

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE IMAGES OF  
MEN AND WOMEN IN THE WORKS OF  
SOME ETHIOPIAN WOMEN WRITERS

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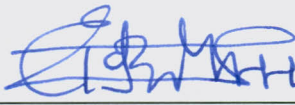
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## ABSTRACT

The research aims at analysing the images of men and women in the works of five Ethiopian women writers. The study is comparative in nature. It tries to determine whether or not there exists a similarity or difference in the way the writers portrayed their men and women characters.

The thesis is divided into three chapters. The first chapter gives a brief review of the critical work in the field of study. The next two chapters deal with the analysis of the books by the women writers. Chapter two discusses characters portrayed in relation to the theme of seduction. Men and women characters that are depicted in relation to the culture of the Ethiopian society are analyzed in the final chapter.

Many of the women characters are depicted as the victims of men's cruelty and ignorance. The rest are presented as the victims of the Ethiopian culture that does not consider women equal to men. The writers seem to propose economic independence to women so that they could live according to their free will.

In most of the works the women characters are favoured by the writers. The feelings of the men characters are not given due attention. Without sufficient reason, the women become successful, while the men fail in life. The writers try to cover the naivety of the women characters by putting all the blame on the men and the culture. While emphasizing on the themes of their respective stories, the writers worked less for the plausibility of their characterization.

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## INTRODUCTION

The research aims at analysing the images of men and women in the works of some Ethiopian women writers. The writers are Mekdes Asnake, Tsehay Melaku, Elfinesh Bekure, Yemiwodish Bekele and Yezina Worku. The works of these authoresses incorporate the major novels and short stories by Ethiopian women.

Four novels and three short stories are selected for discussion. The novels are Owasa and Anguz by Tsehay, Tsilmet by Elfinesh and Mehageba by Mekdes. "Yekirb Ruk" and "Senait" are the short stories by Yezina Worku. The other short story to be analyzed is Yemiwodish Bekele's "Enegrewalehu".

The study is comparative in nature. It will try to determine whether or not there exists a similarity or difference in the way the writers portrayed their men and women characters. Some attempt is made to see if these authoresses depict their men and women characters in a peculiar way.

The thesis is divided into three chapters. The first chapter gives a brief review of the critical work in the field of study. It discusses the various issues related to

feminist criticism including the studies made on the works of Ethiopian women writers. The works on the images of women in Ethiopian literature will also be analyzed in order to compare the portrayal of women in the works of female and male writers.

The next two chapters deal with the analysis of the books by the women writers. Since it is not possible to discuss all the men and the women characters found in the books, the study will concentrate only on the major characters. All the men and the women characters are divided into two groups. In the second chapter those men and women characters portrayed in relation to the theme of seduction are dealt with. First the seduced women characters are analyzed followed by the seducer men characters.

In the third chapter, men and women characters that are depicted in relation to the culture of the Ethiopian society will be discussed. In one way or the other, the lives of these characters are affected by the culture. These characters are divided into two as characters who are the victims of culture and others who are strong enough to act against the culture. At the end of both chapters, the men and the women characters are put in comparison.

## CHAPTER ONE

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The review of literature deals both with the images of women in literature and women's writing. Since the aim of the thesis is to show how the selected five Ethiopian authoresses depicted their men and women characters, it is quite important to show how women are portrayed in world literature in general and African literature in particular. Looking at the critical studies on the works of women writers is also useful to compare the writings of Ethiopian women with the writings of female writers of other countries.

The thesis shares many common features with the studies on women's images in literature and on women's writing since it analyzes the images of women in the works of authoresses. The thesis also differs from previous studies. In the last part of the literature review the points that make the thesis different will be stated.

#### **1.1 Some of the Major Studies on the Images of Women in Literature and on Women's Writing**

It is quite clear that there are different views concerning the place of men and women in any society. The culture of a certain society shapes the people's attitude toward the male and the female sex. One has to study first the culture of that society in order to find the causes of gender related opinions.

Even though gender related issues were raised back in the 17th and 18th centuries, the issue became widely recognized in the past 20 years. In this period, feminists raised various issues which aim at changing gender relations in the society. They strongly opposed the patriarchal culture that suppresses women.

There are many studies which assert that gender biased opinions are reflected in literature. Since literature is a reflection of one's mind cultivated by his interaction in a specific society, any literary work could not escape from manifesting people's attitude towards a certain issue.

Feminist critics also denounce patriarchy that is manifested in literature. They strongly believe that the society's stereotypes are reflected in literature. Humm defines feminist criticism as "the analysis of a universal sexual representation and ideology in literature from the point of view of women" (90).

According to Newton (ed., 1988) one of the main concerns of feminist critics is the image of women in literature. These critics investigate how women are presented in literary works. The other main concern of feminist criticism mentioned by Newton is women's writing. Here, the main concern of the woman as writer is what is given emphasis.

### 1.1.1 Studies on the Images of Women

As mentioned earlier feminist critics try to prove their points by studying the images of women and women's writing. Critics who study the images of women in literature analyze how women characters are presented. Josephine Donovan (1988) says that "images of women" approach was widely spread in the early 1970's and still dominated the pedagogy of women's studies in literature. She states that these feminist critics who follow the "images of women" approach try to prove whether a woman is "capable of self determined action".

The primary assumption a critic in the images of women school must make is an evaluation of the authenticity of the female characters. Authenticity is another concept borrowed from the existentialists in particular Heidegger, who meant by it whether an individual has a self-defined critical consciousness as opposed to a mass produced or stereotypical identity (1988: 264)

Because economic and geographic reasons influence the image of women in different parts of the world, it is proper to see the critical works on the images of women with division. First, the images of women in European and American literatures and then women's images in African literature will be discussed. Because the thesis deals with the works of Ethiopian women writers, critical works on the images of women will be analyzed separately.

#### 1.1.1.1 Studies on the Images of Women in European and American Literature

Mary Anne Ferguson (1977) describes the place of women

perspective. In the introductory part of her book she expresses her admiration for feminist literary critics who raised questions like "Is there a separate discipline of feminist criticism?". She strongly emphasize the point that the study of the images of women in literature has to consider people's history, psychology and other aspects.

...to discuss the images of women in literature intelligently, we must know something about women in history, about the psychological and sociological views that have existed, and we must know something about the process by which literature makes use of these views. Literature both reflects and helps to create reality (1977:10).

Ferguson asserts that the image of women in literary works is stereotyped. She defines stereotypes as society's images and she tries to prove that the society's image given to women has been distorted. According to Ferguson, women have been viewed in literature as mother, wife, mistress, sex object etc.\* She says women have been always defined in relationship to men. Men, she mentions, are defined by their relationship to the "outside world".

Ferguson's book is valuable since it gives a clear picture of women stereotypes in literature. The introductory part of the book thoroughly discusses issues related to feminist literary criticism. The methodology Ferguson used to present her points is worth-mentioning. Ferguson divides her book into seven chapters, in each of which she analyzes one stereotype. The major stereotypes discussed in the book are "submissive wife", "mother", "dominating wife", "sex object" and "liberated women".

Josephine Donovan (1988) is one of the feminist critics who assert that the image of women in literature is alien from a female point of view. She confirms that for the most part, literature written by men, deny women's "essential selfhood". She writes,

Much of our literature in fact depends upon a series of fixed images of women stereotypes. These reified forms, surprisingly few in number, are repeated over and over again through much of western literature. The objectified images have one thing in common, however, they define the woman in so far as she relates to, serves, or thwarts the interests of men (1988: 266).

Ruth Sherry (1988) strongly criticizes the judgement that works about men are "general" and works that deal with the experiences of women are 'narrow'. She asserts that this judgement comes from the culture of a certain society that gives much importance to the experience of men. Women's experience are not given due attention in literature, Sherry believes. They are presented in terms of "romantic and sexual relationships".

#### 1.1.1.2 Studies on the Images of Women in African Literature

There are some studies on the images of women in African literature. Even though it is possible to detect similarities between the images of women in European and African literatures, they also exhibit differences. These dissimilarities come from the differences between the European and African cultures. It is worthy to note that aspects like colonialism and apartheid had their own

influence on the way women are portrayed in African literature. The images of women in African literature excluding Ethiopia and the images of women in Ethiopian literature will be discussed respectively.

#### 1.1.1.2.1 Images of Women in African Literature Excluding Ethiopian Literature

Not only the written ones but African oral literature also reflects society's attitude towards gender relations. Studies on the oral literatures of African peoples assert that gender biased opinions are reflected in myths, proverbs and other stories. They also affirm that these oral literatures change through time and the gender biased opinions also exhibit change. This is true since oral literature is exposed to variation and change with the passing of time.

Mineke Schipper's (1987: ) article tries to prove that in African mythology, compared with men, women are put in a secondary position. She states,

Not only in myths, but also in fairy tales and all sorts of other stories, woman may be depicted as a dangerous force, as threatening nature, a witch, a negative power, as the one who swallows or castrates man ... (1987: 29-40).

Schipper points out that women are not always presented as negative force in myths. She mentions some of the ways women are represented in myths and other stories positively. She says that the woman is put as "the tender virgin or the

virtuous maternal character". Schipper affirms that the positive view of a woman is connected with her reproductive function. She says that she is portrayed as "dearly loved" and "loving mother". She affirms that the positive and the negative views are prevalent in the oral literature of Africa.

One of the many critics who tried to identify the images of women in African literature is Molara Ogundipe-Leslie (1987). She mentions some of the many female stereotypes in African literature. One of these stereotypes is the image of women as lovers. A woman is not portrayed involving in "deeper aspects" of love but sexual love, Ogundipe-Leslie points out. She stresses at another stereotype in her article. She criticizes authors who portray the African rural woman so "naively and childishly". The rural woman is presented as having no need for change, power and wealth, she says.

Mineke Schipper (1987: 36-47) tries to examine the three factors that have contributed to the development of women's image in African literature. These are (a) the mythological 'prephase', (2) the colonial heritage and (3) developments since the 1960's. Schipper examines these three factors by giving examples from different texts.

First she analyzes how African women are depicted as both negative and positive forces in African oral literature.

Then she shifts to the image of women drawn from the colonial heritage. Here she shows how modern African women are accused of losing their African identity. When she analyzes the developments since the 1960's, she tries to identify the change in the images of women in African literature. She even questions whether the change since the 1960's could be called a new perspective or not.

Mineke Schipper does not totally condemn African men writers in their presentation of women characters. She gives credit to some men authors who tried to be fair in their depiction of women. One of the men authors whom Schipper gives credit for advocating African women's liberation is Sambène Ousmane. She says Sambène Ousmane criticizes mercilessly women's "resignation to their fate".

W. Brown (1981) stresses at the diverse male views of the African women. She compares the works of authors like Senghor, Achebe and Ousmane and concludes that the image of African women is diverse. The cause of this diversity, Brown confirms, is the variety of opinions, concerning the role and experiences of women in Africa.

#### 1.1.1.2.2 Studies on the Images of Women in Ethiopian Literature

There are a few studies dealing with the images of women in Ethiopian literature. One finds several tales, proverbs and other stories which clearly exhibit the place of women in

the Ethiopian society. These tales, proverbs and other stories help to picture out the way men and women are treated. There is a senior essay on the images of women in Ethiopian oral literature. Tadesse Eshete's (1972) paper lists Amharic proverbs that show women's secondary position in the Ethiopian society.

The proverbs are divided into different themes. The first group of proverbs show women's economic dependence on men. These proverbs tell that women cannot live independently but as subordinates. There are also proverbs that tell women's limited participation in social and political activities. Women are presented in the proverbs as submissive, irrational and sensual.

There are proverbs in the senior essay about women's place in religion and education. There are also proverbs which talk about marriage and these proverbs clearly indicate that a woman has no right to choose her marriage partner. One hundred seventy three proverbs are listed in the appendix.

Fekade Azeze's (1990) paper is the only theoretical work in Ethiopia on this issue. The paper discusses the factors that influence the portrayal of women in literature. It explains how the culture of the society shapes the writer to depict his characters in a certain way.

Fekade discusses four factors that determine the way an author portrays his women characters and one of these factors is oral tradition that passes from generation to generation. Oral traditions give the writer a certain image of women. Literature also contributes a lot in shaping the mind of the writer to depict his women characters. The bible and the koran are mentioned as examples of literature that mould the mind of the writer.

Modern education and civilization are also cited as factors that influence the way a writer portrays his characters. The day to day activities of the writer also affect his attitude towards women. The above mentioned four factors shape the writer's mind and influence his portrayal of women characters.

The senior essays by Askale Lemma, Jemanesh Solomon and Yeshi Tadesse try to show how women are presented in the plays and novels selected. Askale's paper deals with the images of women in Amharic novels. She appreciates the concerns of a few men authors like Hadis Alemayehu for depicting the lives of Ethiopian women.

Askale asserts that women are presented in many literary works in their relationship to men. She says that they are not seen discussing important matters with their male partners. Instead, the authors seem to have much concern for showing the women characters' beauty.

Jemanesh's and Yeshe's paper both deal with the images of women in Ethiopian plays. Jemanesh condemns men playwrights of Ethiopia for reflecting the societal stereotypes of women as they are. Referring to works like Bale Kabbana Bale Dabba, Belg and Yeshoh Aklil, she asserts that men playwrights like Mengistu Lemma and Tsegaye G/Medhin failed to portray women of different personalities. She says that these authors depicted men of various personalities but their women characters are almost all bad.

In her conclusion, Jemanesh suggests that Ethiopian writers need to portray women of different personalities from various angles. She strongly criticizes the idea of portraying women only as sensual lovers and mothers. She says women should be depicted taking part in various social activities.

Yeshe's conclusion is no different from Jemanesh's. In her paper that deals with the images of women in pre-revolution Ethiopian plays, she criticizes men playwrights like Mengistu Lemma and Tsegaye G/Medhin for portraying women only in their relationship to men.

Askale, Jemanesh and Yeshe assert that the male authors of the selected works portrayed their women characters in their relationship to men. They criticize authors whom they think did not portray women of various qualities. They said the selected men authors better portrayed their men characters than their women ones.

There is also a paper by Zerihun Asfaw (1985). The paper deals with the women characters of Bealu Girma, a renowned Ethiopian novelist. In his conclusion, Zerihun states that Bealu's women characters are portrayed as strong and rational. He says that these characters are determined to achieve their goals.

It is proper to remind that there are studies on one or two women characters in Ethiopian literature. These studies try to discuss how a certain woman character is portrayed in a literary work in relation to the other characters. Since these studies do not emphasize on the characterization of the women characters in particular, they are of less importance to one who studies the images of women in general.

#### 1.1.2 Studies on Women's Writing

There are many studies on the writings of women. These studies try to show the interests of women writers in the choice of subject matter and writing style. In this, critics try to prove that the writings of women exhibit some differences from the writings of men. These feminist critics discuss the works of women writers from the previous centuries upto the present.

Ruth Sherry (1988) believes that the difference in experiences of men and women could result in the difference between what men write and women write. She asserts that it is not appropriate to study women's writing alone as long as

it makes the study easier. Like one considers poetry from fiction or sixteen-century works separately from nineteenth-century, she affirms that it is not impossible to analyze women's writing separately for the purpose of study.

#### 1.1.2.1 Studies on the Works of European and American Women Writers

There are critics who deal with the works of European and American women writers. Ruth Sherry (1988) mentions the subject areas women are interested in and the reasons why women's writing has been undervalued. Women's writing from the past up to the present are analyzed in her book divided into different genres.

Sherry asserts that women writers often deal with the lives of women. She also lists other areas where authoresses are interested. Giving examples from different books written by women, she tries to show how women's works are different from that of men. Sherry says,

Women writers likewise often treat problems of love, sexuality and marriage, but women writers frequently include other aspects of women's lives as well. Perhaps there are relatively few male characters, or they occupy a less central place in the work than the women characters do (1980:2)

She also shows that women writers give a detailed account for the relationships of women characters with each other. She also shows how these writers present the day to day activities of their women characters by giving examples from Virginia Woolf's novel Mrs. Dalloway. She shows how the

from Virginia Woolf's novel Mrs. Dalloway. She shows how the writer gave close attention to Mrs. Dalloway's responsibilities and plans than those of men characters.

Sherry points out change in authoresses' choice of subject matter. She says that authoresses of earlier centuries were not used to dealing with sexual matters. Authoresses like George Eliot and Emily Bronte hardly dealt with women's sexual desires because it is regarded as taboo. But at present there are authoresses who write about sexuality. She mentions the names of authoresses who deal with sexuality at present.

Some feminist critics analyzed women's writing dividing them according to the periods they were written. Jane Spencer (1986) deals with the works of 18th century women writers. She tries to identify certain aspects of these works by dividing them in periods. Spencer divides the women novelists' responses into three main kinds. These novelists protest against society's treatment of women. Secondly they seem to advise women to conform to the "accepted feminine role". They also tried to escape from protesting and conforming by writing fantastic works.

Spencer points out that these responses might be mixed in a single novel. She also divides the three traditions of women's writing of the eighteenth century into different periods. Protest novels are said to be prevalent at the beginning and the end of the 18th century.

Spencer discusses the tradition of protest in the first chapter of her book. She says the novel with a seduced heroine was prevalent in the works of women writers of 19th century. In these works men are depicted as untrustworthy. The authoresses also criticize masculine authority. A man is seen leaving a woman at the "mercy of a society" which neglects her for losing her virginity. A woman might be forced to live with an illegitimate child.

Spencer states that in the seduction novels the writers show how innocence ruins women's lives. In such novels the heroine was seduced because she was innocent. Spencer criticizes the protest novels. She says,

.... By idealizing the heroine as innocent victim of men and fate, the novel of seduction sometimes reinforced rather than challenged the oppressive ideology of femininity. Ruin could be portrayed as an inevitably tragic destiny rather than an assailable social wrong (1986: 113).

#### 1.1.2.2 Studies on the Works of African Women Writers

There are also studies which specifically deal with the works of African women writers. Some of these studies try to categorize the works of African authoresses according to their themes and styles. There are also feminist critics who seem to show directions to African authoresses in order to fight patriarchy in their writing. These critics urge authoresses to combat in their works stereotypes in African society.

1.1.2.2.1 Studies on the Works of African Women Writers Excluding Ethiopia

Molara Ogundipe-Leslie (1987) asserts that African women are depicted in literature as "all-accepting creatures" and as "passionate and sensual lovers". She says that African authoresses should correct the false images of women in Africa. To do this, she says, the authoresses must know about African women and womanhood. She strongly believes that female writers' view of female experience is authentic. "The female writer should be committed in three ways: as a writer, as a woman and as a third world person, and her biological womanhood is implicated in all three (1987:10).

Ogundipe-Leslie asserts that African female writers are committed to their art, even though their skills differ in quality. She lists the names of African women writers who are prominent in African literature. These are Bessie Head, Ama Ata Aidoo, Mariama Bâ in the genre of fiction, Eufa Sutherland, Micere mugo in drama and poetry.

Katherine Frank's (1987) article tries to point out that the feminist novel in Africa is "in general more radical, even more militant, than its western counterpart". She proves her point by giving examples from prominent African women writers like Mariama Bâ, Flora Nowapa , Buchi Emecheta and Ama Ata Aidoo. She says that these writers are more radical in their recommendation of "a world of women without men". She mentions Ama Ata Aidoo's novel Our Sister Killjoy

as an example of African women's support of feminist separatism since the book deals with the idea of lesbianism.

Frank also deals with the themes of African women writers. The interest of some African women writers in depicting educated and "highly westernized" heroines in urban environments is very much striking according to her. Frank believes that authoresses like Ama Ata Aidoo, Mariama Bâ and Flora Nowapa portrayed such feminist heroines in order to show women's capacity to be economically independent and to live without men. She says that these authoresses also show the conflict between western and African values.

The introduction to Lioyed W. Brown's (181) book is of much help in understanding clearly what has been done so far specially on the criticism of the works of African women writers. Brown strongly criticizes African critics for ignoring the works of African women writers. She tries to single out the errors of critics who analyzed the works of African women writers and in this she managed to give an overall picture of the work done regarding criticism.

Brown strongly criticizes those critics who only concentrated on the women's writers view by ignoring the artistic merits of the works. She says that this critics have treated the works of the writers as "political tracts". They overlooked the African women's effort to integrate theme and form. Brown believes that critics should give room both

to the content and the manner of presentation of a literary work.

Oladele Taiwo (1984) discusses the role of African women in literature and society. She states African women's contribution to oral literature. She says that their contribution started with the use of "nursery rhymes" in the upbringing of children. In the following sentences Taiwo describes the writings of African women and the main preoccupation of her book.

Some write in total rejection of the image of women projected by male writers. Others try to glorify the role played by women in society and thereby help to raise their status. How successful female novelists have been in these endeavours is the main preoccupation of the rest of this book (1984: 13).

There are articles on the feminist trend in the book Literature and Black Aesthetics. The first is Helen Chukwoma's (1990) "Voices and Choices: The Feminist Dilemma in Four African Novels". In this article the writer stresses that women must seek "better forms of revolt than sexual..." (141). She believes that the form of resistance of women should not be immoral.

Theodora A. Ezeigbo (1990) also discusses the works of Nigerian women writers, Buchi Emecheta, Flora Nowapa and Elechi Amadi. In her conclusion the critic asserts that these writers have given a "realistic" representation of "female reality" in African society.

#### 1.1.2.2.2 Studies on the Works of Ethiopian Women Writers

There are two senior essays dealing with the works of Ethiopian women writers. These senior essays are prepared by two female students of the Institute of Language Studies, Addis Ababa University. One is Agaredech Jemaneh's paper which tries to analyze the thematic and technical interests of Ethiopian women writers. Agaredech gives an overall picture of the writings of Ethiopian women in all the literary genres.

She lists all the Ethiopian women writers starting from 1889 Eth. cal. She divides the works of the writers in all literary genres. She asserts that the works of the authoresses show similarities in their themes. The recurrent themes found in their works are related with the education of women. Love and cultural conflicts are also repeatedly dealt by the writers.

Regarding the characterization of the writers, Agaredech says that their works lack plausibility. The list of the works of the women put at the end of the senior essay is important since it includes all the works by women writers up to 1979 Eth.cal. Because Agaredech tries to analyze too many works, she failed to deeply analyze each work.

The other paper is by Alem Bayelegn with the title "Setoch Besetoch Derasiyan Ayn" (Women in the Eyes of Women writers). The paper tries to show how women are portrayed by

Ethiopian women writers. Alem analyzes the novels and short stories by Tsehay Melaku, Yemiwodish Bekele and Yizina Worku.

She says that the women characters are portrayed as strong. Alem asserts that the writers also tried to show the feelings and problems of women. She asks if the writers concentrated on the feelings of their women characters because they are women. Alem says that some of the women characters are not portrayed plausibly. Her paper tries to look at all the novels and short stories by women written after 1974 but fails to deeply analyze each work.

The latest work on the writings of Ethiopian women is Assefa Worku's M.A. thesis written in 1987 (E.C.). The title of his thesis is "An Analysis of Literary Techniques in Some of the Prose Works of Ethiopian Women Authors, 1959-1985 Eth.C." In his abstract Assefa says that the purpose of his study is "to introduce and analyse the literary techniques of some of the prose works of Ethiopian women authors."

In his thesis, he tried to examine the characterization, plot constructions and language of twelve women writers. Moreover, Assefa discussed the contribution of authoresses to the overall development of modern Amharic literature. He says that the problem of interconnection and the crumming up of unnecessary characters, events, incidents and settings in the construction of the plots are commonly seen in the prose works of many Ethiopian women writers.

The above discussion on the studies already made on the images of women in literature and on women's writing might be of help to follow the analysis in this thesis. The findings of the theses also help to see if Ethiopian women writers are different from authoresses of other countries discussed in this chapter. An attempt will be made to show whether Ethiopian authoresses show similarities with authoresses of other countries in the portrayal of their men and women characters.

Many of the studies discussed in this chapter focus on the images of women in literature and on the portrayal of women characters in the writings of women. This thesis differs from these works in its attempt to compare the portrayal of women characters with the portrayal of men characters.

Agaredech's and Alem's senior essays on Ethiopian women's writing lack depth because they try to analyze many literary works written in a long period of time. This thesis is different from the two because it only concentrates on four novels and three short stories, out of which two are long short stories. Only fifteen characters are selected for discussion and this helps to deeply analyze the portrayal of each character.

The thesis mainly concentrates on the major men and women characters. What type of men and women characters are portrayed in the literary works? Do the writers react against the stereotype images of women in their works? Are the women writers more sympathetic to their female characters than the male ones? These and other questions will be posed. In the attempt to answer the above questions, it is obvious that the thematic interests of the women writers will be discussed.

CHAPTER TWO

MEN AND WOMEN CHARACTERS PORTRAYED IN  
RELATION TO THE THEME OF SEDUCTION

Some of the works written by Ethiopian authoresses deal with the theme of seduction. In these works one finds women characters who are seduced by men and forced to live miserable lives. Jane Spencer asserts that in the 18th century authoresses of Europe also dealt with a similar theme. In the works of these European authoresses, women are depicted as innocent and unguarded (1986: 112). It is quite logical to ask why this seduction theme is recurrent in the works of authoresses.

The main purpose of this section is to see how the authoresses depicted characters in relation to the theme of seduction. Two of the three books that are to be analyzed in this chapter are written by Tsehay Melaku. The novels of Tsehay are Owasa and Anguz. The other writer is Elfinesh Bekure who wrote Tsilmet. The seduced women and the seducer men characters will be analyzed respectively. In order to follow the analysis, it is important to put the stories of the novels in short.

## 2.1 Synopsis

### A. Owasa

It is a novel about the life of two women who are seduced by men. Mintesinot is neglected by her boy-friend Wubishet after she gets pregnant. This makes her sick but with the help of her mother and her friends she becomes well again. After many years, she meets Wubishet who seduced her. Wubishet feels guilty when he sees Mintesinot and his daughter Wude. At the end of the story Wubishet dies in an accident but Senait lives a happy life. In the novel there is also the story of Fanaye who is seduced by a man but who becomes successful in life through hard work.

### B. Anguz

The novel deals with the life of Senait who becomes mad because a man kills her father and brothers. The man, Kebede Gari, kills Senait's father and brothers because she is not willing to be his lover. Senait recovers from her illness and decides to revenge Kebede. For this purpose, she marries Kebede and poisons him. Senait does not only poison Kebede but herself too. Kebede dies instantly but Senait survives.

### C. Tsilmet

It is a novel that deals with the life of a seduced woman called Bizwayehu. Dawit neglects Bizwayehu after she gave birth to a baby. Because she has nowhere to go Bizwayehu becomes a house-maid. Just by chance she gets a good job and marries a very kind man named Mekwanint. After

many years, Dawit, the man who left her to suffer asks for her help. Bizwayehu refuses to help him. At last Dawit dies but Bizwayehu lives with her family happily.

## 2.2 Seduced Women Characters

In Qwasa, Anguz and Tsilmet, there are three women characters who are seduced by men. These women characters are Mintesinot and sister Fanaye in Qwasa, and Senait in Anguz. Tsilmet's Bizwayehu is also a character who is seduced. The themes of the above novels are based on the stories of these seduced women. The characters are used by their male partners as sex objects.

Mintesinot is one of the major characters in Qwasa. She has a very good relationship with Wubishet until she gets pregnant. After she gave birth to a daughter, Wubishet is not willing to help her. His neglect causes her mental illness.

The other reason for her mental illness is mentioned by her mother ~~named~~ Mulu. Mintesinot's sickness is caused by the traditional medicine she took in order to abort her child. Luckily she gives birth to a baby daughter but the child is not healthy.

Mintesinot stays paralysed for 12 years. She could not speak or respond in any way. She becomes thin and weak. The authoress portrays Mintesinot in a very sympathetic way so

that the reader might feel sorry for her. Her mental disorder and her physical disability are described in detail.

The authoress's sympathy to Mintesinot is expressed in another way. Because the writer wants her to get well, she makes her get help from persons who are not close to her. It is possible to say that Mintesinot recovers from her illness with the help of Mekuria, but Mekuria is in no position to offer Mintesinot that much help. He takes her to a hospital and helps her to get medical treatment. Mekuria helps Mintesinot in every way so that she could have a peaceful life.

Mekuria is a friend of Mintesinot's ex-boy-friend. It is also mentioned in the novel that Mekuria was very close to Mintesinot 12 years ago. Even though he knows her very well he is in no position to offer Mintesinot that much help. Other than Mekuria, the other persons are not expected to show her that much concern.

The way Mintesinot recovers from her illness is not plausible either. After many years of suffering, she gets well overnight. After she gets well, she leads a normal life as if nothing happened to her. In the novel Mintesinot's illness is mentioned many times but it is not expressed in the way the reader could feel her suffering. More emphasis is given to her recovery and her success in life.

If the writer had been aware of the plausibility of her characterization of Mintesinot, she would have made her recovery more gradual. Mintesinot gets a good job and starts to lead a happy life with her friends. The thin and ugly Mintesinot becomes a very beautiful young woman. She also starts to participate in social activities being the secretary of one of the social organizations in her district.

The ~~writer~~ tries to show what Mintesinot feels about her past life but this effort is not enough. After she gets well, she leads a very happy life and falls in love with a man. Her past experience has no impact on her. At least she should have been little suspicious about her new relationship.

It seems that the authoress needed to show Mintesinot's success, and forgot to seriously consider the plausibility of the characterization. Mintesinot's life jumps to success without being supported by sufficient evidence. The success at last seems to be intended to compensate for the suffering she endured earlier. Not only her physical change but her psychological recovery should have taken more time than it is presented in the novel.

Mintesinot wants to revenge the man who does wrong to her. She strongly opposes the idea of introducing her child to the father. She says that Wubishet should be deprived the privilege of knowing his child whom he neglects.

Mintesinot is not happy to see Wubishet fail by himself. She wants to take revenge on him. She has a plan to cure her mind by killing the person who made her suffer in life. The authoress also gave much emphasis to the feelings of Mintesinot.

It is not only Mintesinot's life which is affected but her daughter's and her mother's too. Her daughter Wude is always sick because of the traditional medicine her mother took to abort her. Wude is brought up by her grand-mother Mulu who is a poor old woman. Because Mulu cannot send her to school, Wude is forced to support her self by working as a house-maid.

Wude suffers a lot to get money for her education. She has to work hard and study to be successful. There is a woman who pushes her to be a prostitute in order to get money. Wude is a little convinced that she can lead a better life as a prostitute. She is a very disciplined young girl but it is only her miserable life that make her prefer the life of a prostitute. It is because her mother Mintesinot is not able to care for her that Wude suffers in life.

Not only Wude but Mintesinot's mother Mulu also suffers a lot. Because she is poor, she could not afford to take Mintesinot to a hospital. She does whatever she can to help her daughter. Besides her economic problem, her psychology is affected by what happened to Mintesinot.

Mulu doesn't want her grand-daughter Wude to become a beautiful girl. She is very much afraid that Wude will also be seduced by a man like her mother. She wants Wude to remain a child so that men won't lay their eyes on her.

She stared at her, like a mother, she is not happy with her daughter's physical growth, and beauty. When her age adds up and she becomes adolescent woiyzero Mulu is worried. When she starts to have all the physical changes that make a woman, she becomes very sad. She wants her to be always a child and live with her (65).

In Owasa there is another seduced character called Sister Fanaye. Through this character, the authoress tries to show how the psychology of women could be ruined after being seduced. A man becomes close to Sister Fanaye telling her that he will find her lost brother for her. He seduces her and she becomes pregnant. Sister Fanaye is neglected by the man who seduces her. She is forced to become a prostitute in order to raise her twin children.

Sister Fanaye describes in detail the miserable life she lives when she is a prostitute. Here it is possible to say that the authoress wants the reader to realize the reasons why women become prostitutes. She tries to convince the reader that women become prostitutes not because they want to but because they do not have the economic means to sustain their lives and the lives of their children. The ~~writer~~ tells that prostitution is a social evil.

More than presenting the unpleasant life sister Fanaye lives when she is a prostitute, the authoress gives much

attention to the psychological damage on sister Fanaye after she starts to live under economic constraint. Her past experience made her strong to change her life. She becomes a "Sister" so that she could help children who suffer like hers. She always remembers her children who died because they could not have proper medication. Her past experience gave her the courage to face the difficulties in life.

Her past experience also has a great impact on her social relations. Because she believes that the Ethiopian society does not try to save her from suffering, she loses respect for the society in return. Fanaye shows her hatred for the society in many ways.

Fanaye smokes in public and wears differently. She does not act in the way the society expects her to act. No social obligation stops her from doing what she thinks right. She expresses her feelings without considering the response of the society. She knows very well that this is not liked by the society but she believes that this is the only way of revenging her enemies.

My aim is to kill and die. I live the way I wanted and planned to live. I freed myself from all social norms and systems that mass of people created. Many names are given to me and to the way I lead my life. But I do not care. From all the social norms and rules, there is nothing that interests me. That is why I do not mix. I hate people because I see a person hurting another person in the social relations they created(181).

Though the writer presents sister Fanaye as a deviant person, she tries to make the reader sympathetic to her. She

gives much emphasis in showing sister Fanaye's kindness in order she could get the readers' liking. Her different personality and her honesty are presented together so that the reader could understand her state of mind.

Sister Fanaye's psychological damage is seen in her wish to revenge those who affect her life. The title of the book, Qwasa, means revenge in Amharic. Fanaye also revenges the society by deviating from the society's norms. She strongly believes that revenge is the only way that washes away her bad memory. She says:

Though I am able to lead my life in a sustained manner, my profession did not help me to cure the wound on my mind. I have a strong conviction that a victim gets cured if washed with blood and I have a long plan to wash myself with the blood of my enemies (254).

Sister Fanaye's relationship with Mekuria is somewhat different from what is considered a normal relationship in the Ethiopian society regarding the relationship between opposite sexes. On the day Mekuria meets sister Fanaye he goes to her house. He even spends the night with her on that same day. This is unusual in the Ethiopian culture that expects a man and a woman to take time before becoming sexual partners. A woman is expected to be virgin until the day of her wedding.

It is possible to suggest that the authoress raises the above issue in order to show that, though rejected, sex before marriage is common in the society. Mekuria's mother wants her son to marry a girl who is virgin and very religious. But he

intends to marry sister Fanaye who was a prostitute. The society's expectations and the reality are quite different.

Mekuria proposes to marry sister Fanaye and this could suggest that the writer is sympathetic to such women who are considered to be different by the society. But Fanaye turns down Mekuria's proposal at first. She decides not to take the responsibility of a wife and a mother. She recalls the death of her children and says that a turn of fate will come to her if she gets married. But she changes her mind and decides to marry Mekuria. She does not change her mind without reason. She decides to marry him because she trusts him. She makes him promise to be on her side in all what she does. Mekuria even promises her that he will support her in revenging her enemies.

It is after he promises to be on her side in whatever she does that she decides to marry him. This might help to suggest that the writer does not recommend separation as a solution to the problem of women like sister Fanaye.

An interesting issue is raised with relation to the life of sister Fanaye. This issue is about motherhood. Sister Fanaye hates her mother because she treated her so badly when she was a child. Her unpleasant relationship with her mother affects her attitude towards mothers. She says that she is against the stereotype which says that all mothers are loving and tender.

Sister Fanaye blames her mother for ruining her life. She criticizes Mekuria for categorizing all women in one group as kind and caring. Fanaye says the following about those children who do not get their mothers' care:

You can argue for it, if you really experienced this tenderness. But a child who did not even hear of or dreamed about this tenderness can't appreciate it just by repeating your words. He gives his own interpretations based on his own feelings and experience (246-247).

It is possible to say that Fanaye's attitude towards her mother has its own influence on the formation of her personality. Sister Fanaye refuses to get married and the reason she gives for her refusal is that she doesn't want to be a wife and a mother. This could help to suggest that she hates to be a mother because she hates her mother. It could be her mother's cruel personality that she sees in all women.

The presentation of motherhood is an issue debated amongst some critics. There are critics who strongly criticize the stereotypical depiction of women as the source of tenderness and love. These critics strongly believe that the stereotype images of the mother should be corrected by portraying women of varied personalities. They question writers who define "ideal womanhood" in terms of motherhood. Liloyd W. Brown (1981) asserts that many African women writers are "ambivalent toward motherhood". She says:

They do raise serious questions about the manner in which the mystique of motherhood creates limitations on their sense of choice. They are expected to be mothers, several times over, and if they do not measure upon the community's

expectations, by choice or by natural necessity, then they must bear with the stigma of being regarded as less than whole women (21).

Eventhough Fanaye hates her mother and dislikes the idea of getting married, she changes her mind and marries Mekuria. She becomes pregnant before the day of her wedding. One can ask why the authoress raises this issue. The writer might want to show that this happens in reality, though the culture strongly rejects pregnancy before marriage.

Though Fanaye hates carrying the responsibilities of a woman, she gets married and becomes pregnant. This might suggest that eventhough a woman hates her womanhood circumstances push her to take her responsibilities as a woman.

Like Mintesinot and sister Fanaye, Senait the main character in Anguz, lives a miserable life because of a man she is not willing to marry. Because she refuses to be his lover, the man kills her father and brothers. Senait's grief causes her mental illness and she becomes mad.

Senait recovers from her illness after she is helped by her friends. But she recovers very suddenly and this might push the reader to question the plausibility of Senait's characterization. It is unlikely that one gets well so suddenly after a serious mental illness which is madness.

Senait does not accept her fate but wants to revenge her enemies. After she recovers from her illness she gives her whole time and energy to revenge the man who killed her father and brothers. For the purpose of revenge, she marries the killer. The title of the book Anguz means "scar" in Amharic. It refers to the scar on Senait's psychology that pushes her to revenge her enemy.

Because the authoress wants Senait to be extra-courageous, she make her marry the man she hates the most. It is unlikely that one gets the courage to marry someone who kills his father and brothers. Senait goes as far as carrying the son of her enemy in her womb. She does all this not when she is mentally sick but when she is totally recovered from her illness.

It is possible to say that the authoress is against the stereotype that says women are submissive and all-accepting creatures. Because she wants to show the strength of women, she makes Senait extra-courageous. But this affects the plausibility of the book.

At the end of the story Senait poisons Kebede the killer, his friend and herself. Kebede and his friend die instantly but Senait is saved. One might suspect that she will recover. It is also possible to ask why Senait is saved when the two other poisoned persons dies instantly. From the development of the story it is easy to notice that the writer saves Senait because she has sympathy for her.

Senait does not poison her enemy only but herself too. It is very difficult to imagine why she got married to Kebede to poison him and herself. It is not difficult to guess that the authoress makes Senait marry Kebede just to show that a woman can put herself in an unthinkable situation to fulfil her plans. The authoress affects the plausibility of the book to show the courage of women like Senait. Even though Senait is depicted in the novel as a heroine, her naivety is clearly manifested in her personality.

The authoress's liking of Senait is shown in another situation also. After she is saved from being dead, she becomes engaged to a man who has been her friend so many years ago. The man puts the engagement ring on her finger while she is at the hospital. It is hard to believe that a woman like Senait, with unpleasant past experience decides to marry someone instantly.

It is also unlikely that a man decides to marry his old friend whom he stopped seeing many years ago. He needs time to talk to her closely in order to decide to marry her. But because the authoress only wants Senait's success, she makes her engaged while she is in the hospital. The authoress does not even give her time to recover. This clearly indicates the sympathy of the authoress for Senait. The writer seems to make Senait successful because she is hurt by a man before.

Elfinesh Bekure's novel Tsilmet's story is also based on the life of a seduced woman named Bizwayehu. She is betrayed by her boy-friend Dawit after she gives birth to a baby. He loses interest in her and brings another woman home.

In this novel the authoress does not only criticize Dawit but Bizwayehu too. Bizwayehu trusts Dawit without any doubt and this shows her naivety. He promises to find her a job and she trusts him. "As I have told you I did everything he said as if he is a preacher" (12). Even though the authoress criticizes Bizwayehu's naivety, she does not do it strongly. She puts much of the blame on the society that brought up Bizwayehu without exposing her to the difficulties of life.

After Dawit, Bizwayehu is betrayed by another lover called Tadeyos. Bizwayehu loves him very much until he leaves her and goes out of the country without informing her. Her relationship with Dawit and Tadeyos pushes her to believe that there is no true love. She says "all men are betrayers, all men are liars." (37) This is the reason why it took her sometime to start a new relationship with Mekwanint.

Even though Bizwayehu is naive she is strong as well. She tries to get herself and her child out of misery by working hard. She loves her child so much and she always says that she suffers in life to bring up her child properly. Though she has nothing to feed him, she does not leave him with his father thinking that he might not get good care and

love. The close relationship between a mother and a child is well-brought up in the story.

Bizwayehu does not submit to the difficulties in life but shows perseverance. She tries hard to forget her past experience and decides to live a new life. Though she pretends to forget her past, her experience affects her relationship with other people specially men. She starts to think of all men as cruel and untrustworthy. She believes that men approach women to use them as sex-objects. She could not think of her new-born son as one of these men. She says:

Even this old man smiles for sex. How could I say that a man is a human being. There is one thing. I have a son. When he matures, will he behave like other men? I will be sorry if he does. (10)

The life of street women is presented in a very sympathetic way in the novel. Bizwayehu leaves Dawit's house in the middle of the night. She does not have any place to go. A man tries to use her as a sex-object. There is another poor woman who says that she is always worried about being raped at night. This issue is emphatically presented in the novel to show how women are unsafe to move wherever and whenever they want.

Bizwayehu's life jumps from misery to happiness without showing plausibility. Even though she is a strong person, luck is also on her side. She gets a job when the applicants are so many. It is possible that one could be selected from

so many competitors. "The compound is filled with the applicants but only two will be nominated." (p24).

Bizwayehu's nomination from all these applicants makes her life change just by chance. After she gets a job she marries Mekwanint and starts to live a happy and luxurious life. Though not impossible, it is highly improbable that the beggar becomes a wealthy woman after a few years.

Bizwayehu gets too much help from other people. These people are not expected to give her all that support and this can make one suggest that the authoress is sympathetic to Bizwayehu. The old woman who does not know her very well allows her to live with her. Her late husband Mekwanint is also very kind to her. Mekwanint is brought into the story to help Bizwayehu.

The issue of virginity is also given emphasis in the novel. Bizwayehu is terribly sorry that she lost her virginity without her wish. In the Ethiopian society a woman is expected to be virgin until the day of her wedding. Bizwayehu is shocked when she lost her virginity because that is what is totally rejected in the society. In the novel virginity is described as something that gives "pride and confidence" to a girl.

When Bizwayehu marries Mekwanint it is pretended that she is virgin. The authoress describes ironically people's

attempt to pretend that Bizwayehu is virgin. She criticizes such culture that forces people to pretend for what doesn't really exist.

In the novel Bizwayehu's inner feelings are emphasized. Her ambitions are expressed in detail. She wants to revenge the man who seduces her. She is against giving Dawit any support when he is seriously ill. She strongly believes that he should be left to suffer because he is responsible for the suffering of other innocent people. She says:

Dawit is punished for what he did to me. Let alone for a man, one feels very much sorry when his pet dies. But I did not feel sorry for Dawit's death. I even praised God for making him suffer.... Did he ever think of death when he made me cry? (88)

All the women characters discussed above are used by men as sex objects. Their psychology is hurt by the men who use them to satisfy their sexual needs. The psychological damage lives with them throughout their lives and they always want to revenge those men who seduce them.

Their unpleasant experience also gives them strength and courage. They have perseverance to overcome all the difficulties in life. Sometimes these characters are extra courageous and this affects the plausibility of the characterization. Besides their strength, the ~~writers~~ also push them to become successful. They make them get help from other persons who are in no position to give them that much support.

All these characters suffer at the beginning but they become happy and successful at last. It seems that the ~~writers~~ focus on the success of the seduced characters rather than the plausibility of their characterization.

### 2.3 Seducer Men Characters

The seducer men characters are responsible for the destruction of the lives of women. As shown in the previous section of the thesis, these men characters use women as sex objects. They are cruel and untrustworthy. They have no sense of responsibility for the lives of their children. In this section three seducer men characters will be discussed. These are Owasa's Wubishet Endailalu and Anguz's Kebede Gari. The other one is Dawit from Tsilmet.

Owasa's Wubishet uses women as sex objects. One of his victims is Mintesinot who is discussed earlier in this chapter. wubishet betrays Mintesinot after she gave birth to a child. He refuses to give her money for the medication of their child.

The characterization of Wubishet does not show consistency. Wubishet is said to have been a man who feels responsible for the society's well-being. Why he becomes so cruel and irresponsible is not mentioned properly. It is quite improbable to say that a man who feels responsible for the society, does not have a feeling of sympathy for the woman he pretends to love.

It is unlikely that two persons meet in a big city just by chance. But because the authoress wants to show Wubishet punished for what he did, she makes him meet his girl-friend and his child. Wubishet feels guilty. He even becomes sick and hospitalized. The authoress gives much emphasis to Wubishet's feeling of guilt when he meets his daughter and Mintesinot. From the development of the story, their meeting is improbable.

Wubishet does not ruin the life of Mintesinot only but other women's too. He betrays women after he seduces them. He has no sympathy for these women. He even says that all women, who do not hesitate to believe what they are told by their lovers, are fools. He thinks that women do not learn from their mistakes.

Wubishet likes to ruin the lives of decent and disciplined young girls. He feels victorious when he wins the hearts of such mannered young women. It is these kind of women he always seduces.

Wealthy women also interest him and that is why he marries Abebayehu. He decides to marry her thinking that he might have a chance to inherit the wealth of her family. His need to be rich could be seen in relation to his upbringing. He is brought-up in a very poor condition.

At the end of the story Wubishet Endailalu dies. But it looks that he dies just because the authoress does not want him alive. Wubishet dies by accident at a big gathering of a wedding. It is true that just one person may die in an accident. But in Wubishet's case it seems that the character pays for his misdeeds by losing his life. He is absent in the story for a long time and reappears to take his punishment.

Wubishet is not very well depicted in the story so that the reader could give him his own judgement. The reader could not clearly identify his personality. His death seems the last punishment by the authoress, following the psychological torture.

Anguz's Kebede Gari is also a man with no moral sense. He kills people just to make a woman his own. This is the reason why he killed the father and brothers of Senait. Throughout the novel, his need to use women as sex-objects is manifested. But why he became such a person is not mentioned.

At the beginning of the novel Kebede Gari is said to be someone who respects old persons in his community. All of a sudden he changes to a person who kills people. The writer does not care much to develop the personality of Kebede in a plausible way.

Senait marries Kebede in order to take revenge on him. After she marries him he treats her very kindly. This might show his love for her. A murderer could not be very polite and kind to a woman whose father and brothers he killed. He should have followed each and every move of hers with suspicion since he knows that she was mad because of the death of her father and brothers.

It is logical to say that the authoress makes Kebede Gari very kind and helpful because she wants him to help Senait in order to fulfil her plans. Senait marries Kebede to kill him. It looks that because the authoress wants Kebede to be punished by Senait, she makes him so kind to her so that she could be with him and kill him.

At the end of the story, Kebede is killed, poisoned by his wife Senait. The ending seems that Kebede is killed just because he must be punished for what he did. The authoress does not care much about showing his feelings. Every thing is told from the point of view of Senait.

Tsilmet's Dawit is not much different from Anguz's Kebede Gari. Dawit also approaches women to satisfy his biological need. He is very good at winning the hearts of women by approaching them in a very attractive manner. He has no feeling of responsibility for the life of his child. He neglects Bizwayehu and pushes her to leave him after she gave birth to a baby. He starves Bizwayehu and his child so that they leave his house. He even brings another woman home.

The authoress does not show the reader how Dawit became such a cruel personality. It seems that her main concern is to show the life of a woman whose life is ruined by a seducer. She does not give emphasis to the personality of Dawit.

It is not possible to say that a person like Dawit does not exist. From the way he treats Bizwayehu and his child, his cruelty is a little bit exaggerated. The way he insults Bizwayehu and starves his child to death makes him cruel. It looks that the authoress exaggerates his cruelty to make the reader hate him and feel sorry for Bizwayehu.

Dawit suddenly reappears in the middle of the story. He is very sick and has no money to go to a hospital. While he is suffering, he feels guilty of what he did to Bizwayehu and his child. He tells his friend to telephone Bizwayehu to ask for her apology.

It is unlikely that Dawit apologizes to Bizwayehu after about 20 years. The writer does not care much about the plausibility of this apology. She only emphasizes on his feeling of guilt. Because Dawit stays too long without medical help, he dies four days after he is hospitalized.

Dawit's death is unexpected. He just shows up in the middle of the story and dies. It looks that he reappears in the story just to take his punishment. After Bizwayehu left his house in the middle of the night, he disappears from the

story. He comes back again being seriously sick. He dies immediately.

All the three men characters use women as sex-objects. They have no feeling of guilt for ruining the lives of women. They do not feel responsible for the lives of their children either. Two of these characters, Wubishet and Dawit feel guilty after so many years. From the development of the novels it is possible to say that these men feel guilty just because the authoresses want them to feel that way. Since their personalities are not well-depicted the reader cannot judge whether these men truly feel guilty.

The way the lives of these characters ends is also not plausible. All the three men die at last. It is possible that these characters die because the authoresses want them to. Dawit and Wubishet disappear from the stories after they ruined the lives of women and reappear again just to take their punishments. Their punishments are guilty feeling at first and death at last.

#### **2.4 A Comparison of the Men and the Women Characters Who are Portrayed in Relation to the Theme of Seduction**

The authoresses portrayed their men and women characters in a way that fits into the themes that deal with the lives of women that are ruined by men. To compare how these men and women characters are portrayed, it is better to enumerate some points. The general features of women characters are

enumerated under "a" while those of men are described under "b".

- a. The women are used by men as sex objects.
- b. The men use women as sex objects.
- a. The lives of women characters are ruined by men.
- b. The men ruin the lives of women.
- a. The women trust men totally. They are honest and kind.
- b. The men are untrustworthy. They are dishonest and cruel.
- a. The women become strong after they are seduced.
- b. The men characters are not strong. Their lives deteriorate because of their weaknesses.
- a. The women are helped by others to an unbelievable degree. Their lives change because they get help.
- b. The men do not get help from others.
- a. The writers try to show the inner feelings and ambitions of the women characters.
- b. The inner feelings and ambitions of men characters are not well-considered in the novels.
- a. The lives of seduced women characters come to success at last without following the development of the story.
- b. The seducer men fail in life, at last. They die in ways that do not follow the development of the story.

**CHAPTER THREE**  
**MEN AND WOMEN CHARACTERS PORTRAYED**  
**WITH RELATION TO CULTURE**

In this chapter the portrayal of some men and women characters in relation to the culture of the society will be discussed. The focus of the authoresses lay much on the culture of the society. In their portrayal of these men and women characters, they tried to criticize the culture of the society regarding the place of women.

The characters could be divided in two. The first group contains those characters who are portrayed as victims of the culture that suppresses women. The other group incorporates men and women characters who are affected by the culture but who are strong enough to resist it.

**3.1 Men and Women Characters Portrayed As  
Victims of Culture**

Some Ethiopian authoresses tried to criticize in their works the society's culture for suppressing women. The long short stories by Yezina Worku with the title "Yekirb Ruk" and "Senait" and the novel of Mekdes Asnake Mehageba are selected for discussion. These three works deal with marriage in general but also raise issues related to other aspects of women's lives.

Unlike the authoresses of the novels discussed in the previous chapter, Yezina's and Mekdes's criticism on men is not strong. They try to be fair with their men characters by criticizing the culture of the society for shaping the men the way they are. This does not mean that the men escape criticism. In order to follow the analysis, presenting the stories of the short stories and the novel in brief is useful.

### 3.1.1 Synopsis

#### A. Yekirb Ruk

In "Yekirb Ruk" the main character Alemishet marries Ashenafi and lives with him. As time passes, she realizes that they are not close to each other as they should be. She discusses her problem with her friend Fikirte. Her friend pushes her to change her life and introduces her to a young man.

Alemishet starts an affair with the young man and becomes pregnant. She tries to abort the child by taking traditional medicine and this makes her seriously ill. She runs away from the hospital.

#### B. Senait

"Senait" is a long short story that deals with the life of a woman named Senait. Senait loves a man called Solomon. Because Solomon and Senait love each other, they start to live together without the consent of her aunt.

Solomon and Senait want to have a child but they could not. Their friends and neighbours begin nagging Senait to have a child. Because she is frustrated, Senait stops taking part in social activities. Solomon treats her as usual with much care but as time passes he also starts to ask why Senait could not have a baby and becomes frustrated. Solomon starts to neglect Senait for not giving birth to a child.

Senait is so frustrated and her married life starts to crack. Solomon pushes Senait in many ways to leave the house. At last he brings his mistress home pretending that she is his relative. Knowing that the woman is not his relative but his mistress, Senait poisons Solomon, his mistress and herself. Solomon and his mistress die instantly but Senait survives.

### C. Mehageba

The novel Mehageba deals with the life of a muslim woman called Aisha. Aisha covers her face with a piece of cloth called "Shider". Because she is always covered, she has many diseases. Her husband Sherif takes her to a hospital to get her medical treatment. She is asked to take off the cloth that covers her face. Sherif refuses to allow his wife to take off the cloth and takes her back home without getting treatment.

The nurse tries to convince Sherif to allow his wife to take her "Shider" off. Sherif says that covering of women's faces with cloth is a religious custom that has wider

acceptance by the old and respected religious people. At last the nurse convinces him and he allows Aisha to get medical treatment.

### 3.1.2 Women Characters Portrayed as Victims of Culture

In Yezina's long short stories "Yekirb Ruk" and "Senait" the main characters are women. The lives of these women characters are ruined because of the culture of the Ethiopian society that suppresses women. In Mehageba Mekdes condemns those beliefs that affect the lives of women. In these three works the authoress gave much emphasis to the suffering of women, and expose the suppressive culture.

In "Yekirb Ruk" the main character is Alemishet. Through the life of Alemishet the authoress discusses issues related to the life of an Ethiopian woman. Alemishet gets married to a man whom she does not know very well. They meet a few times before their marriage. Alemishet does not get the chance to know Ashenafi's personality very well.

Alemishet does not consider the necessity of knowing the personality of her would-be husband before marriage. She is brought up in the culture which forces women to marry men whom they do not know very well.

Alemishet is brought up restricted to her house and her school. Her father was a very aggressive person and she could not spend even an hour without his knowledge. For Ato Fekadu, her father, places like cinema, theatre and a friend's house are rude places (101).

Because she wants her life to change, Alemishet is not unhappy with her marriage at first. When Ashenafi becomes her friend, she is happy because she thought he would change her life. Her physical growth also urges her to have a lover. She wants to be like some of the girls who go out to different places with their boy-friends.

Even though she liked him, she didn't have the courage to say "ok". When she thinks over it, if he is her fiancée, he could take her to a cinema and theatre. If her father allows, he could take her for a trip to different parks. Just like other young girls who enjoy themselves with their boy-friends, she could have nice time with him. (105).

She wants to go to the movies with him but Ashenafi does not take her to those places. Instead he starts to prepare for marriage. He buys house-hold utensils. Ashenafi does not consider the need to have closer relationship with a would be marriage partner. Though Alemishet is not happy, she does not say anything to Ashenafi. She also starts preparing her self for marriage.

The writer strongly criticizes the Ethiopian culture that inhibits women from going to different places by themselves. Young girls like Alemishet are expected to stay at home and help their mothers while boys are allowed to go out with their fathers.

Alemishet is eager to know what the other world outside the house looks like. At first she is happy to marry Ashenafi because she thought that the marriage will give her a chance

to see the world. But Ashenafi wants her to stay at home. The major conflict in the short story is between Alemishet's expectations and Ashenafi's offer.

The writer also criticizes the established marriage customs in the Ethiopian society. She attacks marriage that takes place before the two partners know each other very well. Through Alemishet's friend, Fikirte, the writer addresses the reader that marriage partners should be able to know each other very well before their marriage.

After Alemishet and Ashenafi got married, life becomes boring to Alemishet. Though her husband is kind to her and to their son, he does not try to share her feelings. She always dreams of a man who could take her out to different places and discusses with her different matters. She does not want to be a wife who only stays at home and does her house-hold activities properly.

Her friend Fikirte is one who adds to her doubts about her marriage. She always tells her that married couples should share their feelings. Fikirte tells her about her sexual life and pushes her to compare it with hers. Alemishet never had sexual satisfaction in her married life. She is confused when she hears about the sexual feeling two partners could share between them. She starts craving for a satisfying relationship. When she has sexual intercourse with her husband, she never experiences the feeling Fikirte describes to her.

It is when Alemishet has many doubts about her marriage that she was introduced to a young man called Tewodros. Her mind pushes her to go out with Tewodros and see for herself what relationship with a "modern" young man looks like. Her friend Fikirte also pushes her to go out with Tewodros and witness what she meant by "sharing feelings with a partner". Since her feeling urged her to see what she thought she lacked, she starts to have an extra-marital affair.

The ~~writer~~ shows her sympathy to Alemishet by neglecting Alemishet's naivety. She tries to convince the reader that Alemishet is involved in extra-marital affair because her husband neglects her feelings. The writer seems to say that it is not surprising if a woman does wrong when she tries to get what she lacks. Alemishet is presented as someone who made mistakes in the process of knowing herself.

In her own words the ~~writer~~ says that one should not be surprised if people get involved in extra-marital affair. She asserts that not sharing feelings could result in going in different ways. "In marriage, if one ignores the feeling of the other, there is no way other than going in different directions" (139).

The writer seems to say that there is nothing Alemishet could do to save her marriage. Alemishet is depicted by the authoress as someone who is involved in adultery to find the right person in her life. She is not seen taking any measure

to save her marriage. She does not think of her affecting the lives of her child, her husband and herself.

Alemishet seems to be guided by her emotions. She is easily convinced by what her friend tells her. All these make Alemishet a naive personality. Since the authoress tries to hide this naivety, her sympathy to her character is clearly exposed in the story.

A very important thing is raised with relations to Alemishet's life. It is economic independence. The authoress seems to propose economic independence for women so that they can live their own free lives.

Alemishet is forced to live with Ashenafi because she has nowhere to go. She wants to leave him but does not have the economic means to sustain the life of her child and herself. The writer tells the reader that Ethiopian women need to be economically free so that they could decide on their lives.

In "Yekirb Ruk", the authoress gives a detailed description of Alemishet's feelings. She tells about her interests and ambitions. Most of all Alemishet's sexual feeling is given much emphasis. The comparison between her feelings when she has sex with her husband and with Tewodros is discussed in detail.

In "Yekirb Ruk", Alemishet and her friend Fikirte discuss their secrets in life without any inhibition. Alemishet shares all her feelings with Fikirte but she does not share it with her husband or her family. She even brings out her sexual life for discussion with Fikirte. In this short story women's close relationship with each other is clearly seen.

At the end of the story Alemishet becomes pregnant and in her effort to abort her child she gets seriously ill. She puts her life at risk taking a dangerous traditional medicine for abortion. It is only here that the authoress accepts Alemishet's naivety. Even here she tries to convince the reader that Alemishet takes the medicine because she is confused and does not know the way out.

Alemishet is in a comma a few hours before she runs away from the hospital. It is unlikely that a person could run away a few hours after he was in a comma. Because the writer does not want Alemishet to face her husband and the community for what she does, she makes her run away. She still keeps her sympathy by making her run away and saving her from facing the community.

Like "Yekirb Ruk", "Senait" is also a short story that presents the life of a woman who is affected by the culture. It deals with the difficulties of a barren woman in the Ethiopian society. It also raises other issues pertaining to the life of a woman.

The story deals with the feelings of Senait from her years of adolescence to the years she becomes a matured young woman. At the beginning of the short story, the authoress describes the physical and psychological changes a young woman like Senait shows when she become a grown-up girl. Senait always dreams of having a boy-friend and becoming in love.

The authoress tries to express the sexual feeling of a young woman when she grows from childhood to adolescence. Senait's restless behaviour is associated with her physical and psychological growth. She looks at her self in the mirror frequently and wants to look beautiful and tries to make sure that she is attractive.

... there was not much I know about love, I felt as if I had some memory of the past. I was strained. Something passed whispering, telling me to shout, fly and run away. I became restless. My young body magnified and put in front of me the love of youth it longed for but could not get (129).

Senait trusts Solomon and leaves her aunt. She feels sorry when she realizes that she has only Solomon but no relative or friend to count on. Her feeling could be taken as a foreshadow of the ending of the story. But because she is madly in love with Solomon, she does not care much about her relations with her aunt. The authoress does not approve the naivety of Senait. She tries to convince the reader that Alemishet leaves her aunt because her aunt is cruel to her.

Senait's and Solomon's marriage breaks up because they could not have a child. Their marriage cracks because they

could not resist the society's push to have their own child. Senait starts to hide herself so that people might not ask her about having a child. She says:

I would be happy if I am not at home when guests come to our house. Their first question is whether we have children or not. There is no better answer than pretending that we did not listen to their question (177).

Solomon completely neglects Senait. He starts to drink and stays out late at night. He even brings his mistress home so that she could replace Senait one day. Senait happens to know that the girl is not Solomon's relative but his mistress. She faints when she makes sure that the woman lives with them to trick her and drive her out of the house.

Senait knows that Solomon does everything to upset her and make her leave. But she could not leave him because she does not have her own income. Here the writer suggests that Senait is forced to live with the man who hates her because she is economically dependent on him. Just like Alemishet in "Yekirb Ruk", Senait suffers because she has no means of sustaining herself.

Senait does not have relatives she can go to. Her mother and father died when she was a child. Her aunt treats her very badly and she is not brought up with care. In the short story the authoress gives much emphasis to the upbringing of Senait. This might suggest that the authoress is interested in showing the lives of children who lose their parents, and are forced to live miserable lives.

At the end of the story Senait poisons Solomon, his mistress and herself. One may ask why she did not take other measures to save her life. She wants to revenge Solomon and does not look for other alternatives. The reader might wonder why she took such a naive step.

The poison kills Solomon and his mistress leaving Senait unscathed. One cannot deny the possibility of a person to survive from the three persons. It is also possible to guess that the authoress's sympathy to Senait is shown in saving her. It seems that the authoress wants the short story to have a happy ending.

In this short story the writer criticizes both Solomon and the culture of the Ethiopian society that blames the infertile woman. The story gives much emphasis to the feelings of Senait. She is presented as a victim of her husband, and the society that wounds the psychology of the barren woman.

Like Senait, Mehageba's Aisha is the victim of the culture that degrades women. The novel deals with the rights of women. It is explained in the book that the word "Mehageba" is an Arabic name given to women who cover their faces with dark clothes. The authoress criticizes the harmful custom that orders muslim women to cover their faces with clothes.

Most part of the novel deals with the conversation between sherif and the Nurse Yodit. The Nurse tries to convince Sherif to allow his wife to take her "Shider" off. Sherif says that covering of women's faces with cloth is a religious custom that has wider acceptance by the old religious leaders. At last the Nurse convinces Sherif, and Aisha gets medical treatment taking off the cloth that used to cover her face and she becomes healthy.

As mentioned earlier the book mostly deals with the rights of women. The authoress strongly attacks the idea which says that covering the face of women with dark cloth is one of the rules of the muslim religion itself. She says that such rules are formed by men to degrade women. The rules have acceptance by the followers of the muslim religion.

The Nurse Yodit asserts that these harmful customs should be avoided so that women have equal rights to live freely in the society. She says:

.... If we first of all analyze science, we know that all things are created male and female. God made his creatures male and female to make them breed, not to make them oppressors and oppressed or good and evil. Because all God's works are sacred, men and women are equal. He did not make men as rulers and women as the ones to be ruled (114-115).

The authoress stresses the idea that women should learn in order to make themselves free from the domination of men. She advises women to be strong enough to fight harmful customs that have nothing to do with the rules of the muslim religion.

The writer recommends that women should be economically independent in order to be free.

All the women characters presented above are victims of the culture that degrades women. Their feelings are ignored only because they are women. Their ideas are not considered.

### 3.1.3 Men characters Portrayed as Victims of Culture

In the short stories discussed in the previous section of this chapter, there are men characters who are presented in relation to the culture of the society. These characters are not the only ones blamed. The culture of the society is also criticized. The characters that will be discussed here are "Yekirb Ruk's" Ashenafi, "Senait's" Solomon and Mehageba's Sherif.

"Yekirb Ruk's" Ashenafi is a very decent and respected person. He takes care of his child. Ashenafi marries Alemishet in a traditional way. He does not try to know her very closely before their marriage. But this is no surprise since most of the marriages are conducted this way in the Ethiopian community.

Even though the authoress criticizes the culture, she also blames Ashenafi for being so ignorant of Alemishet's feelings. Ashenafi does not want to share his feelings with his wife. He only wants her to be a good house-wife who takes care of the family. He also wants her to follow up her education very seriously.

Ashenafi buys everything Alemishet needs but does not take her out to entertain her. He does not allow her to discuss their family matters with him. He decides on their family matters just by himself. He does not talk with her while he is at home. He only reads in the evenings leaving every house-hold responsibility to her.

Ashenafi does not try to understand the sexual needs of Alemishet because he is brought up in a society where women's sexual needs are not considered. Alemishet is not happy with her sexual relationship with her husband. Because of this she starts to think of her married life as a trap. She even asks why people marry if they care more for their social relations, and less to the feelings of their partners. Alemishet says:

People get married and live together and they give emphasis to raising children and their social status, neglecting love. What is marriage if love is neglected? Why should I blame my marriage when I did not have a happy and joyful life before marriage(126).

In the story Ashenafi's negligence is said to have resulted in Alemishet's going out with another man. This also leads to the breaking up of their marriage. Ashenafi's negligence is the result of the culture of the society in which Ashenafi is brought up. He does not know that Alemishet needs to have a friendly relationship with her husband. He buys her everything she wants for herself and their child. He helps her a lot to make her successful in her education.

Though Ashenafi and Alemishet live together, they are not close to each other in terms of understanding one another. The title of the short story "Yekirb Ruk" also refers to Ashenafi's and Alemishet's relationship. It means that Ashenafi is far away from Alemishet even if they live together.

The authoress becomes unfair with Ashenafi at the end of the story. Ashenafi tries to force his house-maid to sleep with him on the day his wife is hospitalized. The authoress does not care for the consistency of Ashenafi's character when she makes him an adulterer all of a sudden.

Throughout the story Ashenafi is depicted as a respected and decent young man. His sudden change could be a clue to the authoress's intention. It is possible that the authoress changes Ashenafi suddenly because she wants to say that men can be easily led by their emotions.

At the end of the story Ashenafi finds out that his wife has an affair with another man. He becomes confused. When he knows that she is pregnant, he becomes very annoyed. It seems that the authoress wants Ashenafi to be punished for his neglect.

The writer should have ended the story when Alemishet runs away from the hospital. She extends the story after its climax to show how Ashenafi suffers at last. At the end, the

authoress tries to convince the reader that Ashenafi suffers because of his neglect. She says that he does not realize that his wrong doings even after losing his wife.

The writer passes her own judgement on Ashenaif. The following sentence, the last sentence of the short story, proves the point. "He was frustrated when he felt that she was far away from him but he could not realize that they did not know each other when they lived together" (217). These are the exact words of the authoress herself.

In the other short story, "Senait", Solomon is portrayed at first as a loving husband. He takes care of Senait until he loses hope on her giving birth to a child. Solomon does all bad things to his wife so that she hates him and leaves him. Though he is arrogant, the culture of the society also contributes a lot to his personality. His friends and neighbours frequently ask him why his wife could not have a baby and this makes him so much frustrated.

The writer changes the character of Solomon from a very kind person to an arrogant one implausibly. He becomes inconsiderate to the extent of bringing his mistress home. He acts cruelly as if he had never been a good person before.

It seems that the authoress wants to show the suffering of the barren woman and forgets the need for the plausibility of the characterization of Solomon. A very kind and decent

man cannot be as rude as Solomon instantly. At the end of the short story Solomon is killed by his wife and this seems the authoress's punishment for his arrogance.

In Mehageba, Sherif is portrayed as a man who degrades women thinking that he does this to perform his religious duties. He forbids his wife from getting medical treatment because he believes that his wife should not take off the cloth that covers her face.

The characterization of Sherif does not have consistency. Sherif is very serious about his religion at the beginning of the story. But after Sister Yodit told him the dangers of covering the face, he is changed. He allows his wife to take off the cloth that covers her face, and takes her to the hospital.

His change of behaviour is so radical that one finds it difficult to accept it. A person cannot suddenly and easily change, especially, his belief related to religion. Since Sherif's belief grew up with him, it should have been difficult for him to change it so quickly. The authoress seems to care for his wife's success and forgets to depict Sherif plausibly. Because she wants Aisha to become free, she made Sherif a person who is easily persuaded.

To conclude, the men characters discussed in this section damage the feelings of their marriage partners. They are the

products of the culture they are brought up in. They degrade women because they grew up in communities where women's feelings are repressed. These men characters are not successful at last. Ashenafi loses his wife, and Solomon his life. Sherif is convinced that women's feelings should not be repressed.

#### 3.1.4 A Comparison of the Men and the Women Characters Portrayed as Victims of Culture

The men and the women characters discussed in this chapter are all victims of the Ethiopian culture in different ways. It is better to enumerate some points to compare how these characters are portrayed in these works. The women characters are described under "a" and the men under "b".

- a. The women characters' lives are ruined because of the culture of the Ethiopian society that degrades women. These women characters are also the victims of their ignorant husbands.
- b. The men characters do not care for the feelings of their female partners and in this they wound the feelings of their women partners.
- a. Because they are economically dependent on their male partners, the women characters are forced to live with the men they do not want to live with. (This is for Alemishet and Senait).

- b. The men are dominant because they are the sources of income to their families.
- a. Finally, Alemishet and Senait take their own measures to end their suffering though their measures seem a little naive.
- b. At the end, Ashenafi and Solomon are punished for their guilt. Ashenafi is left by his wife and Solomon is poisoned to death.

### **3.2 The "Strong" Men and Women Characters Portrayed with Relation to Culture**

In this section, some characters who are portrayed in relation to culture are analyzed. The lives of these characters are affected by the culture of the society. But the characters are strong enough to resist the culture that affects their lives. Firstly the women characters will be discussed, followed by the men characters. The characters are taken from the novels Anguz, Owasa and Tsilmet and the short story "Enegrewalehu". The selected characters are five, three women and two men.

#### **3.2.1 The "Strong" Women Characters**

There are women characters who are courageous in the novel Anguz and the short story "Enegrewalehu". The characters are Kidist and Alganesh in Anguz and Senait in "Enegrewalehu". These characters are courageous enough to do what is unacceptable in the culture. They are not submissive.

Kidist is a strong woman character found in Anguz. She is very helpful to others. She goes to the United States of America and studies Journalism and Literature. Because she wants to help her poor country and people, she comes back to Ethiopia and starts to work in a relief organization and helps the poor. Her kindness is highly exaggerated. This shows that the writer favours the character.

Kidist is courageous enough to avoid the society's expectations of a woman. She decides not to get married because she plans to be a writer. Even though her father and her friends push her to get married, she insists on her interest in literature. Whenever these people raise the question of marriage, she tells them that "One should not be guided by other people but his own mind". She strongly believes that a person has to lead his life at his own free will.

In the novel Kidist is not depicted as a woman who is against the culture but she is portrayed as a positive character who could be taken as a model. Kidist loves her boy-friend but she loves writing more. She decides to be a writer without getting married. It seems that the authoress wants to tell the reader that women could have greater ambitions than getting married.

Kidist does not stop deviating from the culture of the society by avoiding marriage. She also decides to have a child

without marriage. In the Ethiopian society a woman who has a child without marriage is despised, if not cursed. But Kidist's decision is not presented in the novel as bad. Kidist is portrayed as a woman who wants to have her own child but whose mind is not ready to get married.

Kidist always wants freedom and that is what she tells her father in the following sentences: "Father, I need a complete freedom. I object to religious rules and cultural influences that make women inferior"(161). Kidist holds serious debates to convince her family and friends to accept her plans.

Like Kidist, Alganesh has a very strong personality. She is very kind and helpful. She is kind to the extent of giving her only shop to a woman who works for her. Because she spends her money helping the poor, she could not deposit the money she gets. Her kindness is exaggerated and, again, this shows the authoress's sympathy to the character.

Alganesh is daring enough to decide to raise her only son by herself. She does not think of getting married but works hard to support herself. She always wants to help the needy. Because of her kindness, she is liked by the community. She is also known for her strength to fight for truth.

Alganesh is portrayed as a very aggressive and energetic woman. In the Ethiopian society a woman is not expected to be

aggressive. She has to be submissive in order to fulfil the expectations of the society. To the contrary, Alganesh courageously fights for her belief.

Though Alganesh is not submissive and this makes her deviate from the society's expectations, she respects the culture in some ways. She does not support those people who try to bring radical changes to the culture. Unlike Kidist she does not support the idea of bearing a child without marriage. Alganesh could be taken as a mediator between those people who support the existing culture and those who try to bring radical changes to the culture.

Alganesh is very much courageous. Besides her courage, the writer is also sympathetic to her. Alganesh's life is seen changing without following the development of the story. She becomes successful without sufficient reasons. A man gives her a lottery ticket sent by her friend. She wins the lottery, and gets 30 thousand birr. The writer could have shown Senait's help to Alganesh in other ways. Because she wants Alganesh to come out of her economic problem, she makes her get a lot of money.

"Enegrewalehu" is a short story in which the main character Senait loves a man named Girma. She becomes the first to express her love. Girma also likes Senait and starts to go out with her until she finds out that Girma has a wife and children. The reader might ask why the authoress

portrayed a deviant character like Senait. In the Ethiopian society it is quite known that it is not women but men who are the first to express their love to their partners. Senait is a character who does what she wants. The writer portrays Senait as a positive character. She depicts her as a strong woman who does right even though it is not customary in the culture.

At the end of the story Senait is shocked when she finds out that Girma is married. She thought her relationship will last longer and becomes serious. But Girma does not think the same way. He does not even inform her that he is married. He brings his wife and children to a public gathering where Senait is present. He does not care that this could be shocking to her. His act indicates that he is not serious about his relationship with Senait.

From the development of the story it is possible to suggest that the authoress wants the reader to realize that it is not easy for a woman to act freely in a society like Ethiopia. Senait's relationship with Girma does not work out may be because she is the first to express her love. Girma might have cared for the feelings of Senait, had he been the first to fall in love with her and express his love. He does not show any respect to her as a lover. This suggests that in the Ethiopian society, a woman who is the first to express her love to a man may fall on a bad partner. She might even be dismissed with humiliation.

All in all, the authoresses give much emphasis to the inner feelings of the strong women characters. Their ambitions and plans are presented in detail. The characters are courageous and rational to a greater extent. They are guided by their own free will.

### 3.2.2 The "Strong" Men Characters

In the novels Qwasa and Tsilmet there are two major men characters who have extremely good personalities. They are Mekuria and Mekwanint. Both are very kind and helpful. Throughout the novels they are portrayed helping the needy. They do what they want against the culture of the society.

In Qwasa , Mekuria helps Mintesinot and her family. He also stretches his hand to help other persons who need his support. He is an old friend of Wubishet Endailalu who betrayed Mintesinot after she gave birth to a child. Mekuria strongly objects Wubishet for neglecting Mintesinot and his child. He even fights with Wubishet and breaks his tooth. He always supports Mintesinot.

When Mintesinot is seriously ill after she is betrayed, Mekuria gives her a lot of help. Though he knows her quite well, Mekuria is in no position to give all that help to Mintesinot. She is only an ex-girl-friend of his old friend. But Mekuria spends all his time and energy in helping Mintesinot.

It seems that the authoress wants to help Mintesinot to recover from her illness. She puts Mekuria in the story to give her all that help. He comes to the life of Mintesinot as an angel and saves her. Because persons like Mekuria are rare in real life, his characterization is not plausible.

Mekuria shows strength when he confronted the culture and decided to marry sister Fanaye, a prostitute who had two children. In the Ethiopian society, a man is expected to marry a respected and decent girl. But Mekuria decides to marry Fanaye who was a prostitute. He believes that she was a prostitute not because she chose to but due to circumstances that pushed her to it.

Mekuria's decision to marry Fanaye is appreciated when it is considered in relation to his mother's personality. Mekuria's mother is an old fashioned woman who wants to choose a marriage partner to Mekuria. But Mekuria refuses to marry all the girls his mother proposed. The criteria of his mother for choosing the girls are decency and respectability. She also believes that her son should marry a girl who is religious and who goes to church regularly.

Sister Fanaye is totally different from the kind of girl his mother proposes to Mekuria. It is obvious that his mother strongly objects to her son's marriage to a woman who was a prostitute. Though he loves his mother, Mekuria does not change his decision. He is ready to face all oppositions to

the marriage including his mother's. He decides to marry Fanaye because he believes that she is not a prostitute any more and her past is over.

In Tsilmet, there is another god-like character called Mekwanint. He is the late husband of the main character Bizwayehu. Mekwanint marries Bizwayehu after she is betrayed by Dawit. She meet him when she feels that all men use women as sex-objects. Mekwanint is good enough to change this impression of hers.

Mekwanint decides to marry Bizwayehu, a woman who has a child without marriage. In the Ethiopian society a woman who has a child without being married is totally rejected. The person who decides to marry such a woman receives strong criticism from his family and his friends.

Mekwanint is kind to an unbelievable degree. He treats Bizwayehu very kindly. He takes care of his step-son so kindly. He is even very much happy to know that Bizwayehu has a son before he met her. The way he reacts when he first meets his step-son is unrealistic. He seems as if he meets his own son after many years.

Mekwanint is kind to the extent of helping his wife's ex-boy-friend Dawit. When his wife forbids him from helping Dawit, he refuses and takes him to a hospital. He tries hard to save Dawit's life without the consent of his wife. He does

not know Dawit before but he helps him for the sake of humanity. This makes Mekwanint an angel and affects the plausibility of his characterization.

The writer seems to care less for the characterization of Mekwanint. She makes her marry a very kind person like Mekwanint, because she only wants Bizwayehu to lead a happy life. This is why we say that he is not depicted like the ordinary man in the real world; he is like an angel.

Both Mekuria and Mekwanint appear in the novels in order to help the women who suffered because of men. They help the women to an unbelievable degree and this is the reason that makes one suspect that they are in the novels to give help. The authoresses do not bother to depict the personal ambitions and feelings of these men characters. They only made them busy helping other persons, specially the seduced women.

### 3.2.3 A Comparison of the "Strong" Men and Women Characters Portrayed with Relation to Culture

The following points summarise the similarities and differences observed between "strong" men and women characters. The women are described under "a" and the men characters under "b".

- a. The writers concentrate on the strength of the women characters to live according to their free will. They have the strength to oppose the society's stereotypes on women.

- b. The writers emphasize on the kindness of the men characters in helping the needy specially their women partners. They are determined to act against the culture.
- a. The women characters are courageous and kind to an unbelievable degree.
- b. The men characters' kindness is not plausible. They are god-like characters.
- a. The authoresses give much emphasis to the inner feelings and ambitions of these "strong" women characters.
- b. The inner feelings of the "strong" men characters are not given much attention.

## CONCLUSION

In the novels and short stories discussed in the previous two chapters, most of the characters are portrayed in relation to marriage. Many of the women characters are depicted as the victims of men's cruelty and ignorance. The rest of the women characters are portrayed in relation to the culture of the society. These characters are presented as the victims of the Ethiopian culture that does not consider women equal to men.

Even though the women characters are seen suffering, they are depicted with the potential of coming out of their misery. Some of the women characters are even strong enough to fight back the society's stereotype image of women. These characters have the courage to do what they feel is right irrespective of the society's expectations. Some of the women characters in the novels and short stories have firmly decided to live without marriage.

The authoresses seem to propose economic independence to women so that they could live according to their free will. There are women characters in some of the novels and short stories who are forced to live with the men they hate because they do not have the economic means to sustain their lives and the lives of their children. Some of them are able to decide on their future life without the influence of others because they are economically independent. The writers seem to admire and support the women characters who try to lead their lives according to their free will.

The writers also seem to favour the women characters more than the men ones. Their sympathy to their women characters is shown in their changing the lives of their women characters without sufficient reasons. Their liking of the women characters is also manifested in the excuses they manufacture to justify the misdeeds of their women characters. The women are only presented only as persons who suffer because of the cruelty of men and the oppressive nature of the culture.

It is possible to argue that the women characters are favoured in the literary works not because of the sympathy of the authoresses but because of their creative inability to create plausible characters. This argument could be partially true but it loses ground when one compares the men and the women characters in the fictions.

In most of the works, the lives of the women characters jump to success, while the men fail in life. Even most of the men characters lose their lives when the women survive from possible danger. It is only in analysing the depiction of the women characters in comparison with the men that one realizes that the women characters are very much favoured by the authoresses.

The writers also try to cover the naivety of the women characters by putting all the blame on men and the culture. In the contrary, the men characters are totally irrational. They are ignorant of the feelings of their female partners.

The authoresses also show their sympathy to their women characters by making them get help from others but the help they get is sometimes unrestricted. Because the writers want the women to be successful in the end, they either make them very strong or put them in a situation where they could get too much help from others.

In most of the stories, the men are either poisoned to death or suffer from health problems due to their unmannered behaviour. Their lives end tragically but without following the developments in the stories. Some of them feel guilty for the lives of the female partners they ruined. Their feeling of guilt and their suffering is very much emphasized by the authoresses, and this might have been intended to suggest that the men characters need to be punished for what they did.

The writers gave more attention to the inner feelings of the women characters than the men. Above all, the close relationship between women is emphasized in many of the stories. Women are seen sharing their feelings and experiences with each other freely. The ambitions and plans of the women characters are presented in detail.

The writers' characterization of their men and women characters could be seen from different angles. It is possible to ask various questions as to why the writers portrayed their men and women characters in the manner discussed earlier. It is hoped that research in the field would investigate this issue in more detail, depth and expanse in the future.

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## DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, declare that this thesis is my original work and has not been presented for a degree in any other university.

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