptian and Ethiopian writers regarding the Nile/Abbay by making a comparative analysis of some selected works on the river, and the portrayal of hydro politics in the literature. In addition to the stated main objectives, the study has the following specific objectives:

- ✚ To determine the relationship between government rhetoric in different periods and the literary works produced in each period of the respective countries
- ✚ To identify the implicit and explicit implication of hydro-politics in poetry.
- ✚ To demonstrate whether or not a correlation does exist between the writers' views and the government policies.
- ✚ To distinguish the bond of contention between Ethiopian Poets and Egyptian poets.

1.4 Delimitation of the Study

While there may be many works referring to the Nile, especially taking the Egyptian history of literature into consideration, the scope of this study is limited to the analysis of some selected works. In addition, these selected materials:

- Are assessed with a specific reference of the type of discourse of the times they were written in and their hydro-political content where ever possible. Because as Macherey cited by Gebre (2001 E.C) has it, “the role of literature is to say what a period thinks of itself.”
- May not be analyzed entirely but parts of them that most reveal the hydro-political discourse will be dealt with as much as possible.
- Are basically poems from both countries. However, for the sake of clarification, excerpts from song lyrics or drama are inserted wherever appropriate.

1.5 Limitations of the Study

Resource constraints in relation to time and required data are the major limitations to this study. As regards the required data, this study would have been enhanced if the materials had been readily available in places of concern of the research - both at home and, especially, in Egypt. In other words, it would have been better to analyze as many texts as possible with reference to other similar studies as well in order to confidently mingle an issue as serious as hydro-politics with creative writings and hence to discuss literature as a hydro-political discourse. But scarcity of the required data and reference materials, as well as inaccessibility of some works has made the research a daunting task. Besides, considering the lack of precedence on the nature of the study and insufficiency of the available materials, developing a theoretical framework for the study was another test that made the writing of this study difficult to manage within the timeframe given. However, the writer has attempted to overcome these challenges after battling in some ways, like, soliciting assistance of different people here and abroad for the acquisition of materials and purchasing some via the internet, and reading as much as possible.

1.6 Significance of the Study

In producing this thesis, the researcher believes that the work would contribute to the understanding of the Nile dilemma in general and its hydro political discourse representation in literature in particular. It is also expected that this research will add another dimension to literary discourse in that it gives room for critics and readers to think beyond the apparent.

Other significances of this thesis are:

- ✓ It may assist Ethiopian writers to aspire for writing in English and representing the objective realities of their country with different approach.
- ✓ Considering the grandeur nature and significance of the Nile/Abbay, and the substantial power of literature in influencing individuals, groups, or states, this research might contribute to the actions, reactions, decision making and policy adoptions for harmonious relationships.
- ✓ The research may also serve as a spring board for further studies in this area to promote academic discourse.

1.7 Methodology of the Study

This study is interdisciplinary in nature and it utilizes textual analysis and descriptive methods. Therefore, a close reading and re-reading of the selected texts for the analysis is a major task in the investigation. Thus the research is basically a library-based study where critical reading of

materials available in the libraries and the electronic sources takes the lion's share in the organization of data for review of related literature and the analysis.

Primary data is collected from the texts under study based on:

- The hydro-political content of the texts
- The comparability of texts from both sides so as to maintain balance
- Judgment of representativeness of the texts (as much as possible)

Then the analysis is carried out with the help of the supporting information which comprises relevant literature on the Nile in general and hydro-politics in particular. Discourse analysis pertinent to the study is carried out via critical reading and when needed, translation of Arabic or Amharic texts into English is done.

1.8 Organization of the study

This thesis is organized in four main chapters. The first chapter is the introduction which consists of the background for the study, statement of the problem, objectives of the study, delimitation of the study, limitations of the study, significance of the study and methodology of the study. The second chapter deals with the review of related literature which is broadly divided into the historical literature and related literature/studies. In the historical literature, reference materials regarding the Nile, historical relations of Ethiopia and Egypt from ancient times to the present moment, and different books written on the subject from a hydro-political point of view are discussed. In addition, related studies done by other researchers regarding Nile/Abbay in literature will be touched upon. This is followed by chapter three which is dedicated for the

analysis of the data from the selected texts. This would also have sub topics each one of which would implicitly or explicitly refer to hydro-politics. This includes Nile/Abbay in poetry of the two countries through the years: National perception of the Nile/Abbay, Glorification of the Nile by Egyptian poets and resentment by Ethiopian poets. Abbay as a natural barrier (a dividing factor), Abbay as a unifying factor, Abbay as a traitor, Abbay as a life savior and collaborator of development, and Abbay as a source of conflict (threat for hydro-political clash). The last chapter concludes the research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This chapter provides the reader with a quick look into some books and articles on the Nile/Abbay with particular reference to the Eastern Nile Basin. This includes a highlight on historical documents of relationship between Egypt and Ethiopia, legal agreements and basin hydro-politics and so on. On top of that, to show that there is a gap that this thesis tries to fill in, a review of related literary studies previously done by students and/or professionals of literature is attempted.

2.1 Review of Historical Literature

2.1.1 The Mysterious Source

Nature has disclosed to no one his secret spring,
and men have not been allowed to see thee, Nile,
while small; she has withdrawn thy hiding-places
and has preferred that the nations should wonder at
rather than know thy origin.

Lucan

(www.Bartleby.com/Greatbooksonline, 2011)

As the Roman poet Marcus Annaeus Lucanus has rightly put it two millennia ago, the exact source of Abbay is one of its great mysteries as it has always been a point of altercation since time immemorial. The enigma of the source, agree Erlich and Gershoni (2000), has produced endless speculations and legends. Until today, there is a tendency by many to refer to the source of the Abbay as the highlands of Ethiopia or the region of the highlands of Lake Tana and so on. Explorers from all over the world were hence irresistibly drawn to Ethiopia and other parts of Africa to find the real source since two millennia ago. These include, the world's first historian

Herodotus, the Roman Emperor Nero, the Greek astronomer/geographer Ptolemy, the Scottish explorer James Bruce, the English explorers John Speke and Sir Samuel Baker, Spanish priest Pedro Paez (the first to discover it), the Belgian Adolf Linent, the German explorer Burkhardt Waldecker. Some were more successful than others.

Accordingly, Abbay originates in the north western Ethiopian mountains (2747 m.a.s.l.) specifically the Gish Mountain in Gish Abay. (Bruce, 1790; Cheesman, 1936; Ludwig, 1937; Collins, 2002) Gish Abbay town is found in Sekela woreda, West Gojjam zone, Amhara region.



The very beginning of the Little Blue Nile is a muddy stream. Courtesy of *Mystery of the Nile Educational Guide* (2005)

Emil Ludwig in *The Life-Story of a river* (1937) explicitly argues:

In the high mountains lies the source of the “little Abbay,” the “Mother of Abbay” that is of the Blue Nile. This mountainous country, lying [about 100 km] south of L. Tana, gives birth to the river in the Gish valley, at an altitude of [2743 meter.] [...] *the river makes a brief passage through the lake [Tana], like a prelude to its song. (1937:110) Emphasis mine.*

2.1.2 The Nomenclature, Myth and History

From ancient times to the present era, the river has several names. In the ancient Egyptian mythology *Hapi* is the god of the Nile River and the source of life of all the people, animals and plants around it. Beasancon cited in W/ghiorghis (2001 E.C) talks about many other different names of the river like ‘the god of gods’, “the god of vegetation,” “source of life,” “the reason for prosperity of Egypt,” “life giving,” “the creator of grain,” and so on inscribed on stelae. (Woldeghiorgis, 2001 E.C.)

The name Nile is derived from the *Nahal* or *river valley* in old Semitic (De Villiers in Tafesse, 2001) or from the Greek *neilos* (www.uv.es/EBRIT/main/eb.htm.) So the ancient Egyptians might have used it to refer to the valley the river brought life to. Some sources say that the word Nile comes from the Arabic word *nel* whose meaning is a “gift to others” that is to say “Nile is a gift from God.” (Woldeghiorgis, 2001 E.C) This might have something to do with *nilo meter* - the instrument used by the Ancient Egyptians to measure the volume of the Nile River.

With regard to Abbay also there are different stories of nomenclature. For example, corresponding to Gedle Zere’abruk (2001 E.C.), the naming goes as follows:

Abune Zere'abtuk was summoned to Emperor Iyasu's court at Gonder. On his departure he recommended his prayer books to the river's care until he returned. When he returned after seven years he asked the source to give back his books.

"*gish!*" [spit out!] he said and the source of the river did the same.

To the Abun's amazement, the books that came out of the water were all dry. To show this "miracle", Abune Zere'abruk turned to a monk who was with him and said, "*Aba, eyi!*" [Fathe, look!] Since then, the river came to be called *Abbay!*

Combining "gish" and 'Aba eyi", the place where the river emerges came to be known as "*Gish Abbay*". Sometimes in Gish Abay, the people also call *Abbay Gihon*. This traces its root to the Biblical times where this river is considered to be one of the four rivers that water the Garden of Eden. (Gen.2:13)

"Abawi" in the classical Geez language to mean "big" or "fatherly" (Tafla, 2000; Bruce,1790) has been suggested as the meaning of the river's name due to its great magnificence. On the other hand, referring to the river's uselessness to Ethiopia so far, and to its heedlessness to the people of Ethiopia some contend that *Abbay* is called as such to mean that it is a *liar* (Woldeghiorgis, 2001 E.C). Al-Bahr al-Azraq and Jupiter are other names of the river.

2.1.3 Historical Connections of Egypt and Ethiopia

It is interesting to see the cultural, religious, political, and economic relations of Egypt and Ethiopia are one way or another associated with the Nile/*Abbay*. The recorded history of centuries-long multifaceted relations dates as far back as the time of kings and mamluks, passes

through pre-colonial periods, and continues to the colonial and present moment having different faces. Below, some of the major connections are given in their chronological order.

1133-73 King Lalibela discussed the idea of diverting the Nile and forced the Egyptians to pay annual tribute.

1344-71 Emperor Saife Arad laid the foundation for the Ethiopian “golden age” by engaging Egyptian experts in his political administration and his armed forces.

1381 Emperor Dawit sent an army that reached Aswan because the Egyptian Mmluks persecuted the Ethiopian community in Jerusalem. Peace was reestablished as Egyptians responded positively and an appeasement has been effected..

1414-1429 Emperor Yishak hosted a group of Mamluks led by Al-Tabingha who had fled from their rivals in Egypt.

Pankhurst (2000) also identifies three more Ethiopian kings who have been claimed to have attempted to block/divert Abbay. He then argues that there had been no concrete effort to interfere with the river. In addition as none of the claims were supported with Egyptian sources, Ethiopia’s position to intimidate the very life of Egypt is a “myth that agitates politics to this very day.” The claim, he asserts, “proved to be no more than roars of a paper lion”.

Scholars like Arsano (2007), however, believe that in terms of the Nile/Abbay all the mentioned medieval kings, the Monarchy, Dergue and the present administration have similar stand, albeit the efforts made and the approaches followed may vary depending on different factors.

Unlike the ancient and medieval relations of the two countries which are mainly based on legend and chronicles, well documented relationships and actions on the Nile started taking place in the early 20th century.

1917 King Tafari Mekonen sent Dr. workneh martin to discuss and recruit American engineers for the lake Tana development plan.

1924 Egypt and Ethiopia started diplomatic relations.

1930 Ethio-US cooperation led to the commencement of the physical survey of the Nile at an estimated total cost of USD 8,878,000.

1941 Ethiopia repudiated the 1902 Treaty over the Nile because Britain recognized the abortive Italian 'Conquest' of Ethiopia.

1951 Ethiopian Abun appointed for the first time as Head of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Earlier, the post was filled by Egyptians.

1956 Ethiopia asserted that it reserved (then and in the future) the right to utilize the waters of the Blue Nile, without recognizing any limitations on its freedom of action.

1957-62 The 1930 survey on the Nile implemented. It involved studies of stream flow; soils, hydroelectric power potential and land use.

1960 Muslim students established the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) in Cairo.

1960 The construction of the Aswan High Dam started. It was completed after eight years in 1968.

1977 Ethiopia stressed at the UN Water Conference at Mar del Plata in Argentina that it was 'the sovereign right of any riparian state, in the absence of an international agreement, to proceed unilaterally with the development of water resources within its territory'.

1988 the USD 300 million Tana-Beles project started. In this connection Egypt is said to have influenced the blockage of a loan from the African Development Bank (ADB) which was requested for this purpose. This was allegedly done because Egypt felt the project would harm it.

1991 Ethiopia and the Sudan signed an agreement to use the Blue Nile and the Tekeze/Atbara rivers to the dismay of Egypt.

1993 The first of a series of Nile 2002 conferences launched. It was funded by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).

1997 (September) An Aide Memoir was sent to the diplomatic missions in Cairo by the Government of Ethiopia. It asserted that the 1959 water apportionment agreement between Egypt and the Sudan was not binding on Ethiopia.

1999 Ethiopia asserted its right to the waters of the Nile at the UN conference on water resources.

2011 The construction of the Ethiopian Great Millennium Dam started.

2.1.4 The Impact of Nile Treaties

The legal agreements between and among riparian states are majorly colonial and post colonial phenomena. Concerning the two countries, there are eight major treaties signed in a span of

about 70 years between 1891 and 1959 on the use of the Nile waters (Kefyalew Mekonnen cited in Gebeto, 2010) and one framework agreement of cooperation in 1993 (Abraham, 2004; Arsano 2007). The major agreements are shown below in chronological order:

1• **Anglo-Italian Protocol of April 15/1891** affirms that the Italian Government pledges not to engage in any construction work on the Atbara River in view of irrigation, which might significantly affect its flow into the Nile (Abraham 2004).

2. **Anglo-Italian agreement of 1901** over the use of River Gash (Gebeto, 2010)

3• **Ethio-British Agreement of May 15/1902** says that His Majesty the Emperor Menelik II, King of Kings of Ethiopia, engages himself towards the Government of His Britannic Majesty not to construct any works across the Blue Nile, Lake Tana or the Sobat river which would arrest the flow of their waters except in agreement with His Britannic Majesty's Government and the Government of Sudan.(Woldeghiorghis 2001 E.C. ; Abraham 2004)

4• **Agreement of December 13/ 1906 between Britain, France and Italy** asserts that the interest of Great Britain and Egypt in the Nile Basin, more specifically as regards the regulation of the waters of that river and its tributaries, shall be respected (Abraham 2004).

5• **Agreement between Britain and Italy, December 14-20, 1906.** This agreement contends that the Government of Italy engages not to construct on the head-waters of the Blue Nile or White Nile or tributaries or effluents any works which might sensibly modify their flow into the river (Abraham 2004).

6• **The May 7, 1929 Agreement between Britain (on behalf of the Sudan) and Egypt** states that Egypt as an independent state and Britain on behalf of the Sudan, signed the first agreement

after World War-I. Egypt complained, for the first time, that Sudan may undertake irrigation development in its territory. Under this agreement, the concept of 'Egypt's natural and historical rights' came into being (Abraham 2004, Arsano 2007, Erlich 2002)

7. Agreement for the Apportionment (Full Utilization) of the Nile Waters between Egypt and the Sudan was signed in November 1959. The proportion of waters of the Nile was 55.5 billion m³ for Egypt, 18.5 billion m³ for the Sudan and 10 billion m³ was estimated to evaporate under condition the flow stays the same (84 billion m³) (Woldeghiorgis 2009). June 1959, Emperor Haileselassie broke the affiliation of Ethiopian Christianity with Egyptian Coptic Church. So according to Erlich and Gershoni, 2000, "spiritual" dependence stops but "material" dependence continues. The following year the Aswan High Dam construction started and was completed in 1968.

8. Agreement of July 1/ 1993 between Presidents Meles Zenawi and Husni Mubarak acknowledges 'close relations' of the two countries 'linked by the Nile River with its basin as a center of mutual interest'. (Arsano 2007). Due to Ethiopia's disagreement with Britain, the latter excluded the former when other agreements (Anglo-Italian, Anglo-Egyptian and Egypt-Sudan) were signed in 1925, 1929 and 1959 respectively (Abraham 2004). On July 1, 1993 the two leaders agreed 'not to do anything with the Nile waters that might harm the interests of either party'. This was, nonetheless, a "talk to further talk" on the Nile water according to Tafesse 2001 as it is not detailed.

9. The Nile Basin Agreement between Six Riparian States is expected to be ratified in the near future though Egypt and the Sudan have still refused to sign this agreement. The agreement is part of the negotiations between the ten countries of the Nile Basin Initiative to sign a

Cooperative Framework Agreement (CFA) that have been ongoing for at least 13 years. (<http://en.afrik.com/article17639.html>)

In summary, partly because many of the agreements were undertaken in a colonial and cold war context, tensions over the control of Nile waters are longstanding obstacles to growth and development in the area. Conflict prevention and cooperative water resources management in the Nile Basin are therefore central development challenges for the ten countries that share the Nile Rivers.

2.1.5 Nile Basin Initiative (NBI)

The Nile Basin Initiative (NBI), initiated formally in 1999, provides a basin-wide framework to fight poverty and promote socio-economic development amongst the ten Nile countries. The NBI is led by the Council of Ministers in charge of Water Affairs from the member state (Nile-COM), with the support of a Technical Advisory Committee (Nile-TAC), and a Secretariat (Nile-SEC).

The Nile Basin Initiative's Strategic Action Program is guided by a shared vision "to achieve sustainable socio-economic development through the equitable utilization of, and benefit from, the common Nile Basin water resources" (NBI 2000).

2.2 Review of Related Literature/Studies

When it comes to the realm of literature, much has not been done in the context of the relation of the two countries in general and hydro-politics in particular. This writer has come across very few works done on the area and this project intends to indicate the existing gaps and tries to fill them in the context of literary discourse rather than historical, legal or geographical accounts.

1. *Myth and Reality: Minds of Ethiopian Poets on the Blue Nile* by Bayleyegn Tasew (1998)

This study is published in the Proceedings of the 5th Nile 2002 Conference. It deals with the perceptions of two Ethiopian poets, namely Tsegaye Gebremedhin and Hailu Gebreyohannes. In his study, Tasew has used the poems:

- *Innatkin Belulegn* by poet Hailu Gebreyohannes and he has tried to analyze the relationship between myth and poetry and their function as instruments of conveying deep seated feelings like hunger and poverty.
- *Abbay* by Poet Laureate Tsegaye Gebremedhin. Here also he has considered the deep imagination of the poet and the power of the poem to analyze the “age-old” historical heritage and cultural values and beliefs.

The author then concludes that the Nile has a great place in the world of mythology and history. He also argued that Ethiopian poets forward their views on self reliance, salvation, and utilization of the Nile waters on the basis of equity, good-faith, and so on.

2. *The Father of Rivers: The Nile in Ethiopian Literature* by Bairu Tafla (2000)

In this study Tafla assesses the notion and role of the Nile in Ethiopian literature in the ‘widest sense of the term’ and one of the particular issues he explicitly avoided in his paper from the outset is dealing with the “politics ensuing from the complexity of the problems” that the river involves. He instead explored all types of literature – history, religion, folklore, novel, poetry, etc. and tried to show how Abbay “the Father of Rivers” is represented in these works.

From poetry he took into consideration three poems – Ayalneh Mulatu's *Tikur Abbay*, Hailu Gebreyohannes's *Inmatkin Belulgn*, and an anonymous poem from the Ethiopian daily newspaper *Addis Zemen*.

Tafla argues that the Nile was, and still is, an ever-present factor in the mind of the Ethiopian society and that it is a deep-rooted element in the Ethiopian culture and foreign policy.

The fact that both studies revolve around the Nile makes them related to this work. Nonetheless, two fundamental points make the present work different from both of these studies. Firstly, none of the works deals specifically with broader concept of hydro-politics in depth. Tafla explicitly avoids it from his analysis and Tasew implies it in his concluding remarks. This work on the contrary considers, in addition to some other facts, different situations in which hydro-political spirits are communicated or at least implied in all the poems selected. Secondly, both studies deal with Ethiopian literature only, and even so, they considered only two and three poems for analysis while this one is concerned about the literature of two countries found in the Nile Basin and a comparative analysis is made to reveal the perceptions of the poets, to show the contention between the poets and by extension their respective countries, and finally to check the relationship of the countries and/or the respective national situations suggested through the poems wherever possible.

Chapter Three: A Comparative Analysis of Ethiopian and Egyptian

Poetry on the Nile/Abbay¹

This chapter deals with the analysis of the selected poems from Egypt and Ethiopia. All poems from Ethiopia except one are in Amharic, and unless stated otherwise, their translation is done by this writer. Some of the poems by Egyptian poets are found already translated and some are retrieved in Arabic and the writer got them translated. The poems are sub divided into themes and sub-themes, so comparison is made based on the general area or focus of the poems – national Vs regional, glorification Vs resentment, the times (if available) when the poems were produced – for contextualization, and so on.

Poetry, derived from a Greek word, *poesis*, meaning “making” or “creating”, is a fascinating work of art written with deep insight, high quality, moving intensity or sincerity, or immense beauty. Apart from its captivating nature, poetry, according to Herder, is a means of conveying historical truth in a way better than history itself:

In poetry’s gallery of diverse ways of thinking, diverse aspirations and diverse desires, we come to know periods and nations far more intimately than we can through the misleading and pathetic method of studying their political and military history. [...] From its poetry, we can learn [the people’s] way of thinking, its desires and wants, the way it rejoiced and the ways it was guided either by its principles or its inclinations. (cited in Gallagher and Greenblatt, 2001: 7)

¹ Nile: the Nile proper (from Khartoum onwards) – for the Egyptian poems

Abbay: the Abbay proper (from source until it leaves Ethiopian territory) – for Ethiopian poems

The poems analyzed in this chapter do not at any rate represent the entire production of literary works from both countries. While a decisive judgment requires a thorough analysis of all forms of work or at least as many more as possible, for obvious reasons this study is limited to the ones that were accessible from Egypt and the ones that are, in this writer's judgment, reasonably comparable to them from Amharic. Therefore, the points made based on the poems here under are only preliminary and are subject to change in later studies.

In Egypt, hymn to the Nile is very common and is important as bearing witness to the state of religious thought, the economic use, the psychology and way of life in the time of the Pharaohs. On the other hand, the reflection the myths associated with and the praise for Abbay in Ethiopia in the sense it is done in Egyptian poems seems to be virtually non-existent.

3.1 The National Perception of the Nile/Abbay: Glorification Vs Resentment

For a general comparison of the river's behavior and the stark difference of perception by the poets of the source and receiver states, it suffices to consider the following poems:

3.1.1 Glorification

This hymn to the Nile by an unknown Egyptian author was written circa 2100 B.C. The poet is concerned with the Nile river valley civilization and the power of the river. The river is revered as a god of gods.

Hail to the Nile

Hail to thee, O Nile!

Who manifests thyself over this land,

and comes to give life to Egypt!

*Mysterious is thy issuing forth from the darkness,
on this day whereon it is celebrated!
Watering the orchards created by Ra,
to cause all the cattle to live,
you give the earth to drink, inexhaustible one!
Path that descends from the sky,
loving the bread of Seb and the first-fruits of Nepera,
You cause the workshops of Ptah to prosper!*

The poet begun by talking to the “inexhaustible” river “himself” about the river’s appearance from the “darkness” – a common expression in many of the hymns (perhaps alluding to the mysteriousness of the source) and the watering of the fields, prosperity and so on.

Absence or even reduced amount of the Nile floods is not tolerable. The disaster that follows is expressed in the following verses:

*If you cease your toil and your work, then all that exists is in anguish.
If the gods suffer in heaven, then the faces of men waste away.
Then He torments the flocks of Egypt, and great and small are in agony.*

S/He then proceeds to describe more about the praise and the sacrifices offered to the Nile and “His” inundation.

*But all is changed for mankind when He comes;
All is changed by the inundation; it is a healing-balm for all mankind.
Establisher of justice! Mankind desires you,
Supplicating you to answer their prayers;
You answer them by the inundation! Men offer the first-fruits of corn;
All the gods adore you!*

O inundation of the Nile, offerings are made unto you,

*men are immolated to you, great festivals are instituted for you.
Birds are sacrificed to you, gazelles are taken for you in the
mountain,
Pure flames are prepared for you. Sacrifice is melted to every god
as it is made to the Nile.
The Nile has made its retreats in Southern Egypt.*

The poet concludes by showing how Egyptians accept the Nile for them to prosper. They enthusiastically say, “*Come and Prosper!*”

*Men exalt him like the cycle of the gods,
They dread him who creates the heat,
Even him who has made his son the universal master
In order to give prosperity to Egypt.
Come (and) prosper! Come (and) prosper!
O Nile, come (and) prosper!
O you who make men to live through his flocks
and his flocks through his orchards!
Come (and) prosper, come, O Nile, come (and) prosper!*

(<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/hymn-nile.html>)

The Nile had a strong influence on the writings of the ancient Egyptians (Wallis, 1885). While this is but only one example of the hymns to the Nile by Ancient Egyptians written millennia before the birth of Christ, it remains to be the reflection of the general truth about the Egyptians’ view of the Nile and its absolute importance until very recently. The myth and realities mixed in the poem show the absolute dependence of the country on the Nile. The darker side of this extreme love and adoration of the Nile might have led to possessiveness. To the Egyptians the

Nile was unquestionably “their” god in those days, and “their” river above and beyond the claims of any other riparian state in the basin now.

3.1.2 Resentment

The Ethiopian poets on the other hand aired their frustrations, grievances, sorrow, hatred etc. using their poetry though not as early as the Egyptians. (This writer has not come across any poem of such nature written before 1967 E.C.) The diplomatic relation of Ethiopia with regard to the Nile during the Haileseilasie regime was such that little had to be said about Abbay “so as not to arouse Egyptian emotion.” (Tafla, 2000). Especially towards the end of his regime, as Ashok Swain (1997) would agree, the emperor had neither the “political will” nor the “financial strength” to develop the water resources of the country.

It was about this time that one profound work has been produced by Poet Laureate Tsegaye Gebremedhin. That too was more concerned about the regional and international significance and the rich historical heritage of the river. The poem *Abbay* (1972) like the Egyptian hymn, glorifies the river as the “cradle of civilization,” the “blood of the mother of Cush (Ethiopia)”, “the Gihon”, the “god of gods” and so on and so forth. (Esat Woy Abeba, 1999)

In later times, however, considering the country’s situation, no wonder the lamentation in published poems outweighs the praise as the advantages of Abbay are too little as compared to the disadvantages. This hopelessness is reflected in some of the poets’ works.

The problem begins with the loss of the fertile soil from our highlands. In the following excerpt from Tadele Gedle's (1993 E.C.) poem, this theft is metaphorically presented with the loss of agricultural produce the fertile soil could have yielded to the Ethiopians if it had stayed.

Abbay Went Out of Sight
While there are many natives at home,
It took all our produce from our fields
The teff, the wheat, barley and mallet,
The peas, the beans, and the chickpeas
The orange, the mango, lemon from our garden
To give it to the Egyptians.

Being unable to use what is supposed to be 'one's own' is so heart breaking. Being deprived of the benefit of whatever you have at hand is so painful. The poet's regret about the escape of Abbay refusing to be tamed is expressed rightly in these verses:

Abbay galloped, it flowed;
It could not save us from our plight
Soil got mixed with Water,
Abbay sprinted like a panther!

(Wolliyou, 2002 E.C.)

Abbay is also personified, insulted, cursed and told his crimes right to the face. One such exemplary poem is Poet Hailu G/Yohannes's *Innatkin Belulgn*. The poet begins his disparaging insult "Inatkin" with the title and goes on talking about Abbay's heedlessness. He is telling his Ethiopian fellows to insult Abbay on his behalf. Excerpt from *Innatkin Bellulign*, by Poet Hailu Gebre Yohannes (Translation from Bayleyegn Tasew, 1998) is given below.

*Please get an eye of Abbay! When it is flowing away.
Let its tears run down!
It flows like a snake in a twist,
When its natives suffer from thirst,
When they utter a cry of agony.
Why, then does it not give response?
Because it is cruel, Abbay is heedless.*

From us, he turns his face to the river itself and starts talking to Abbay and interrogates the “blind” and “deaf” “him” thus:

*If you have eyes, you, Abbay-the idle,
Please see that man, that man for a moment,
Burnt with thirst, exhausted, such like this,
For you have deserted him to go to other places.
Please see the land screaming in pain,
Yelling to receive your favor,
Begging for your mercy,
Begging you for a drop of water.
When your land cries out to tell the tale of her woes,
With her throat dried up,
So, what happened to your ears?
For they seem to be deaf to her cries.*

The poet’s vision about the wish and will of the people, the country’s national interest which goes in line with the “natural” or “God-given right” is expressed in the following verses:

*Fencing by dams to change you into power,
Distributing by canals to make you fruitful,*

*Tapping by pipes to feed mankind,
Governed by his power, under his control,
Indeed, he will use you, and
You will never remain mocking at him.*

(Tasew, 1998)

Such view of unilateral approach – Ethiopia’s “natural right” as opposed to the Egyptians “historical rights” which is rooted in the obsession as seen in the above poem are deeply seated in the psychology of the poets of the respective countries.

Even a more malevolent curse comes from another Ethiopian poet who seems to have lost hope on Abbay totally. In his poem entitled *Abbay*, poet Abebaw Melaku (1995 E.C.) would love to rip Abbay off its “illegitimate” fame, honor and big name of the past.

*For the illegitimate praise you have received in the past,
For your wicked way of fooling the entire “habesha”,
Get double of your disaster, be cursed.*

*Since from the beginning what have you given us,
Except your name?
If it were for your shrewdness,
Instead of singing and dancing in your name,
We should rather mourn the loss of you.*

*Abbay! Reap vanity, reap what you have sown,
As we grieved because of you, grieve even more.*

(wolliyou, 2002 E.C.)

Such was the general trend and the language of the time – deep sorrow and grievance accumulated for thousands of years.

One major charge the Egyptian poets have against the Nile is the inundation. As much as it is wanted for surplus production of crops, the inundation at times becomes devastating. This has been indicated in the hymn of ancient Egyptians and also in the poems of much recent ones.

The first three lines from a poem by Tahir Themakhshiri is given as an example below.

The poet addresses the Nile and asks “him” rhetorical questions as to why “he” hummers Egypt with heavy and destructive flood. He writes thus:

Are you mobilized by jealousy or anger?

Are you on revolution on my country, Egypt?

To throw her sons into crazy waves?

(www.Bartleby.com/Greatbooksonline, 2011)

The above are few examples of poems from the two countries dealing to a greater extent with the national level of hydro-political concerns. Whether written to or about the river Nile/Abbay, the implication is always there that concerned stake holders consciously or unconsciously take some lessons. For Bairu Tafla, in Ethiopia Abbay’s “indictment” is “in conformity with the traditional *gene* (sacred hymn) technique, as it was impossible to charge the relevant government organs for doing too little about it.” (Tafla, 2000:166)

This writer agrees with the above point, but the “concerned government organs” were not saved as the writers in the later times came up with a better approach – making the river speak back!

The following narrative poem by Zenamarkos Endalew entitled *The Exiled Abbay* (1992 E.C.) is one example. The poem is Abbay's narration of his life-history starting from his birth at Gish Abbay. He talks about his journey to lake Tana and then to Tisissat Fall, about his task of delineating Gojjam from Gondar, wollo, Shewa, and Wollega.

He then talks about the reason for his exile to the Sudan and Egypt like this:

*Hoping to get someone who may wish to use me,
I flowed around the whole land of Ethiopia,
But there was none at all willing to use me,
All the authorities ignored me totally,
The Ministry of Work did not care to ask me,
The Ministry of Mine did not care to ask me,
Municipalities were careless for me,
Water Development did not care to ask me,
Agriculturalists turned their faces on me,
Engineers, journalists, all the educated turned their faces on me,
So I got mad at them and I planned to do something.*

(Endalew, 1992 E.C.)

That plan of his is to take with him all the fertile soil, the important volcanic minerals and everything useful to the places where he claims to have had a better response. Then Abbay finishes his story when he empties itself into the Mediterranean Sea.

This accusation-counter accusation, blame-denial, relationship between Abbay and the poets was common during the Dergue regime and the present regime. A more direct response to the "false accusations" on Abbay is given by Getachew Wolliyou. In his poem called *Abbay's Response*

(2002 E.C.), the writer addresses the lethargy and laziness of the people and the reluctance of policy makers through Abbay himself. An excerpt is given below.

*Please stop the insult, don't curse me for nothing,
Instead, construct a dam, or divert me for use,
Don't expect me to be your policy maker,
Your water engineer or a donor agency
I can't act against the course of nature,
And flow upwards,
But I want you to know that I'm rewarding,
I'm ready to respond and to stand by your side,
If you are determined to work and develop.*

(Wolliyou, 2002)

This kind of technique is also common with the Egyptian poets. According to the data available to this writer the domestic concern of the Egyptians is different from that of the Ethiopians. The Egyptian poets are more concerned about environment as a hydro-political concern. In that case the Nile is made to ask, respond or accuse.

Neglect and misuse of the Nile as a major internal problem in Egypt prompted an Egyptian poet, *Farouk Gweda*, to publish a poem. In this poem the Nile is portrayed as rebelling against the tyranny of those inhabiting its shores. Partial translation of the poem (last six verses) published in Al-Ahram is retrieved from www.politicalislam.org

The Nile so bitterly tells the inhabitants to go back in time and to act like their ancestors, the ancient Egyptians who so adored nature in general and the Nile in particular that the “common

man” in those days never polluted the Nile “even once in his life time”.

(www.mansvu.mans.edu/hala)

*Go back to your old love ... and teach
Your children to protect my shores
I gave you my life...but you showed contempt for my intimacy
I therefore raise my flag of rebellion
If I had known what the future was hiding
I would have chosen another land than yours to settle in*

www.politicalislam.org

The unlawful establishment of industries, dumping of sewage into the river, and use of pesticides and fertilizers are mentioned as causes of pollution in Egypt. According to the Wikipedia Encyclopedia, in Egypt,

[...] there are 36 industries that discharge their pollution sources directly into the Nile, and 41 into irrigation canals[...]The northeast Nile Delta region has a high incident rate of pancreatic cancer that is believed to be from high levels of heavy metals and organ-chlorine pesticides found in the soil and water.
(www.wikipedia.com)

3.1.3 Revolution

In another poem written just before the 2011 Egyptian revolution, Gweda wrote a poem entitled *To a River that has Lost its Contumacy*. In this poem the poet speaks to the proud old Nile about the loss of its purity.

*Why did you surrender?
For ages you suckled us fear*

*You taught us silence and the impossible
Now you are hiding behind the years
You go back and forth like a faint apparition
Why did you surrender?
You were once our pride*

The poet then seems to use the Nile to criticize the system in the same way as Ethiopians' *qene*. Gweida indicates that he is also "chained". Who chained them? Some people referred to as "they" – may be the irresponsible authorities.

*Did they chain you as they chained us?
Did they silence you as they did to us?
Why are you afraid?
You frightened monarchs in the past
They feared your rage.*

*They can never dethrone you
But did they chain you?
To destroy inside us the time of pride?
Slave we became as they enslaved you.
Oh Nile.*

*Let us revive the old spring
Destroy your chains and mine.
Since you and I surrender?
My home address is humiliated pride
Because this is not Egypt and you are not the Nile. [Emphasis this writer's]*

www.mansvu.mans.edu/hala

For the Egyptians, before they claim to address the problem of water scarcity at the regional level, this hydro-political home work of alleviating water scarcity at a national level by protecting water pollution needs to be done. That is why the poets are preoccupied with such tasks as lamenting about the Nile's purity and using it as a tool to convey their concealed messages.

Considering the industrialization and irrigation level in Ethiopia, this is not a major threat at least for the time being. So it does not seem ^{to be} a concern for the Ethiopian poets. For the moment their concern is possibility of industrialization through hydro-electric power generation and possibility of developing irrigation canals. Thus, in 1992 E.C., Ayalneh Mulatu came up with a one act poetic drama entitled *Shotelay*. Here, in Act one, Scene five, the Spirit of Abbay and an old woman (representing Ethiopia – the *shotelay*) are conversing.

The poet, like the previous poets is making the Abbay defiantly argue and convincingly deny the accusations of the old lady.

*The Old Woman: Now, what do you want of me?
You have ripped me off my treasure,
You have left me naked,
So what do you want from me today?*

*Abbay (Spirit): I am here to talk with you,
I want to tell you the truth.*

OW: well, I don't want to talk to you.

Abbay: Why?

OW: Because you are drawing my enemies, not my allies,

You came out of my womb, but you are not my supporter.

The argument continues. The old woman tells Abbay that he was a criminal as he takes her property and gives it to her “enemies”; he kills her children with hunger and thirst but he feeds and gives water to others who later come to attack her; etc. In his defense, Abbay denies everything and he adamantly tells her that it is all her children’s fault. They are not united and strong; they are not attempting to use him.

OW: that is because they are afraid!

*Afraid of those, whom you have boosted,
With our soil, with our water.*

Abbay: No, they did not try in the first place,

*If they did they wouldn't be afraid.
What they are apprehensive about is their
Apprehension itself.*

OW: Haven't you produced enemies for us?

*Don't we have rivals that have come because of you?
What are all these years of war and calamity?
The death, suffering of yesterday and before yesterday,
Isn't that because of you, Abbay?
And we have been threatened,
“If you touch a drop of water from Abbay,
Blood will be shed that is equal to the amount of Abbay!”*

Abbay: Whatever they say!

*There has never been war because you used water from me
And there will never be.*

Some hydro-political scholars argue that there will be war because of cross-boundary rivers. This controversial argument that there will be war over water is reiterated in the frustrations of the old woman. Yet, some others argue that war over water is just a myth, and cooperation is the solution. And this is succinctly pointed out by Abbay in his conversation with the old woman. So Abbay continues:

*Abbay: But if you choose to sit and die of drought and hunger,
Whose fault is that anyway? Yours? Theirs? Or mine?*
(Mulat, 1992 E.C.)

They finally agree to collaborate for development by using Abbay's tributaries for a start until it is possible to take out the main, ungovernable Abbay from its deep valleys and precipices. Thus, the "water war" argument is somehow demystified by the agreement of Abbay and the old lady (Ethiopia) to work together for the national agenda.

3.2 The Regional Significance of Abbay/Nile: Cooperation Vs Conflict

The sense of cooperation/conflict comes when the poets start thinking beyond the national concern. The sense of conflict is depicted when poets think of their deprivation and consider their relative deprivation because of "others". The notion of cooperation arises when people think of their blessings and consider others as causes of the blessings.

3.2.1 Cooperation and conflict?

Though dealing with songs/lyrical poetry in general is not this paper's primary concern, the writer believes that considering monumental hydro-political lyrics is worthwhile. One such work

of art that has the magnificence of Abbay itself is Ejigayehu Shibabaw's *Abbay* where both notions conflict and cooperation are clearly indicated.

የማደረጅ ዉበት የማደስቅ ቀንጅና፣
የማይደርቅ የማይነጥፍ ሰዘመን የጸና፣
ከጥንት ከጽንሰ አዳም ገና ከፍጥረት፣
የፈሰሰ ዉሃ ፈልቆ ከገነት፣
ግርማ ሞገስ ያገር ጸጋ ያገር ስብስ
አባይ
የበረሃው ሲሳይ
ብነካው ተነኩ አንቀጠቀጣቸው
መሆንህን ሳሳዉቅ ስጋና ደማቸው
የሚበሉት ዉሃ የሚጠጡት ዉሃ
አባይ ስጋሲ ነው በዚያ በበርሃ
አባይ ወንዛ ወንዙ
ብዙ ነው መዘዙ
አባይ ይወቅሱሃል አንተን እንደ ሰው
ተራብን ተጠማን ተቸገርን ብለው
አንተ ወራጅ ዉሃ ቢጠሩህ አትሰማ
ምን አስቀምጠሃል ከግብፃኝ ከተማ

Ejigayehu's regional concern with regard to Abbay, its greatness, is clearly expressed here.

*Non transient beauty, limitless splendor,
Eternal waters, more enduring than time
Waters that emanated and flowed from Heaven
Since the conception of Adam and the time of creation
Unfathomable charisma, grace of the nation, Abbay.*

Abbay, nourishment of the desert

Then she further indicates her sudden awareness of what the Nile/Abbay means to the Egyptians and that it was a river involving much political friction and apprehension. Here it goes like this:

*I touched Abbay, I touched them too, and they got irritated.
Before I didn't know that you're their flesh and blood
What they eat is water, and what they drink is too
Abbay is bounteous to those of the desert
Abbay, in you there is too much tension.*

“They” are the Egyptians, and “their” extreme dependence on and concern about the Nile is explicitly put forward in the above verses. John Paul Sartre as quoted by Grossman, discusses the power of literature for common understanding and that one can use literature to see things through the eyes of one’s enemy so that perhaps “the enemy gradually ceases to be our enemy”. (www.Literature and Politics _ Dannymorrison.htm).

GiGi’s understanding of the Abbay as the “flesh and blood” of the Egyptians and that “they get irritated” when it is touched seems to suggest that there needs to be a feeling of responsibility and being considerate in the way the river is utilized. But it does not end there; she says, if not, she smells “too much tension” in the river – abbay!

*Abbay, they blame you as a human being
Telling you about their hunger and thirst
You, flowing water, you don't hear when called,
What is that you have put in the town of the Egyptians?*

(Ejigayehu Shibabaw, 2001)

Here, “they” refers to the Ethiopians, and the people’s trouble and the country’s economic situation is well stated. GiGi personifies Abbay the river and tells him that he is not listening when his natives are calling him as a “human being”. Beautiful!

3.2.2 Cooperation

As to how to go about the regional cooperation of the Nile utilization, Poet Hailu G/Yohannes, towards the end of his poem *Innatkin Belulgn* says the following succinctly.

*We shall seek solution in unity and cooperation,
We shall get the knowledge, the method, and the system,
To be able to use it in peaceful cooperation,
Unless we take it seriously,
Unless we can use it in unity,
An African wealth – such as the Nile,
...continues to live talking of our worthlessness.*

(Tasew, 1998: his translation)

Back in the days, there were instances where the image of the Ethiopians by the Egyptians was so positive that poetry of the later did not hesitate to testify this friendship and cooperative attitude. The great Egyptian poet Ahmed Shawqi, the “prince of poets” exemplified this sense of cooperation in one of his poems written in 1932 and entitled *Al-Nil Nejashi*.

The prince of poets talks about the source of the sweetness of the Nile – it’s sweetness is “dark” meaning to say that it is emanating from the “*mother of Kush*” (to borrow Laureate Tsegaye’s expression.)

*The Nile is the Nejashi, his sweetness is dark –
Golden and marble his wonder of spark,
On aghul he is playing
For us the Nile is praying
Our lives does he give
May forever he live.*

(Erlich 2002)

This has the same language of the ancient hymn to the Nile except that here it is considered and admired as a creation rather than a creator (god). Acknowledging that the river was sent from the Ethiopian “Nejashi”, that “he” is praying for them and that “he” gives them life, Shawqi wishes an eternal life for the Nile and by extension the wish goes to the source – Ethiopia.

One very beautiful example to show that not all Ethiopian poems are critical of Abbay and to clarify the universal quality of the river in building trust and cooperation among riparian states, particularly Ethiopia and Egypt, here is an excerpt from the Ethiopian Poet Laureate Tsegaye Gebremedhin’s *Nile* (1997, his own translation)

*My name is Africa. I am the mother of the Nile.
O Nile, my prodigal daughter on the wilderness of the desert
Bringing God's harmony to all brothers and sisters
And calming down their noises of brass in their endless nakedness
O Nile, you are music that restore the rhythm of existence
Into the awkward stampeding of these Middle Eastern blindness
You are the irrigator that cultivate peace
From my Ethiopian sacred mountains of the sun
Across to nod on the East of Aden and across Sinai
Beyond Gibraltar into the heights of Mount Moriah
O Nile, my chosen sacrifice for universal peace offering*

*Upon whose gift the heritages of Meroe and Egypt
Still survive for the benefit of our lone World.*

(AJEST, 2010)

3.2.3 Conflict

The heyday of relationship of the two countries is not eternal however. Most often than not contempt, conflict and tension are expressed or at least implied in the poetry of both countries. There are situations where this mentality is tuned by the rhetoric of the respective time, system and Nile/Abbay discourse.

One such discourse is the birth of the Aswan High Dam in 1960. This was about the time when the Ethiopian Church broke away from the Egyptian Coptic Church (June 1959). This was about the time Egypt and the Sudan signed agreement to use the whole Nile waters declaring Ethiopia irrelevant to the Nile/Abbay. The break in the Church relation and the water agreement of the two countries is considered by Haggai Erlich as a “mutual declaration of historical divorce” between Ethiopia and Egypt. (Erlich, 2002)

Here is a poem by the singer Abd al-Wahhab entitled *The Transformation of the Nile* which declares that “*the Nile belongs to Nejashi*” is no longer valid. It was also changed into a song and the known Egyptian singer Umm Kulthum perpetuated the idea through a song.

*Who, who would have believed
That the river which has run for millions of years,
Its direction left and right
We would change at our own will,
And even install adjustments in it.*

(Meital’s translation in Erlich, 2002)

True to the spirit of the time, the dam was considered their symbol of security. As Collins (2002) would say “the Nile ends at Aswan.” Which technically means it also starts from Aswan, because they “would change it at their will” and they would “install adjustments in it”. By so doing, says Abd al-Wahhab, the threat of the Ethiopian medieval kings and their followers is nullified. Similarly, Erlich (2002:133) contends that because of the dam, the intimidation of “...Aklilu Habtewold in 1949, Haileselassie in the 1950s and Mengistu in the 1980s lost its sting.”

As much as there are numerous productions of songs that resonate with the present government rhetoric with regard to the Grand Millenium Dam on Abbay in Ethiopia, one may not fail to mention some indications of confidence and boosted spirit.

As an example, here is the sense of the last verses from a recent song by Genet Masresha:

*It is time ... Abbay, the smokless fuel
Please irrigate the fields of your motherland
If one is angry with it, we are ready to face the consequence.*

More precisely,

**ፍሰስብትና በሀገርህ ሜዳ፡
የሚቆጣም ካስ ያበጠው ደፈንዳ!**

Genet Masresha, (2003 E.C)

Chapter Four: Conclusion

The Nile has proved to be one of the most significant reasons for the age long relationship of Ethiopia and Egypt. One other central issue when considering the two countries age-long relationship is the religious tie that was established around the 3rd century. So the Abun came from Alexandria, and the Abbay goes to Egypt to give life to the entire nation.

Numerous types of literature have been produced regarding the two countries, their relationships, and the river Nile in particular from different angles. As regards the Nile and its connection to the two countries relation, the hydro-political dilemma takes the lion's share. In line with that many Ethiopians, Egyptians, and other writers have written books regarding the trans-boundary river, the treaties on it, international laws, ways of cooperation and so on.

The main contention between the two countries with reference to the hydro-political connection is the Egyptians' "historical right" which emanated from the 1929 and 1959 water agreements between Egypt and the Sudan for total apportionment of the Nile waters and the "natural right" of Ethiopia where Ethiopia demands an equitable share of the waters. From the literatures produced, one could understand that the national and regional contexts of hydro-politics are basic as the national interests of the countries influence their regional policies.

As to the perceptions of poets of the two countries on the Nile, a clear difference is observed. This is dependent on the the political, socio-economic and cultural values of the respective countries and the psychology of the poets. The major preoccupation of the Ethiopian poets is their grievance, regret, anger, and hopelessness in terms of utilizing Abbay for the country's development. So there is a major contention between the river and the poets. The poems reflect

accusations, counter accusations, claims, counter claims, blames, denials, frustrations and cursing. But in the end they have a general tendency of focusing on the “natural right” of the country to use its river Abbay in a way preaching “equitable use” of the waters of the Nile.

On the other hand the minds of the Egyptian poets are pretty much obsessed with a possessive love for the Nile. The Nile for the Egyptians is an important part of their life to the extent that they have worshiped it since time immemorial. This “no Nile, no life!” tendency has been propagated in their poems perpetuating the “historical” right up to the present day rhetoric.

As to the government rhetoric and the messages of the poems, generally the above relationships govern the correlation. In both cases, the poets have used the river to reflect their national interest. Thus the poems reveal the polarity of view between Ethiopian and Egyptian writers on the question of the Nile.

In sum, the poets in question are the proponents of their respective national interests across the ages.

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Declaration

I, the undersigned, declare that this thesis is my work and that all sources of material used in writing it have been duly acknowledged.

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