



**A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THEMES AND
DRAMATIC TECHNIQUES IN
ABBE GUBEGNA'S AMHARIC PLAYS**

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this research thesis to my wife, Woizero
Senait Birara, and to my children,

Benyam Taddese

Mary Taddesse

Emnetie Taddese

ABSTRACT

The main objective of this research is to analyze and comment on Abbe Gubegna's Amharic plays under two main sections: Thematic analysis and Dramatic Techniques. Before dealing with these issues the author's biography and his place in the history of Ethiopia drama are briefly provided.

Most of Abbe's Amharic plays are based on historical materials from within and without the country in which the corruption of the administrations and the misery of the people are depicted. The thematic analysis of the plays reveal the dichotomy between the author's reformist stand and his conservative beliefs. On one side he is an out-and-out non-conformist, and on the other, he upholds the hierarchy and the divine guidance of God. His apparent religiousness does not tally with his change-oriented tendencies.

The plays are examined chronologically with regard to their dramatic techniques. They are analyzed from three angles: dramatic situation, structure, and characterization. This analysis shows that little technical improvements have been made from play to play. Finally, the merits and demerits of the plays and the author's social contributions are summarized.

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CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ii
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Purpose of the Study	1
1.2 Method of the Study	3
1.3 Author's place in the History of Ethiopian Drama	4
II. THEMATIC ANALYSIS	10
2.1 Political Themes	10
2.2 Religious Themes	31
III. DRAMATIC TECHNIQUES	38
3.1 Dramatic Situation	38
3.2 Structure	45
3.3 Characterization	52
IV. CONCLUSION	58
REFERENCES	62
BIBLIOGRAPHY	67

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION



1.1 Objective of the study

In this chapter the objective and methods of the study are given with the author's place in the history of Ethiopian drama.

Abbe Gubegna was one of the well-known authors in Amharic literature, who gained popularity through some of his literary works. Like many authors of his time he tried to reflect the dissatisfaction of the people as much as possible. In almost all of his works he advocated the change of the status quo. He did not bypass anything that adversely affected the people without condemning it. Even after one of his works was banned after publication in 1955,* he continued producing books in various literary genres one after the other.

Abbe is better known as a novelist by the general public than as a playwright. The majority of his plays are written at the turning points of political upheavals of the Ethiopian people in the 1950's and 1960's. The play, Yerom Awedadeq /The Fall of Rome/, for instance, was published two months before the coup attempt in 1953. One year after the coup the play Yepatris Lumumba Asazzagn Amuamuat /The Saddening Death of Patrice Lumumba/ was written. The play Poletikanna Poletikennoch /Politics and Politicians/ was written three years after the Ethiopian Revolution in 1966.

* All dates used in this work, unless otherwise mentioned, are according to the Ethiopian Calendar.

Four out of five of Abbe's Amharic plays deal with the political issues of the country, directly or indirectly. Some are deliberately made to coincide with and fit the political conditions of some foreign countries. Under the guise of these foreign settings he manages to elude the tight grip of censorship and could criticise his own government and people.

In the last few years except for his novels his Amharic Plays have not been studied critically by any researcher. Only Tesfaye Dagneu wrote his master's thesis on his novels under the title of "The Portrayal of Society and the Concept of Modernization in Abbe Gubegna's Novels" (1986). Among other Ethiopian critics, who have tried to provide information on the works of Abbe Gubegna, is Ato Asfaw Dante. In his article "Some points on the Writings of Abbe Gubegna," which was published in Amharic in the monthly magazine of Yekatit, 1974.¹ He gives an over-view of Abbe's works. Despite his having to rely on scanty sources and his lack of detailed analysis of the relevant texts, he provides a useful summary of the themes of Abbe's works and their publication dates. In addition, he poses some relevant questions to show the need of paying special attention to the study of their technical aspects leaving to interested researchers of the future to answer them.

Since the author usually deals with the topical issues of the times, critical analysis is vital for un-veiling the merits and demerits of his works. The foremost objective of this thesis is, therefore, to critically analyze the major aims of the playwright by closely examining the themes and dramatic devices he has employed to communicate his messages

to society. Moreover, it is also intended to give a deeper insight into his understanding of the society by comparing his works with some other Ethiopian writers.

1.2 Methods of the Study

In order to depict the norms and values of his society the dramatist employs different angles of presentation namely situation, characterization and plotting. Moreover, as is indicated by R.A. Banks:

The text begins with the dramatist or group of dramatists setting down the words on a page Birth, origins, family background, education, experiences, attitude to life, and relationships will all help condition what is written. Equally important will be the context in which the text is produced.²

In view of this, and to get into the mind and pin-point the major aims of the author, the context in which the plays were written is examined beforehand. In order also to assess the social conditions of the people, the social institutions such as the land tenure system, the bureaucracy, and the government censorship are studied. To validate the researcher's arguments some relevant external materials are quoted when necessary. The study is based on only five of his Amharic plays, namely, Yerom Awedadeq, Yepatris Lumumba Asazzagn Amuamuat, Yerahel Inba, Yedekamoch Wetmed, and Politkanna Poletikennoch, in the order of their publication.

It is hoped that this study will be helpful to those who want to make researches on the works of other playwrights. A critical study of literary works which deal with the topical issues of the people at a given time would



easily be accessible to historians and politicians. Moreover, playwrights, especially the newly emerging society of young authors, can benefit from this study considerably because literature as a whole is a partnership between the author and the critic; the former creates whereas the latter recreates. Criticism illuminates the enveloping darkness of art. And without criticism art would not develop very well.³

1.3 The Author's Place in the History of Ethiopian Drama

On looking back into the development of Amharic literature, especially the three Amharic literary genres - the novel, the short story, and the drama - we witness the fact that they are recent developments especially when compared with the literary history of other countries. The novel and the drama appeared at the beginning of this century and the short story appeared soon after.

The first Amharic novel, Libb Wellad Tarik, was written by Afework Gabreyesus in 1908 (G.C), while the first Amharic drama, Yawrewoch Komedya, by Bejirond Teklehawariat Teklemariam around 1912 (G.C). It was staged in 1920 - 1921 (G.C) (but because of its allegorical satire it was banned.) Consequently there was no more drama production for the next decade or so. However, soon after the coronation of emperor Haile Sellasie in 1923 more plays were written and among their authors Yoftahe Nigussie's name is usually referred to in the forefront with his play Affaieshigne. This playwright is reported to have written several poems and plays of which many cannot be found in print. Since Yoftahe was well versed in 'quene' his works are technically superior to that of Teklehawariat's.

At that time it was difficult to produce plays as there were no halls available for performances. This was remedied when the Hager Fiqr Mahber /National Patriotic Association/ was founded in 1927. But no sooner had it started than it was interrupted by the Italian invasion.

The theater, however, revived with a new spirit of patriotism in 1945 (G.C), after the end of the Second World War. From this time on-wards, the theater was used for many plays whose themes were based on patriotism, morals, and history composed by the early playwrights such as Mekonnen Endalkachew and Kabada Micael. At the same time the novel and the drama began to flourish in large numbers by different newly emerging young authors. Generally speaking, in the study of the development of the Amharic drama the names of the authors that are usually mentioned, from the beginning up to the 1966 Ethiopian Revolution, are Bejirond Teklehawariat Teklemariam, Yoftahe Nigussie, Captain Nalbandian, Ato Melaku Bogosow, Girmachew Teklehawariat, Mekonnen Endalkachew, Kabada Micael, Megistu Lemma, Tsegaye Gebremedhin, Tesfaye Gessesse, and Abbe Gubegna.

The post-war generation of Ethiopian authors, who had the advantages of modern education both here and abroad wrote plays on religious and patriotic themes. These playwrights include Mekonnen Endalkachew, Girmachew Teklehawariat, and Kabada Micael. These authors, though well educated, had little knowledge of theatrical techniques. The productions, therefore, remained not far advanced until people like Tsegaye Gebremedhin and Tesfaye Gessesse appeared with a proper training of stage-craft. It was at this juncture that Abbe Gubegna came on to the Amharic Literary scene in Ethiopia.

Abbe was born in the administrative region of Gojjam at a small place known as Korench Abo, in Bahr Dar, from his farmer father Ato Gubegna Ambaye and his mother Woizero Yigardu Belay, on sene 19, 1925. During his child-hood he joined the traditional church school where Merigeta Gessesse taught him Ge'ez "Quene" and grammar. After completing the traditional 'quene' school he went back to his birth place and served as a Merigeta, traditional school administrator, for sometime. Then he left to attend a modern school in Dangla in the same administrative region where he stayed to complete grade six. After this he travelled to Addis Ababa where he managed to get a job in the Ministry of Information.

No one knows what he did about furthering his education after he left his region. Some say that he completed grade eight only, while others assume that he must have completed grade twelve. His niece told Tesfaye Dagnew that she had seen a report card on which Abbe's name was registered as a grade twelve student.*

He left the Ministry of Information to work in the Ministry of Health for sometime. He was a voracious reader and in the course of time turned out to be a poet, a playwright, and a novelist. He started writing at the early age of twenty-five and continued for two decades until his death in 1972. In his later years he devoted much of his time to writing novels and plays. Totally, he produced over twenty works including eight novels, six plays, three books of poems, a play and a novel in English and numerous articles and essays. His reputation was first established with his novel Allewolloedim/ I refuse to be born/, which was banned on publication in 1955.

Owing to his diehardness in attacking the government he was many times reprimanded, arrested, and banished to Gore and Mocha, in Illubabor region, for more than three years. He lived for almost twelve years without any job depending only on the sale of his literary works.⁵

In almost all literary criticisms of Amharic literature Abbe is regarded as one of the most prolific and categorized among the latest socially committed writers. While some critics describe his works as "mere entertaining than significant",⁶ Joanna - Mantel Niecko records that:

Abbe Gubegna, creator of works popular in progressive intellectual circles, whose subject matter, though historical, is a pretext for the exposure of the most topical social and political issues in the country.⁷

On the other hand, Mengistu Lemma said that Abbe was "a hard working man who has the distinction of having authored the first best sellers in the history of modern Amharic literature".⁸

In his two novels, Allewolloledim and Melka'am Seifenebelbal, for example, he courageously criticises social injustice and advocates economic reform in the country. He is ahead of his times in exposing as truthfully as possible the contemporary social and political issues of the country. He castigated mercilessly the clergy, the press and the then existing old regime. His works, on the whole, enable the reader to glance back and assess himself with pleasure because, as Edwin, B. Burgum puts it: "one of the chief sources of pleasure in reading fiction is its satisfaction of our desire to know more about ourselves as we function together in society."⁹ The author's principal aim was to change the society in which he lived, not to

accept it passively. Though the people were fed up with that regime, few dared to criticise it as courageously as Abbe did. That is why he was a popular author in the eyes of the Ethiopian people, including intellectuals.

His other novel, Gobland: Acheberbariw Tota, is a satiric allegory on the amharic of Adefris by Daniachew Worku, and of Solomon Deressa's collection of poems, Liinet, which to him were uglifications of the language. This type of parody has only been achieved by Abbe in Amharic literature. On the whole "as far as his novels go Abbe's strength lies mainly in his courageous criticism of social injustice and in his advocacy of reforms which he felt would help to alleviate the economic and political burden of the masses"¹⁰

Abbe started his literary work by writing plays while working in the Ministry of Health in 1949. Subsequently, he published: Yerom Awedadeq (1953), Yepatris Lumumba Asazzagn Amuamuat (1954), Yerahel Inba (1956), Yedekamoch Wetmed (1965), Poletikanna Politikennoch (1969), and one in English, The Savage Girl. Kimegnaw Bahtawi /The Grudging Hermit/ was his first play in Amharic which was staged in the newly built Haile Sellasie I Theater. However, there is no printed copy available of this play.

Out of his published plays only two, Yedekamoch Wetmed and Poletikanna Poletkennoch, were staged. His third play on a Biblical theme, Yerahel Inba, failed to be staged chiefly because the tragic history of Rahel's enslavement was too much to chew for the authorities. That is why, it seems he stated in the preface to the play:

ይህ ትያትር ከተጻፈ ጥቂት ዓመታት አልፈውታል። በመፈረክ
 ለመታየትም ተመዲባ ነበር፤ ነገር ግን አብዛኛውን ጊዜ
 ለተንቀባቋሽ የሆነው ፊልም ወይም በዚያ በታ አገባብ
 ለላው ካልሆነ በቀር ለኔ ትያትር ጊዜ በሰመገኘቱ በይታይ
 ቀይቷል፤ ገደ የለኝም፤ ካሳተሁት ይበቃኛል።¹¹

A few years have elapsed since the composition of this play. It was designed to be shown on stage. However, the theater Halls were most of the time pre-occupied with Hollywood films, or other related materials which suit the taste of the status quo. As a result it has remained unperformed. I don't care; if I have it published it is enough for me.

Abbe quit his job in the Ministry of Health and devoted himself to literary work for a considerable period. But finally he could not manage to earn his livelihood on his literary endeavours and went back to his native Bahr Dar where he started a wholesale business with the Bahr Dar Textile Factory. In his later years he became greatly disgruntled with the new ideology propounded by the Marxist regime that replaced the old one. He began to drink heavily and speaking openly against the Derg. During one of his visits to the capital, Addis Ababa, he was found dead in a hotel room. His death was clandestinely accomplished and nobody could trace its causes as was common with other deaths of the time, such as Ba'alu Girma'. Abbe died in 1972 at the age of forty-seven, leaving behind three children, two daughters and a son.

In the following two chapters the thematic and dramatic techniques of the author's amharic plays will be analyzed.

CHAPTER TWO

THEMATIC ANALYSIS

In this chapter it is attempted to explore and critically analyse the themes that the author wanted to tackle in his five Amharic plays. The themes that are reflected in these plays can be categorized into two major groups: Political and religious. Political themes are reflected as major issues in four works, and religious theme as minor in two of the plays. On the other hand, the religious theme has been brought forth as a major and the political as minor in only one play. Politically, the author attacks all important government organizations, the administrations, and the society at large whereas he presents the religious theme belending it with politics and moral teachings. To closely see these issues in detail and trace the political philosophy and general view of life of the author they are separately dealt with by quoting relevant passages from each play to support the researcher's arguments. Moreover, in order to grasp and counter-balance the social concept of the author external historical materials are taken for exemplary purposes. At the outset, the researcher would like to dwell on the analysis of political issues of the plays.

2.1 POLITICAL THEMES

Most of Abbe's literary works are pre-occupied with the political affairs of the country in which he endeavours to warn the society and protest against the administration. In the first place, before delving into the thematic analysis of the plays two

questions must be clarified: "Was Abbe the only political writer in the country?" and "What do we mean when we call Abbe a political writer or essayist?"

It does not, however, mean that Abbe was the only political writer of his time. There were his contemporaries such as Tsegaye Gebremedhin, Paulos Nonno, and Berhanu Zerihum, to mention a few of them, who wrote Asqeyami Lijagered /Ugly Girl/, Yesekaram Shengo / Assembly of Drinkers/, and Dil Kemot Behwala /Victory after Death/, respectively. Like Abbe, they used both domestic and foreign settings. On the other hand, when we call Abbe a political writer we mean that he deals with government administrators in their capacity as administrators of the country and makes the country's problems central to his writings. The content of his works become political in that the way people are governed becomes crucial to him, which is a recurrent issue in most of his literary works. He made a strenuous effort to show and give hints to the political fate of the country and the common people in relation to the then existing political systems. It is mostly in this that the strength and courage of the writer lie, which distinguishes him from the other writers in Ethiopia of his time. In every system of administration in which he lived he did not want to accept the status quo as it was and confronted it with his pen until his death.

Most of his Amharic plays are based on historical materials from within and without the country. His first two consecutive plays with foreign settings and political issues, which allude to the Ethiopian situations include Yerom Awedadeq / The Fall of Rome /, and Yepatris Lumumba Asazzagn Amuamuat / The Saddening Death of Patris Lumumba/. The other two political plays, which directly deal with the

political situations of Ethiopia include Yedekamoch Wetmed /The Trap of the Feeble-minded/ and Poletikanna Poletikennoch / Politics and Politicians/. In these plays the author protests against the administration thereby trying to bring forth the attitude shown toward the peasantry. He also politically criticizes and emphasizes the need of unity of the whole people for political emancipation from the fetters of feudalism and the pseudo-democratic system.

In his first play, Yerom Awedadeq, for example, he depicts how the upper class of the nobility in collaboration with the other administrative organs have engendered the collapse and fall of the Roman Empire through extravagance and self-indulgence. The poor people at the bottom of the social strata are down graded in that system of government. They are highly taxed and if they could not pay their taxes they are confiscated their lands and the property they have. In order to suppress any popular movement the government has institutionalized different administrative organs such as the Police Force, the Judiciary the Criminal Investigation Department, the censorship, and so on, which the author holds to infamy considering them as unproductive section of the society. He contends and boldly asserts that though the governments have installed various stifling organizations through which they can curb popular uprisings, change is inevitable. When brought before the court of the nobles to be tried, Tiberius, the protagonist of the story, boldly says:

"... ለመሆኑ አውነትን፣ የሰው ልጅ መባትን፣ ነፃነትን፣
ቅን መንፈስን በገንዘብ ጓደኛ አሰራር አሰከመዬ ትክክል
ይመስለኝኋል?"¹²

"... by the way, for how long do you think that you can live in stifling truth, human rights, freedom, and sincerity by the power of wealth?"

He makes clear that it was impossible to retrograde peoples causes by forming various strangling organizations by the wealth taken from the people themselves.

As we assess the underlying meaning of the play we understand that the author deliberately brings this theme to the fore in order to depict the misery of the people at home and warns the ruling circle. Because in the form of the history of other country or in writing of outside places and distant time Abbe could indirectly point up issues of challenging cogency to the Ethiopia and government of his time. This, of course, demands of us to go back to the historical background of the 50's to briefly see the type of administration that existed for counter-balance as to whether the author has understood the period in question. This is a necessary approach because, "... to understand a literary work ... we must first attempt to bring our own view of reality into as close an alignment as possible with the prevailing view in the time of the work's composition."¹³

Accordingly, if the social condition at the time of the composition of the play is examined it can be seen that the administration in Ethiopia was becoming more deterrent than ever. The Ethiopia of the 1950's was a feudo-bourgeois state and in much of the thinking of the people feudalism dominated. It was ruled by an autocratic monarch with absolute powers, presumably elected by God. Below him was a group of aristocratic families who were also rulers and land owners. There were Balebbats (indigenous rulers) who lived



throughout the country and who had more access to the rural areas serving the monarch in controlling the peasantry in collaboration with the standing army. At the bottom of this social ladder with no political rights was the great mass of the population, the toiling peasantry.

The land tenure system which was established many years back continued during the reign of Emperor Haile Sellasie I. As time went on the vast expropriation of land was accomplished through the government, especially in the southern parts of Ethiopia. The peasantry of the 1950's in Ethiopia endured a worse political situation. It was condemned to live on dry infertile lands. High taxation was also levied on them. Because of the land's infertility the peasants could not pay their taxes. Some peasants were even evicted from their lands whereas, on the other hand,

... the land holding class was not taxed on either its holdings or the revenue derived from them. On the contrary, the land holding class continued to appropriate part of the tax revenue ... The political power of this class guaranteed its exemption from taxation.¹⁴

The author of Yerom Awedadeq wanted to stress this idea and chose "the fall of the ancient Roman Empire" a fitting vulnerable example to use. Of course, "it is undoubtedly not lost on the authors that one cannot criticise the system of justice in a foreign country without brining the system in ones own." ¹⁵ In the introduction of this play, Abbe poses a question of the causes of the decline of the once greatest empire of the world thereby giving the answer himself:

... መጠን የሌለው ደስታና ፈገግነት ለማግኘት ብቻ የሚገባቸው
መረገገትና ነገሥታት፣ በሰበካና ከሀፍት በዚያ አገር በየጊዜው
በመነበታቸው የነሱ ዘራፊነትና አጥቂነት የዚያን ታላቅ ሕዝብ
መንፈስ ደወሰሰ ነፃነትን ማጣት መልካም ነገር መሰሉ አስከሟቸዋል
ጊዜ አደረሱት፡፡¹⁶

...the rise of nobles, Kings, indigenous rulers, and the clergy every time, who were filled solely with lust to live in indulgence and extravagance, their embezzlement and oppression of the people, brought the spiritual decay of that great people and caused them to loathe their own freedom.

At the time of Haile Sellasie's regime the nobles, and indigenous rulers were responsible for the oppression of the people. Therefore, at the time of the publication of Yerom Awedadeq, the repression of the people reached its peak and two months after its publication, December 1953., there started an unexpected military rebellion, which ushered in the abortive coup d'état against Haile Sellasie's regime.

The author still expresses his dissatisfaction in the introduction to the play, Yepatris Lumumba Asazzagn Amuamuat, which also alludes to the Ethiopian political situation of the coup in 1953. As can be observed from the following quotation, for example, the author takes up the words of a philosopher to explain and condemn the harsh measure taken against the coup leaders:

... ታላቅ ሰቅረዋል ምሥራቅን ነፃ ለማድረግ ከፋ ሥራችሁን ለማሰወገድ አንፂ ከፋ ሥራችሁን የሚቃወሙባችሁን ሰው በመገደል የምታደርጉት መሸሸል አንደማይጠቅማችሁ አወቁ " /ጥላላ /...¹⁷

... Socrates the great teaches, "you should know that it is of no use to prosper by killing those people who contradict your wicked actions but to exonerate you from them...

The play, Yepatris Lumumba Asazzagn Amuamuat, in addition, seems to protest against the censorship of the time, one of the stifling organs of the government while sympathising with the coup leaders by allusion. Before writing this play the author had written many books as he further states in the preface:

ይህችን የትያትር መጽሐፍ ከመጻፈ በፊት ሌሎች ልዩ ልዩ
 መጽሐፍች አዘጋጅቼ ለማሰብ አጠባበቅ ነበር ነገር ግን
 መጽሐፍቼን ለማሰብ ያለብኝ ችግር ብዙ በመሆኑ ለማሰብ
 ባልቻልኩ ቀየሁ፡፡ ይሁን እንጂ ይህችን ... የትያትር
 መጽሐፈን ለማቀየት ትዕግሥት አላገኘሁ፡፡ 18

Before writing this play I had various books
 waiting for publications; but because of many
 problems I could not have them published.
 However, for this one ... I had no patience to
 wait any longer.

This text may tell us the problem with the censors.
 During that harsh political situation it seems that the
 author met with difficulties to have his literary works
 published. Keeping other literary pieces at hand, probably
 due to the censors, among which presumably was the novel of
Allewollidim - banned after publication in 1955, the
 author's considerable problems, financial or censorship,
 could not deter him from writing courageously. The delay of
 the publications of some books might have been caused by the
 censorship, which was particularly rough in Ethiopia and
 stifled many works with political contents. At that time
 "any simple plays even produced by school children are
 censored ... Censorship is not guided by any precise rules.
 Rather, it is permeated by any aura of extreme caution. the
 Ministry of Information advises news paper editors to avoid
 reportage of comment that is critical of government
 policy."¹⁹ It started as far back as 1926 when the news
 paper Aymro was founded. In the issue of 1926, it reads,
 "if anything of^a political nature, or anything that harms the
 people appears in Aymro, the author shall bear the
 responsibility."²⁰ Since then no improvement has been
 made on the laws of censorship until very recently with Derg
 regime's doom in 1983.

Abbe wrote Yepartris Lumumba Asazzagn Amuamuat to show
 his sympathy with Lumumba's afflictions and his

dissatisfaction thereby warning the new generation as it is observable in the preface when he says:

ይህን ዓይነት ሥራ አፍሪቃው ገዢዎች አንዲረዱ በታሪክ መመዝገብ
ለመበቀል አንዲት በፋሽስት ሰማወቅና ለመጠንቀቅ ይጠቅማል፡፡ ከዚህ
ያለ በላይ በአፍሪቃው ከፍለ ዓለማችን የዎቱንና የታሰቡትን
፲፯ኛዎች አስመርባት አንድ ውለታ ከፋይነት ነው፡፡ 21

Recording this work of bloodshed in the annals of history for the African posterity to understand, though not for revenge, is noteworthy to know and beware of it. More than that, not forgetting those killed and martyred heroes in our African continent can be considered as our being indebted to them.

Remembering these African heroes, who lost their lives for the real causes of the people, writing about them can, according to the author, serve to keep alive their memory as monuments. According to the above quoted passage the phrase "... those killed and martyred heroes..." may refer, in this case not only to Lumumba but all the other martyrs in Africa including the coup leaders of Ethiopia; because at that time there were no other important leaders of any popular movement who were killed except in Ethiopia and the Congo.

The sympathy of the author with Lumumba is, of course, undeniable by identifying himself as an African. Lumumba's death while struggling against colonialism for the political and economic emancipation of the people is a historical fact. However, under the guise of Lumumba, along with a historical fact, the author's sympathy with the Ethiopian rebels is not very far from truth, which can be seen in parallel. What are these parallels which enable us to provide an answer to validate our argument?

In the first place, the political upheavals in both countries occupy the same period of time, 1953. And secondly we can understand from the aims upheld by the "martyrs". As the leaders in both countries were engaged in leading their people to political and economic independence they were killed because their actions were interpreted as acts of treason. In addition to the above cited parallels we have the evidence, as mentioned above, that the author was in difficulties to publish many other literary works prior to the production of this play. Therefore, it can be guessed that many other incidents, which may allude to the Ethiopian rebels, might have been cut off by the censors from the play. From these evidences one can deduce that the author under the cover of Lumumba's fate fulfills his nationalistic and broader aims -thus killing two birds with one stone.

Furthermore, it can be seen when the author flounders to mention his country's "heroes". What he could not directly include into the text of the play, beating about the bush, he has even employed the preface for satirizing the government; he states:

የሎምባ ታሪክ ሀገራቸውን ለሚወፋና ለወገናቸው አባባ ለሆኑ
 ሰዎች በጣም አባዛኝ ነው። ራሳቸውን ለሚወፋና ለሰውና ለአው
 ነተኛ ነገር በመሰወት ለሚያወኑ ሰዎች ገን ቅሌትና ቄነት
 ሆኖ ይታያል። ወይም ያልሆነ ትርጉም ይሰጠዋል።²²

The history of Lumumba is very saddening for those who love their country and sympathise with their country-men; but for those who are self-centred and who do not believe in martyrdom for the cause of people and truth it would appear as folly and humiliation. Or else, an unreasonable interpretation is given.

The theme of this quotation is, therefore, suitable to the case of the coup if the places and the characters are exchanged. As a protest writer the author not only condemns the governments which were responsible for the death of the African "heroes" but also attacks the UN Security Council in the same play. He curses the organization because of its partiality shown the Third World and calls on the people of Africa not to trust the UNO.

As the author predicted the inevitability of change earlier in his first play, Yerom Awedadeq, there came a revolution in which the death-knell of Haile Sellasie's regime was sounded. After the passing away of that regime the newly emerging petty-bourgeois class took over the power by proclaiming "socialism" as its guiding principle of administration. The Author still goes on with his protest even against the so-called intellectual politicians and the ruling elites, whom he believes to be responsible for the misery of the people in a new form of oppression. This idea is reflected in his last play, Poletikanna Poletikennoch.

In this play the author presents his protest in the form of satiric comedy in order to be able to ridicule the society in question because satiric comedy "ridicules political policies or philosophical doctrines, or else attacks the disorders of society by ridiculing the violators of its standards or morals or manners."²³ Färrädä, the protagonist, who is no doubt the representative of the author, ridicules the educated class who claim to have brought on the revolution without contributing anything. He attacks them regretting their lack of genuineness for the emancipation of the poor man in the street from the fetters of pseudo-democratic system of government except striving for their own political supremacy. As Färrädä has been

discussing with the other guests during the interviews, a doctor of policial science named Mitiku, comes on the scene with hair combed in an "Afro-style". Presently, he begins to look down upon those guests as ignorant and unfit to lead the country to socialism. He speaks with his towering pride about his educational background; then Färrädä accuses him of his shamming:

ፈረደ:- አረ ይህ አጥባቢ ሃሳብ ለሀገር ጥቅም ላይ የሚውል ብሎ ገፍቶ ሲሆን፡ ወርዶት መታፈን፡ በሽታ፡ ድንቅና፡ ጉሳቅ ልና፡ በነሱም ስም አየተጠራበርን ወደባርነት መገባት በታን / የሚጠባበቅና ከፍተኛ ችህርት የሚጠባበቅና ጉፈረ የሚጠባበቅና ሰብካት በታን / ከአንገሩ ወጪ የኢትዮጵያ ሕዝብ በጤሉነት አይደለልም፡፡ 24

Ferrädä:- What a deceiver this son of a double dealer! Now enough! Ill-treatment, oppression, hunger, humiliation, stifling, disease, ignorance, pain. Deceived in their names to be retraped into slavery is enough for us. Higher education for deceiving, Afrostyle for deceiving, deceiving by preaching is enough for us for we've had enough of them. From today on the Ethiopian population cannot be deceived by such deceptive craftiness.

As is clearly shown in this text after the revolution jargons such as hunger and oppression became the language of the politicians in agitating the people to acclaim socialism. It is these deceptive jargons that the author makes clear to the people as empty words, which could not guarantee their emancipation from ignorance or from whatsoever, and calls their attention to beware of them. These words were used by the so-called political cadres of the 'socialist government' of the Derg. Apart from attacking the intellectual politicians there are many instances in which he directly collides with the rulers. AsDr. Mitiku further explains about the future of Ethiopia,

which would depend on only his education with the exception of the people's participation, Färrädä regrets the plight of Ethiopia by recalling the invasion of the Italian Fascists:

ፈረደ:- /በከፍተኛ ቀጣ / አይ አንጂ ያልታደሰች አገር /
የኢጣሊያ ፋሽስቶች ጠፍተውለት በአዲስ መንፈስ፡
በአዲስ ሥርዓት ተፈጥሮታ ከትክክለኛ ገፈ ትደርሳ
ለች ሰንል ጤላ ጤላው ጉፈረ አየተሸማ ከፍቷ ለይ
ወጣና 33 ዓመት ሙሉ ፈነጠባት፡፡ አሁን ለፈነጠ
ባትና ገፈ ሲያጋባት የሚሻው ደገዎ ሊላው ዓይነት
ጤላ ጉፈረ የአንድ አገር ሕዝብ ተባብሮና ተፋቅሮ
የጋራ መብቱን ነፃነቱንና መሠረታዊ ጥቅሞችን ማጥፋት
በርና ማበልፀግ ሊገባው አንዲት ከጠቅላላው ማህ
በር መካከል የወጡ ጭጥጥ የማይወጡ ጤላዎች ይፈኝ
ጤባት? ²⁵

Farrada:- (in a high tone of anger) Ah you unlucky country! We hoped that after the elimination of the Italian Fascists the country would reach its true goal in a new spirit and a new system of justice but those Afro-style crafty politicians took the lead in rivalry and jeered at her for 33-years. Now who wants to take the leadership and deceive her is another type of "Goferie"! When it is the people of a country that should decide their collective freedom, rights, and the fundamental interests through agreement and love of each other, why should a handful of cunning members of the society scoff at her?

In the above quotation the phrase "... a handful and cunning members of the society..." may refer to the already established government rulers - the political elite of the Derg, the military junta. As it is pointed out in the passage, the Derg regime hadn't allowed the people's democratic rights; and when the fate of the people, according to the author, should have been decided by the people themselves, a few members of the people have usurped the collective authority of the people.

The author repeatedly shows his dissatisfaction with both governments in which he has seen no change as he had wished. From this stand-point we can see that he was a dissident writer in an almost totally conformist society. Unlike some of his predecessors such as Mekonnen Endalkachew, for example, Abbe did not want to accept the status quo as it was. Though Abbe, too, was a zealous Christian in his faith like Mekonnen, his political outlook is quite different in which both serve their respective classes. Mekonnen Endalkachew in his novel, Yaynie Abeba, for example, presents the condition of slavery without showing the severe struggle for the way out for the slaves from their oppression. Instead, he 'implores' the slave masters to make life easier for them to live freely. Yimer Kifle, in his Master's thesis has critically analysed the works of Mekonnen and commented on his political concept to which I also agree; he suggests that:

As a product of his aristocratic class, Mekonnen does not admit changes that shake the foundation of the existing social set up because allowing such changes would only threaten the existence of his class in power. For fear of being denied the privileges the aristocracy enjoyed during Mekonnen's time the artist advocates for the maintenance of the status quo under the guise of the emancipation of the slave.²⁴

Since Abbe himself originated from the down-trodden class of people, the peasantry, we always see him sympathising with this class in his plays and novels. Therefore, Abbe might perhaps be said to be the antithesis of Mekonnen in his political attitude, especially in his attitude toward the peasantry because most of his literary works are change-oriented though it is very difficult to trace the political system he favoured.

Abbe has clearly shown the misery of the peasantry and strongly attacks the ruling circles in these systems of administration. He has used many instances which fit the Ethiopian political context of the time. He has employed a peasant - character in Yerom Awedadeq to explain the difficulties met by the peasantry to show the negative attitude of this class if it is harshly treated. As Tiberius suggests the indispensability of unity of the people for obtaining freedom, the peasant replies in a disgusting voice:

ገበሬ:- አኔ አገር ነባነት አያላችሁ ሰቅሰብኩ ትገርጫለችሁ!
 የወጭውን ጠላት የመፈራው ከብረን፤ አብረን ... ነብረን ይገፈፍል ብዋ አንጂ ሥጋዋን ... አይበላው/
 ሌላውንም ወገኖቹ የጫቡት ገፈውኛል ... አገራችን የጥቂት ሀብቶች አናት አንጂ ለኛ መናችን ናት?
 የርሞ ሀብቶች መቸት ይጉዳላል ብዋ ነው አኔ በጦር የመቸት/ አባከህ ይበላት/ ያንዱላት ያቃጥላት/ ያም ሆነ ይህ ከሥቃይ ካልወጣሁ የለችም ነባነት፡፡²⁷

Peasant:- I wonder when you preach about country and freedom. My fear of a foreign enemy is only not to dispossess me of my honour, right ... and property; other than this he cannot ... eat my flesh. But I am dispossessed of every other thing by the so-called country-men ... Our country belongs to a few rich ones; what is she for us at all? Is it for the sake of the restoration of the comfortable life of the rich of Rome that I should go to war and die! Let it be annihilated! Let them burn her! Let them scorch her! Any way, unless I am relieved of my sufferings it cannot be said that I have freedom.

He uses the legitimate emotion of the peasant to express the general mood of the people. The warning implies that if the privileged group continued with its indulgence in extravagance, becoming indifferent to the condition of

the toiling masses, the country would, in the same way as the ancient Roman Empire, politically and economically collapse beyond redemption because the people which are the source of everything in the country are fed up with the system; that is what awaits us in the future and disintegration would be the result. The attitude of the ruling circle of the socialist system or the Derg toward the peasantry is also reflected in Poletikann Poletikennoch. As the ex-political prisoners engage in discussions with each other at the Ministry of Information during the interviews, a peasant comes on the scene but nobody pays attention to him up to the end of their discussions. Finally, only Färräda, the protagonist of the story, before leaving the scene bids farewell to the peasant, as can be observed below, thereby condemning the Ministry of Information for not giving the peasant a chance to talk:

ፈረደ:- /ለገበረው/ ጉዳ/ በል ወንድሙ ይህና ዋል አኛ
 መቼም ልንረዳህ ሰይሆን በጤክት ልናደርቅህ ነው
 የተፈጠርነው። / ... ወደ ጋዜጠኛው ይዞረል /
 አቶ ጉርፈ /ተው/ ጥቂት ጥቂት ሀሊና ይኑረን /
 አናንተ ለዎቸው ደቀህ ሰዎች ብቻ መጠራጠር አታድርጉን /
 አሁን ለዚህ ይህ ገበረ አዲስ ሰጠኝ? በሱ ስም
 ስለርሱ አንናገራለን። ገን ከልብ አንወደው። 28

Färräda:- (to the peasant) Amazing! Then, brother, good bye. We are born not to help you but to become trouble-some by our endless polemic. (... turning to the journalist) Ato Gorfu! Please, let us be a little bit judicious! Don't make us the butt of jokes of your favourite people! Now, have we given this poor peasant a chance? In his name we talk about him. But we don't like him, really.

As can be observed in this text, during the Derg regime the situation of the peasantry was much talked of through the mass-media but it was nominal and superficial. The author protests against the Derg regime for its reluctance to alleviate the suffering of the peasantry. He has disproved the democratic nature of the new regime, which vain-gloriously strove to form "the first democratic state of Ethiopia in the horn of Africa and assure peace in the Red Sea Area". If the ending of the story in this play is thoroughly assessed in relation to that system, its symbolic presentation can be understood. The peasant is left alone by all the politicians which is symbolic of nobody paying attention to him. Hence, this implies that the peasantry, which is the backbone of the country's economy, should not be neglected. And the author, especially in these two plays- Yerom Awedadeq and Poletikann Poletikennoch - urges the governments and the political elites of the time that the common people, especially the unlettered peasantry, are a living part of the country and have to be considered and treated humanly; otherwise, the fall of any system of administration is inevitable.

The author not only protests against the corruptions of his governments and their negative attitudes toward the peasantry but also criticises the political ignorance of the society at large in the fore-going two plays. For example, Tiberius is caught by the police and made to appear in court. As the people, who have been protesting against the administration along with him in a secret meeting, are asked to give their testimonies, they testify that he is guilty of condemning the system. Then he condemns the people that they do not struggle for their own freedom and rights; they are credulous and blinded by some superficial promises of the rulers. Such type of social criticism is also reflected



in Poletikanna Poletikennoch, which is replete with political satires of the people. Here, his criticism goes to the lowest class of the society such as the office-boys and bar-tenders to which the author himself was an eye-witness during the confused period of political upheaval in Ethiopia in 1966. During the interviews, for example, as Gorfu wants to provide his guests with varieties of beverages, he calls the office-boy in for an errand; then the office boy answers:

ተለላኪ: /ለጠጥ ብሉ/ አሺ ካሉ ወን ቸገረኝ
 ጉርፈ: አ / አባከህ ተሉ በልና አስመጣልኝ /
 ተለላኪ: አንዱ ሉና ለጭፍላት የተቀጠረኩ መሰሉት አንዱ?
 ጉርፈ: አባከህ መገታን ተወው ሻል /
 ተለላኪ: ለአኩልነት መብቴ መፈገፍ ገድሮ ገድሮ አንዱ?²⁹

Office - boy: (Very proudly) If they say Ok I don't care.

Gorfu: Oh, Please, tell them to bring them soon!

O-boy: By the way, do you think that I am employed to prepare coffee?

Gorfu: Please, you stop arguing!

O-boy: Is it shameful of me to argue about my right?

This clearly shows us that the common people are ignorant of politics and everyone demands only his rights without knowing and fulfilling his duties. Therefore, the author indirectly suggests to the whole population that they should realize the worst living condition they are in and insist on struggling hard for a true popular administration in which their rights would be respected.

Abbe Gubegna wrote plays based on a history of distant times not only of other countries but also of his own country in which the political criticism of the people is depicted. In one of his plays, Yadekamoch Wetmed, he

attempts to make us look back to a particular era - the Zemene Mesafint (Era of Princes) - in the Ethiopian history. This era could otherwise be called the "era of plots and counter plots" among the power-hungry warring lords of Ethiopia beginning from the 18th - 19th century. The story of this play depicts jealousy of political power among the followers of a regional governor, Ras Fiqtor, in one part of the country.

As Kennazmatch Belew has been found to be a brave soldier in one of the battles of the time his overlord gives him his only daughter, Fetlework Fiqtor, in marriage as a reward. However, Belew's winning of good fortune breeds many opponents who have found it a heart-burining issue and reslut in the creation of fear in them that he would in the long run be their ruler. Thus, they ensnare him by fabricating false information to create misunderstanding between Belew and the Ras. When his stooges tend to decline from plotting against Belew, Bitodad Amberber poses a question grudgingly that if it were good for them to keep quiet when a new comer excels them in every aspect and assume an honorable place in their midst; Amberber then belittling Belew's fame tries to convince his friends for the plot by saying:

ቢትወደዱ አዎበርብር:- ታዲያ አሁን የዎትላው በሰውን አንተውና
በታዘዘነት ተጠግቶ በልተረጋገጠ ጉበዝና
በንግድ ወደል ሰዎ ሸፍኖ የሰደቱን ገዴና
ያሳንጻጽ ንግል ወርሶ ያገራችንን ዎስፍና
በናታችን ላይ ይጋልብ ነው ሁላችንን አርጉ ወና? 30

Bitwoded Aberber: Now, then, do you mean that we should leave Belew as he is, Coming for a subordinate position and with unconfirmed bravey, Disguising the secret of his immigration in the name of an obese woman, To inherit our region's dukedom without any struggle, By turning us to nothing, and sit upon our heads?

Through Bit. Amberber they establish a strong freindship to work for the abortion of Belew's wedding by placing him in jeopardy. For their intrigues they exploit the existing situtations of the country to make Ras Fiqtor believe whatever deceptive words they tell him because they know that the Ras is anxious and sensitive to the prevailing situations. As it is noted above, the story time is the era of princes in Ethiopia when there was neither peace nor law and order. At that time if someone was unwilling to stay with his overlord, he could easily change his allegiance to another overlord as he wished since there were many rival provincial governors. The over-night growing of many pretendes to the throne in each district resulted in the breaking down of the country into pieces. In this case Yedekamoch Wetmed is a picturesque epitome of the Zemene Mesafint in Ethiopia. The author claims that he heard the original story from elders but the general atmosphere has already been recorded in history in the following manner:

While the most powerful regional lords were warring among themselves, especially for the guardian of the emperor, the provincial governors would transfer their allegiance from one important leader to another, according to circumstances. However, even the authority of the different

provincial rulers was not secure. District governors tried to establish their own little empires; and the many claimants to power in each region expedited the process of fragmentation and disintegration of the empire.³¹

It is this type of mood that the author tries to show that when one prince could not match with the other in warfare he turns to work underground employing every possible means—lying, misguiding, disseminating bad rumours and what not—to eliminate his opponent by changing his colour like a chameleon. The emperor at the top existed nominally assuming only the tittle.

Through this play Abbe enables us to understand the mistakes our fore-fathers committed, which he deemed was a shameful act. It was, for instance, from such a political labyrinth and web of intrigues that Emperor Tewodros II emerged, after considerable years of banditry, as a triumphant monarch who became the cause of the resurgence of the unity of the country. The situation from which Tewodros sprang out, as the following text testifies, his ascending to power, and the ending of the wicked era of the princes in Ethiopia, were astounding:

This formidable army was put under Biru Aligaz, the victor of Debre Tabor, and sent into Dembya. In April the two armies met at Taqusa and the whole of Ethiopia was dumbfounded when it became known that Kassa was the victor and that two of the most famous followers of Ras Ali, Dejazmatch Biru aligaz and Dejazmatch Belew, were killed.

Finally, Kassa was able to come out from behind his mask of submissiveness and openly declare his aim to defeat Ali and reunite Ethiopia under his rule.³²



Abbe's aim of writing this play is to show the complexities and contradictions of the age among the rich war-mongering princes thereby trying to warn the next generations not to repeat such grave mistakes in history if the country is to advance in any aspect of life.

For the goal of the country's progress the author then reiterates the indispensability of unity of the whole people in his plays. In Yerom Awedadeq he demonstrates the people being united to defend their freedom. This implies that if people lack in unity their political freedom would be at stake. Abbe introduces this notion in the form of an analogy, when he later shows the country fallen in the hands of the Berber conquerors to epitomize the lack of unity as a result. This idea seems to be similar to Kabada Michael's Hannibal, in some respects, in which the fate of his country's future is reported by the protagonist himself before his death in exile. As Hannibal has been engaged in fighting the Romans he, in the mean time, sends a message to the members of the state machinery that he has fallen short of provisions to advance in his fighting. They were supposed to co-operate with him in reinforcing his military background. However, they fail to do so and instead begin to plot against him from which Hannibal's defeat results.³³ Both authors show the possibility of harming the country by one's actions or policies, which impel the country to its own disintegration in their plays. In Hannibal the members of the parliament, instead of co-operating with Hannibal, plot against him from sheer jealousy. In Yerom Awedadeq the nobles become too much indifferent to the situation of their country leaving the burden of defending its freedom to only the military section. Both authors present that the

unity of the people can alter the country's identity and the ruler's characters are the country's destiny. Therefore, they have shown the people being wrecked by the hands of their enemies as a result. In the case of Abbe, though he reiterates about unity and has shown that he believes political change is possible without bloodshed, he, in the final analysis depicts the people unanimously fighting against their common enemy.

Abbe also reflects the need of unity in Poletikanna Poletikennoch. The play ends when all the so-called intellectual politicians disperse without formulating any concrete policy for the country. This situation may imply the necessity of unity among the different political groups and the people in order to achieve a suitable administration for the people.

In spite of his attacks and inciting of the people against the government of his time, we see Abbe contradicting himself, sometimes becoming progressive and sometimes conservative. In the aforementioned plays, especially in Yerom Awedadeq, and Poletikanna Poletikennoch, he has shown how the corrupt, greedy, and power-hungry officials of the country have ill-treated the people. He has publicised the people that their democratic rights have been usurped. He has informed the people that it is the people themselves that should decide their own destiny. In order to achieve these goals, however, the author "manacles" them not to act aggressively against their oppressors. He instead advises them to "wait until change comes by itself out of the blue."

2.2 RELIGIOUS THEMES

Abbe Gubegna sometimes starts his religious and moral teachings by presenting himself as a model believer in the Almighty God even out of the context of his literary issue - even on the cover of his books. From his repeated reference to the existence of God and the martyrdom of Jesus Christ, it is clear that the author's perspective of life is obviously overwhelmed by strong religious sentiments. His religious issues are presented in almost all his plays blended with the political themes either as minor or major; they are given as minor in Yerom Awedadeq and Poletikanna Poletikennoch, and as major in Yerahel Inba /Tears of Rahel/.

In these plays the author reiterates that acclaiming of a true faith, which accepts the existence of God, is a crucial issue to everyone; that is, it is only Christianity in which people can live freely and do good owing to such moral teachings as:

... አዎላከ ሰውን ሲፈጥር ነፃ አድርጎ ፈጥሮታል፡፡ ሲኖርዎ
ከከፋ ሥራ በስተቀር መልካም ሥራ የሆነውን ሁሉ በነፃ አንፂ
ሠራ ተፈቅዶለታል፡፡³⁴

...God created man free. During his life time on earth he is allowed to freely do everything good except bad things.

Moreover, in his play, Poletikanna Poletikennoch, he tries to establish a strong relationship between the people and its creator. This thought is presented blended with the major political themes of the play. As it is discussed earlier, the author through his representative, Färrädä, strongly criticises the so-called politicians, who priggishly claim to contribute much to the coming of the

revolution of 1966. He, of course, accepts social revolution is impossible without the participation of the people including students, workers, peasants, soldiers, and the intellectuals but, according to the author, this is not enough. As Färrädä has been called back by the judge to the court to check whether he is willing to apologise or not he becomes stubborn; then the judge loses his temper and says:

ገፍ:- /ለዘበኝ/ በቃ ወሰዳችሁ በጥበቅ አሠሩ!

ፈረደ:- ገደ ሰላም አገዛዝብህ በለበት ቀን አፈታህ

ገፍ:- አናጸለገ!

ፈረደ:- ታያችሁ!! 35

Judge (to guards) That is all! Take and imprison him under surveillance.

Färrädä: It doesn't matter; I will be set free When God permits.

Judge: We will see!

Färrädä: You will see!

As can be seen in the above dialogue, he believes that social revolution is not the result of only the efforts of human beings but also the result of God's will. Farrada is an ardent believer in the presence of the Creator and hopes that God would bring changes in which he would be set free. Therefore, as he had believed and wished, the revolution of 1966 breaks out after sometimes and he is released from prison as a result.

Abbe, completely assuming the role of a preacher, brings forth his religious teachings in his religious drama, Yerabel Inba. Throughout the whole play he stresses the existence and exaltation of God's capability of performing various miracles trying, at the same time, to convince some people, who are sceptical to believe in the stories presented in the Holy Scriptures. It is stated in the preface that:

በዘመናችን ከጾንኖር ሰዎች መካከል አንዳንዶቹ በሚታይና በሚጠበቅ
 ነገር ካልሆነ በቀር በማይታይና በረቂቅ ነገር ማመንን አንደኛቸው
 ርና ይቆጥሩታል፤ በሰፊው ጊዜ የተሠራውን አንደኛውን ትርጉም ተረት
 ይመለከቱታል፡፡³⁶

From among us, who live in this period of ours, there are some people who consider that believing in the abstract and invisible things, except in the tangible and the visible ones, as ignorance. They also consider the stories that happened in the past as pure fiction.

Hence, the intention of producing this literary piece is to teach ethical values ^{to} those people who do not believe in the existence of the invisible spiritual being and in His capability of rescuing the people who accept and believe in Him. His story depends on an incident in the Book of Jeremiah in the Holy Scriptures, which he expands by connecting it to some parts of Exodus covering chapters 2 to 15, in the same Holy Bible.

In the story Rahel, an Israelite slave, is forced to kill her twins in a mud - well by the tyrant masters of the Pharoah of Egypt. She then bitterly cries unto God and He sends Moses and Aaron to liberate the children of Israel as a result. However, the king stands his ground not to let them go out of the country until God sends many different plagues against him and his people. The king then summons all the country's magicians and conversant philosophers to save him from these God-sent disasterous plagues. As the magicians suggest some invisible counter supernatural forces the pseudo-philosopher finds himself at variance with their ideas: he then addresses the king:

ፈርሶን ሆይ / መቼም አልሰማሃ አኔ ከሀናት ገር የቀጥ የማገሩን
 በማደውቀት ነገር አናውቃለን በሰው ሲባሉ ሲቀጥፉ፤
 በአውነት ከፈለግህ ቅማሱን በሰው ላይ አንዳይገባረፉ
 ደም አንዳይሰፋፋ፤
 የቅማል መሰፈሪያ ድሪብ ለበሽታ ድሆች ከገር ይጥፋ፡፡³⁷

Oh Pharoah! But I do not agree with those
clergy, Who chatter about
everything and,

Who tell lies claiming to know everthing what they
don't know.

If you really want the lice not to be spread,
Let those papuers, who have become
the habitat of the lice, be
eliminated.

The 'Philosopher' places himself aloof from the magicians by adhering to the belief of the modern scientific achievements, which he thinks to be superior to any spiritual belief. He then suggests the impossible which shows the weakness of the scientists and the grave mistake they commit. As can be observed he neither believes in the miracles of the super-natural nor in the ways of the magicians; he is left in a dilemma and has no conviction in anything except in things that can be sensed by our five sense organs. The author ridicules the pseudo-scientists who tend to claim and varify the non-existence of the one true God.

Though all the magicians and the 'wise-man' suggest many different solutions to eradicate the plagues, it has become difficult to do away with them and finally the king succumbs to the power of the Almighty God and allows the Israelites to go out. The beliefs of the so-called philosophers are also proved wrong whereby the author tries to convince and edify the spectators' morals by showing God's capability of miraculously rescuing his people from any problem.

Moreover, the author emphasizes and presents God as the source of everything including politics to establish the

audience's strong relationship with its Creator. The emphasis can be understood from a statement given in the preface whereby he is motivated to write this religious drama; he states:

... የአፍሪቃና የአሰያ ዎድሮ የአሰያውያንና የአፍሪቃውያን ብቻ በነበረበት ዘመን ... በልዩ ልዩ ዎክንያት ... በቅኝ ገዢዎች አጽ ወደቀ ... ገዢዎች የነበሩ ከፍሎች የአውጥኳ መሣሪያ ጌቶች ሲሆኑ በቅኝ ተገዢነት ሲጠቁና ሲጨቁኑ የኖሩት ሕዝቦች አገዛዝብ ሲጠቁ የዓለም ፖለቲካ ድቅም ብዙዎቹ ያለ ደም መፈሰስ ነፃ ሲወጡ ቻሉ። ... ከባለ አውጥኳ በመብት ጥቅም ወርቅ አዎላኪ ታለቅ ጠለት ነፃ ያወጣ አዎላክ ... ዛሬም ተከዎሩን ደገመ በነል ዎን ያሰፍረናል? 38

... When the continents of Africa and Asia belonged to the Africans and Asians themselves ... through various means ... they fell under the yoke of colonialists. Though the rulers owned atomic weapons, ... most of the oppressed people could get their independence ... by the political situation of the world brought by God, without bloodshed. Therefore, what makes us feel shame if we claim that the God, who could have freed ... from the great enemy that owns atomic bomb and arrogant wealth worshiper, has repeated His miracle?

As is evident in the above quotation the play is also written, it seems, in sympathy with the Third World countries, especially Africa and Asia, which were once suffering under colonialism and which have gained their independence. According to the writer, their independence was caused by the will of God, who miraculously altered the political situation of the world. It is well known that many African states got their independence in the 1950's, after the Second World War, without any protracted armed struggle. This, the researcher thinks, might have been considered by the author as a vivid evidence of miraculous occurrence. He depicts the political situation of the world belending it with the major theme of religion in this religious drama.

In the process of the implemementation of a religious theme God is presented as omnipresent and omniscient in Abbe's plays. From this view-point of the author, therefore, it seems that he refutes those revolutionaries, who believe and assert that "Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun."³⁹ Generally speaking, the political attitude of the author can perhaps be summed up as the English saying goes, "Man proposes and God disposes."

Abbe's amharic plays as a whole are the an indirect condemnation of the evils of society and advocates an all embracing change in the dominant institutions, as well as in the economic systems of the then existing governments, peacefully. There is, for instance, a tendency to believe that a peaceful and bloodless transition from a corrupt and unjust system of pseudo-democratic government into a true and a genuine democratic system is possible. However, the writer seems to have been clear neither about how to bring this social transformation he favours to reality nor about who should play a leading role in the process. Though the plays are the reflections of the author's political consciousness, it is difficult to say precisely to which school of political thought and literary movement Abbe would belong.

CHAPTER THREE

DRAMATIC TECHNIQUES

To Abbe Gubegna political issues seem to be the paramount factors that determine the progress of a country. By dealing with political themes he believes he can kill two birds with one stone, namely, politicising the masses and at the same time contributing to the development of Amharic literature. In the preface to one of his plays he suggests that writing about some past happenings in Ethiopia in the form of novels or plays can develop our language and literature by learning much from the past.⁴⁰

In this chapter it is attempted to examine the technical aspects of Abbe's plays: what progress has he shown from his first play onwards? Is he in accord with what he had set out to do? In order to answer these questions and comment on the devices he has employed, three important aspects of the plays are considered: Dramatic situation, structure, and characterization. It is, of course, understood on the part of the researcher that it is difficult to examine each of these features separately as one cannot exist independently of the other; therefore, there will be some overlapping in the forthcoming analysis.

3.1 Dramatic Situation

Before delving into the author's methods of selecting situations the term 'situation' must first be clarified. In fact, in any literary work, including drama, situation is created only when characters face each other. As O'Hara puts it, situation "is the pull of individual against

individual, or individual against circumstances, or of conflicting elements within the individual, or a compounding of these tensions that makes us take note of any situation."⁴¹ While arranging a text for the drama two important situations should be considered thoroughly by the dramatist. At the outset, he must bring in a situation which leads to the subsequent situations, which gradually build up to a crisis in the story. From among many different possible situations at his disposal, the author will have to choose an initial situation, which he thinks would best attract the attention of the audience and prepare it for the ensuing events. In other words, the basic situation is the core of the play on which the whole fabric of the story is built.

Abbe's Yerom Awedadeq, for example, starts with five characters who discuss the condition of their living, which has been severely affected by the ruthless exploitation of the nobles of Rome. This initial situation is, of course, supposed to arouse interest in the audience by painting the background of the story and motivating the audience to be attentive for the coming events; but Abbe's method of starting this play is artificial and static. We cannot understand how these "people" in the starting situation happen to face each other at that particular place and time but they go on talking until they leave the stage. Although, as O'Hara aptly puts it: "in drama both initial and basic situations seldom coincide",⁴² the author's choice of this same initial situation to serve as the basic situation of his plot, is tenuous. The dissatisfaction of the people, the economic collapse of the country, and its loss of

dignity, the remorse of the nobles, and their pledging to work for unity—are all made to stem from this rather weak start.

The successive events in this play are not properly constructed to help the plot move forward. The prolonged and repetitive dialogue between the protagonist, Tiberius, and the nobles in the courtroom scene loosens the plot and deadens interest. The author flouts the principle of selection; but he had to,

First of all ... find a special kind of situation—one that is compact of its own nature or that can be made compact without vital loss. "Selection" is an important principle in the creative process of every artist, but the dramatist must utilize it most regorously. He must get down to the bare centre of a situation.⁴³

The plot in Yerom Awedadeq then lacks "its own nature of compactness." He could have selected the courtroom scene as his opening gambit by excluding its repetitive dialogues, which could have arrested the attention of the audience; this would have enabled him to present the past actions by the implied dialogue of the characters. His characters are, however, made to take too much time on less valuable matters, which are practically void of suspense and interest.

Similarly, the situations in Yepatris Lumumba Asazzagn Ammuamuat are non-selective. All of them are taken from real occurrences and are presented as they are. In the opening situation, the citizens of the Congo are shown rejoicing at Lumumba's election and condemning the past evils of the Belgian colonialists. On this occasion,



Independence Day, an inaugural speech by Lumumba is expected but is by-passed for no reason. After this initial event, scene after scene follows for several pages, seldom rising in tension until we come to Lumumba's death. The story revolves around the idea of the Western powers being suspicious of Lumumba as a communist sympathizer. Owing to this suspicion and mistrust of the big powers, Lumumba and his colleagues are finally meted out their death penalties.

The plot shows an indirect conflict between the Eastern and the Western blocs. The Western powers lay obstacles before Lumumba by using their veto powers in the UN and by imposing trade embargoes on the Congo. The rest is mere bickering by politicians. Only one event is arresting: the rumours of Lumumba's escape from prison to Stanliville to mobilize his army. But the rumours are found to be fabrications by Lumumba's enemies who plan to kill him by using these rumours as a pretext. The author presents this story as it had happened in real life without introducing any atristic excellence. "... what society expects from the writer is," to quote A.ZiS, "artistic innovation and the truth of life, which has always been the essence of real art."⁴⁴

In his religious drama, Yerahel Inba, the playwright deals with the relationship between mankind and its Creator. In the first place, we approach the play through the sufferings of Rahel, an Israelite slave, in child birth, who is forced to kill her twin infants by the tyrant rulers of Egypt. She then bitterly cries unto God. The germ of the plot develops from this situation, which hooks the audience by suspense: what would God's answer be to such bitter cries? It is this gripping situation which leads us with great expectations to the forthcoming results. The

author, unlike in the above mentioned two plays, has chosen a better initial situation but as in Yerom Awedadeq, he makes both the initial and basic situations to coincide. In Yerabel Inba he doesn't mention, even by implication, the basic situation given in the Holy Scriptures. According to the Holy Scriptures, the main cause of the story is, of course, the multiplying of the Israelites in Egypt. The situation of maladjustment is created by the Israelites' growing in number in Egypt and the fear of the Egyptians that "in case war should befall us, then they certainly will also be added to those who hate us and will fight against us and go out of the country."⁴³ This central idea should have been brought forth, which would have enabled the audience to comprehend the basis of the story.

The conflict starts as God sends Moses and Aaron to lead the Israelites to their country - "to a land flowing with milk and honey."⁴⁴ As the Pharaoh refuses to let them go out, God sends plague after plagues against the Egyptians. They then succumb to God's power and allow them to leave; but as the people of Israel reach the coast of the Red Sea, they chase after them to bring them back to slavery. The Red Sea miraculously parts until the Israelites pass through and comes to its initial position submerging and killing the Pharaoh with his forces. The plot of this play is more compact than the plots of the other plays perhaps because it follows the exciting incidents recounted in the Bible.

Abbe's other play, Yedekamoch Wetmed, has a plot with better selective situations which rise in ascending order. The initial situation from which the story takes-off is the scene where the antagonists plot against Belew, the protagonist. This raises questions in the audience's mind:

Why do they plot against him? Would they be successful with their plots? The audience obliged to ask such questions awaits eagerly for the coming events. The villains are then shown in different situations while planning further their intrigues.

But behind this situation we have the basic situation of Belew's success and prowess, which have brought him the good fortune of the Ras's daughter in marriage. Belew's valour has occurred several weeks before the incident that opens the play. It is through the opening situation that the author, by sticking closely to the present, brings back the past by suggestion. It is after Belew excels his comrades in arms and wins the Ras's daughter as a reward that the others, out of sheer jealousy, begin plotting against him. From this basic or specific situation the plot, with its ramifications, develops in tension and mood which makes the play arresting.

The villains, in fact, succeed when they find people who believe their false information. When the Azmaris tauntingly mention Belew's name in their songs, as they have been advised to, Belew loses his temper, springs to his feet, and goes home. Bewildered, the Ras discusses the situation with his counsellors. It is decided to call back Belew to explain his action. It is at this moment that the principal intriguer, Amberber, exploits the situation. By choosing his own accomplices to act as messengers he terrifies Belew to run into the forest as an outlaw. This speeds up the plot to move ahead to its critical point by building crisis upon crisis. A noted drama critic testifies what is meant by telling a story on stage and the importance of crisis:

Events in a play are surcharged with suspense so the story tends to move from peak to peak, giving the audience a sense of the intervening valleys having to climb down and up again. These peaks of plot are the crisis of the story and the art of telling a story upon the stage is chiefly the art of building crises.⁴⁷

The last work of the author is the play, Poletikanna Poletikennoch, which deals with the 1966 Ethiopian Revolution. The play opens as Tezzera expresses his fear of imprisonment because a security police has heard him accusing emperor Haile Sellasie, the previous day while drunk. Now, after coming to sobriety, he becomes agitated at the prospect of being jailed. And, of course, as soon as he goes out from the bar, he is caught by the police and the bar-ladies are summoned to give their testimonies at court. Here, the interest which begins to rise in the audience is reduced because we get nothing new in the next scene which repeats what has already been told. This initial incident foreshadows and immediately links us with the basic situation of the play, that is, the sufferings of many dissidents in and out of prison. The sufferings of the people in prison have been there for the last nine years before the imprisonment of Tezzera, which we understand from the protagonist of the story, Farrada. It is this suffering of the people, according to the intention of the author, that has instigated the 1966 Ethiopian revolution in which the old state apparatus has been ousted and been replaced by the Derg. Since the events that lead to the revolution are not adequately developed, the author seems to urge the audience to take it for granted as spontaneous occurrences. After this the plot goes nowhere except for the polemic among the political prisoners, who finally disperse without any tangible results.

In the course of the development of the story there are repetitive and unconvincing altercation among the characters. In the court scene, for example, the protagonist, Farrada, is constantly called back and forth to beg for forgiveness. In the second scene alone the judge asks Farrada the same question ten times: "why don't you apologize?" The researcher finds this insistence as incredible because during that regime the judges could do anything to anybody, especially to those who were found to be critical of the Emperor. They were working not for the well-being of the people but for the maintenance of the status quo. If we assume, on the other hand, that it is to pave the way for getting bribes, the customary approach would be different. It would have been more convincing if the author had done the opposite: the accused insisting to be released for bribing them. Not only this, the playwright divides the third scene into two sub-scenes in which no logical interdependence of situations can clearly be seen. As a result the plot runs fast at the beginningⁿ and slows down in the end. For: "it is likely to be rather slow in the early part of the play, where the author faces the large problems of exposition and of laying the groundwork for all the subsequent action."⁴⁸

The author prefers a direct presentation of stories from their inception, seldom employing the techniques of foreshadowing or flashback. Hence, in most cases, the situations are undramatic, static, and repetitive.

3.2 Structure

In order to bring forth his theme the author must make his characters experience different situations from its inception through to its end. These experiences must not,

however, be rendered at random. They must have some kind of order. Structure is "the arrangement of events by which the initial situation is modified and developed until the final situation is brought about."⁴⁹ To identify the structure of a play we must consider it as an organic entity in which events occur interconnectedly in cumulative sequences following Aristotle's dictum: "... a play should have a beginning, a middle, and an end."⁵⁰

The first part of a play's structure is exposition. In this part the audience is told about the intent of the characters and the circumstances they find themselves in. "Exposition sets forth what we need to know about the characters and situation before we can understand what the play is about."⁵¹ There are different methods of exposition. Though the most commonly used method is dialogue, there are wordless devices such as stage setting and physical action of characters in which a moderate amount of exposition can be made.

In the opening scene of Yerom Awedadeq five characters in one of the streets of Rome directly delve into describing the plight of their country; we don't know how they happen to be there in the first place. This scene does not develop impetus and arrest the audience's attention. "Anything which is descriptive reduces the significance of the decision and obscures the meaning. Since this situation is the key to play, a static or undeveloped opening will infect the movement of the whole play."⁵² The banquet scene that follows is nothing more than a repetition of what has already been discussed by these characters. Since the events are not made to progress ahead, it results in boredom. The setting of the preparations of the banquet at Chichero's house serves better in telling what we need to

know about the extravagance of the nobles because it is very sophisticated. The entrance of the invited nobles and priests into the banquet hall alone could have served better as a wordless exposition than the babbling of non-entities in the streets of Rome.

The story reaches its climax at the news of the defeat of the Roman soldiers in the hands of the Berbers. We don't even know whether the country was at war in the first place. As Lawson contends:

The climax of a play, being the point at which the struggle of the conscious will to fulfill its aim reaches its greatest intensity, and maximum scope, is the key to the play's unity. It is the root action, determining the value and meaning of all the events that have preceded.⁵³

Yerom Awadadeq lacks this unity because we don't know how the Roman soldiers are defeated. The battle takes place off-stage and it is only reported to the audience, another weakness. This climax comes in the middle of the play and all interest is lost after that.

Like Yerom Awadadeq, Yerahel Inba has similar divisions of acts and scenes. However, the movement of its plot and the arrangement of its incidents are quite different. The climax in Yerahel Inba, by contrast, comes at the end and is quite effective. In the first part we see the sufferings of Rahel, representative of the people of Israel, and Jehovah's answer to ^ethir sufferings by sending Moses and Aaron. The transition of this part to the next is effected by Pharooh's terrible dream which foreshadows his doom. In this play before the plot rises to its climax, an intensified conflict takes place between Jehovah and Pharoah when He sends ten different harmful plagues through Moses to which the Pharoah finally succumbs.

When we examine the play Yepatris Lumumba Asazzagn Amuamuat, on the other hand, from the stand point of structure, the play seems to be lacking in some important techniques a good play needs to have. To begin with, the beginning, the middle, and the end of the play are not interwoven. At the beginning we see Lumumba striving to enhance his country's independence by having discussions with different groups of people (his colleagues, ambassadors, journalists). Then suddenly follows the arrest of Lumumba. Nevertheless the audience finds his arrest so sudden and surprising. It has, however, never been made to aware of this surprising event at the first part of the story through the means of foreshadowing. The conflict, too, is somewhat loose. The characters are, of course, engaged in a kind of polemic situations. Yet, the conflict among them is not vivid and intensified; it contributes very little to the climax of the story. In the final analysis Lumumba's inevitable death is exposed to the audience through the technique of dream. The plot reaches its climax when the Belgian military officers take Lumumba and his colleagues to assassinate him off-stage which is later reported by Dag Hamarsjold, UN - Secretary General. The story ends with the curses of Lumumba's supporters of the Secretary - General but the author unnecessarily repeats the information of Lumumba's death by making Gizenga explain it to the audience.

Of all abbe's Amharic plays Yedekamoch Wetmed has the best structure. Here the author employs better devices of exposition and build up of crisis. In exposing the intent of characters and the implication of circumstances, he has employed various methods such as settings, physical action, asides, dreams, and soliloquies. All in all, the play has a good beginning, a middle, and an end.

The master intriguer is Bitodad Amberber. At the outset he takes his two stooges, Ballata and Ayyala, to Fatlework's house to influence to side with them but they find it very difficult to win her support. At this moment Ballata and Ayyala tend to despair and draw back. But Amberber strengthens their morale by telling them that he has already arranged other means which would lead their conspiracy to success. The plot does not, however, show Amberber's wandering from place to place to hire the minstrels and Debtera Beqalu, and to win the support of Woizero Yiggebdshall. These clandestine deeds are accomplished off-stage and are exposed by Amberber through which method the audience also learns how these forces of opposition will function in the future. Amberber's two stooges are then convinced and decide to continue with their subversive plan, and with this decision the first part transfers to the second in which their plan is to be carried out. Now the audience's attention is gripped and it waits eagerly to see what is going to transpire.

The villains, next, begin to instil suspicions in both central characters - Belew and the Ras - until they become alienated. The author employs the technique of "asides" to effect this when they approach below. The first insinuation to the Ras, on the other hand, is made by the hired Debtera, who negatively mentions Belew's name while interpreting the Ras's dream. To reinforce the Ras's suspicion of Belew's betrayal, Amberber, as soon as Debtera Beqalu leaves, informs the Ras that Belew has an intention to usurp his power by killing him. At first both sides do not take the matter seriously but it begins to take root in them when, at the banquet, the minstrels mention Belew's name in their songs. Here the author makes Belew too shy to speak the truth thus preparing him for his tragic end, which is

unconvincing because the Ras himself advises him not to be so emotional. Hence, since the possibility to reveal his suspicion is already there, he should have told him the truth. But Belew's unnatural act at the banquet twists the Ras's attitude against him. Also the Ras's feeble attempt to dig out the hidden truth is subverted. And he accepts what the villains have told him and his inner psychological conflict is projected to the audience through this soliloquy:

አውነት ነው አሁንስ አወቅሁ አለመን ማለት ያስቸግራል፤
አውነት ቅንነት ካለው ሰው ሰው አንዲያ ያፍራል?
ወረው በአሽመር ሲነገረውስ ሰውን ይደነብራል?
የሰው / የሰው / በከንቱ አይደለም አለ የሠራው ከህይወት፤
የኔን ሕይወት የሚሻበት፤ ወይ የሚጥለኝ ከወርደት፤
አሁን አንዳስተቀላሁት አይደለም የፋሮ በለው ...⁵⁴

Finally, I came to understand which I have found difficult to believe,

If he were sincere why should he be afraid of my gaze?

Why did he as well be in a stampede out of my friend's sarcasm?

No! Never! I must be wrong, there should be something cynical about him,

He must have some drive for killing or defaming me.

I have come to realize that I had a misconception of Belew...

This monologue helps the audience to understand the degree of tension existing between the two characters. This tension in its turn is aggravated when the two villains report the betrayal of Belew to become an outlaw. The story

then rushes to its climax when the villains kill Belew. The story resolves itself with the Ras's knowledge of Belew's innocence and his orders for the arrest of all those who participated in the conspiracy.

In Abbe's last play, Poletikanna Poletikennoch, we come across with the problem of structural arrangements. The beginning of the story deals with the sufferings of the people from injustice and maladministration. What ought to have been brought forth in the second scene is already shown in the first. As Tezzera expresses his fear to Kabbadech and asks her how she is going to testify, she tells him all. The bar-ladies summons to the court is futile also in the second scene because they are induced to answer nothing but "yes" to the judge's questions. In this part of the play we see characters only suffering in the hands of the prison authorities. They are not made to struggle or strive in conflict against their oppressors. How can the play reach a proper climax without initial conflict? If the author had thought it over, however, he could have found many instances to intensify the conflict simply by turning to the events currently taking place in the country. Revolution was in the air in almost all spheres of life. The author proceeds to the play's climactic situation without sufficient struggle by the characters. By this, it seems, he intends to indicate the sudden eruption of the Revolution. But in drama before reaching the climax, adequate information should be given to convince the audience. That is why in Poletikann Poletikennoch the outbreak of the Revolution seems to come out of the blue.

The final part deals with protracted interviews. We see only verbal battles and empty arguments between the so-called revolutionaries and counter-revolutionaries, who finally leave the scene without reaching any consensus.



3.3 Characterization

... ይህንን ትያትር የሚመለከት ሁሉ የፎኑን መውረድና በምን መከንያት መውረዱን አንጂ ዘመኑን ወይም በወረቀቸበት ጊዜ የነበረውን መሪ መፈለግ አያቸውም፡፡⁵⁵

...Those who see this play should be concerned only about Rome's collapse and the causes of its collapse; they need not know the time or the head of state at the time of its collapse.

This remark is given in the introduction to the play, Yerom Awedadeq, which clearly shows the author's sole interest in his theme rather than the historical content. This means that Abbe is not worried at all about the verisimilitude of historical figures.

This attitude of the author has influenced character delineation negatively in almost all his plays. Many of the characters are shadowy sketches and mere representatives of abstract ideas. They are always too much concerned with describing situations without involving themselves in action for several scenes. Their language does not express their inner feelings. They are only mouthpieces for the author's ideas. A dramatist must, however, choose the significant moments in the characters' lives and by appropriate language and action release his audience from the boredom of day-to-day life. Arthur Miller suggests that:

... When you strip from the human being everything that is not of significance, you may get a valid moment out of him, a valid set of speeches, a valid set of attitudes, but in the normal, naturalistic concept, they are not real because the bulk of reality is, of course, its utter boredom, and its insignificance, and its irrelevancy...⁵⁶

The other important factor that also reduces the effectiveness of his characters is their similarity with one another. He invariably follows the same pattern of characterization throughout his plays. As one examines his plays one encounters the same characters over and over again with changes only in name: Tiberius, Davidson, and Farrada, in Yerom Awedadeq, Yepatris Lumumba Asazzagn amuamuat, and Poletikanna Poletikennoch, respectively, are portrayed as bold, emotional, and pacifist characters throughout. They are courageous critics of inept state machineries. It is clear that they are the ideal heroes of the author himself. Tiberius in Yerom Awedadeq, for example, is a pacifist, who does not want the people to engage in armed struggle against their internal enemies. Instead he urges them to act peacefully in unison and "implores" economic and political reform. As the people insist on undertaking an armed struggle to wrest political power from its oppressors, Tiberius pacifies them by saying:

... ከኛ ውስጥ ማንኛውንም ከፋ ሰው ሲሆን በጦርነት አንፈልገው /
 ለዎን ያለችሁ አንደሆነ አኛ አርሰ በርሳችን የተዋጋን አንደሆነ
 በዙፊያችን ያሉ ... የወጭ ጠላታችን ያለ ችግር ሊመሰሰን ይች
 ላል።⁵⁷

Let's not put fingers on triggers against our own brothers [nobles] whether they are wicked or not. If we focus our struggle on ourselves, the ... enemies who have surrounded us would easily dismember our country...

The author uses boastful heroic language. When the nobles threaten him with death, Tiberius expresses his fearlessness by hurling insults at them.

Farrada, in Poletikanna Poletikennoch, likewise, considers himself a true politician, who upholds the causes

of the down-trodden masses. He is as patriotic as Tiberius and as zealous too. Davidson in Yepatris Lumumba Asazzagn Amuamuat, on the other hand, is an English gentleman more friendly to the Africans than the other westerners. When the other European settlers of the Congo disseminate false rumours about Lumumba he, opposing his co-nationals, testifies that Lumumba can be considered as the father of freedom of his people.

The speeches of most of the characters, however, lack genuineness and are not self-revelatory. This emanates from their weakness to involve themselves in conflicts. "... A weak man fights under pressure- and unless he fights, according to his powers and in his own way, there is no conflict."⁵⁸

Abbe's two tragic heroes, Lumumba and Belew, in Yepatris Lumumba Asazzagn Amuamuat and Yedekamoch Wetmed, respectively, do not measure up to being truly tragic because of their weak portrayal. Lumumba is too adulated and adored by the people without his qualities being shown. When he is pressed by the journalists and ambassadors to tell whether he is pro-communist or not, he meekly speaks out that he is friendly and ready to welcome anybody who supports and respects the causes of the people. He, in fact, opposes white supremacy and upholds black power.

Where does Lumumba's tragedy emanate from? He is portrayed as a man with not even a slight 'error' to make him look human. His tragic end is not caused by his own faults but by the power struggle between the world big powers.

The other factor which negatively affects the author's portrayal is the single-naturedness of his characters. Belew, in Yedekamoch Wetmed, is such a character, who does not show and change throughout his life. He is so humble and obedient to his master, Ras Fiqtor, that he decides to remain loyal to him even when he is told that the Ras is up to arrest and deprive him of his privileges. Also, Belew is a man of so much innocence and credulity that he never suspects the motives of the very people who are plotting against him. However, he is a brave warrior and dearly loved by the Ras for his fine qualities. Abbe draws Belew as a totally virtuous man. Neither the author's description nor Belew's action, not even the testimony of his own enemies, indicate that there are defects or imperfections in this man. Such characterization is unconvincing because in real life the most humble we know have, at best, only a measure of goodness. So, portraying a likeable character as perfectly good, a hated one as completely evil, as we frequently see it done by Abbe, is not in accordance with reality.

Belew is not really so tragic if we probe the matter from the stand-point of the Greek concept of tragedy. Because he is perfect with no tragic "fault" in him from which his tragic doom could result. This means that no cathartic effects can be produced in the audience as a result of his tragic experiences.

Belew does not put up a struggle. He is drawn as too submissive a character, too submissive to authority but Brooks contends that:

The tragic protagonist can be a quiet man; in appearance, even unprepossessing man. But strength is necessary. The tragic protagonist must put up a struggle...⁵⁷

At last, as he returns to the Ras's household through the persuasion of his relative, Assefa, he is shot dead. Of course, from this we see that the story ends unhappily but:

... tragedy requires more than unhappy ending... [the hero] must have a certain force. He must not be weak, merely passive victim of external forces, but must be able to struggle powerfully with the forces with which he is in opposition.⁶⁰

Ras Fiqtor is the other central figure around whom the story revolves. The scandalous characters, knowing his weak points, are always successful in deceiving him. He is ever fearful and suspicious that his region might one day be annexed by his rivals from the neighbouring regions. He is superstitious and depends on fortune-tellers. The more he sees dreams the more he becomes suspicious and anxious. He is not strong enough to find the truth by himself and stick to it. He instead pretends to be searching for it and easily succumbs to suggestions by others. For example, he starts to investigate whether Belew is a betrayer or not by interrogating his daughter but as she could not speak in front of her step-mother he, promising to ask her when she is alone, allows her to leave. He does not, however, attempt to investigate the matter further and without any tangible information accepts what his enemies inform him. This shows that Fiqtor is also as submissive as Belew to external forces. His character is not worthy of a ruler or a governor of a region.

Of all the characters in Yedekomoch Wetmed, Bitoded amberber seems to be the most logically drawn. He can, perhaps, be called the "Iago" of the story because he is strong in his convictions. He plans his intrigues with keenness and traps his opponents with vindiction. He strives for the fulfillment of his goals day and night. He

is shrewd and tricky and plays on the weak points of his colleagues including the Ras. He rallies the villains together; and skillfully removes unwanted persons. He contrives for Fitawrari Wasie, for example, a close friend of the Ras to be sent away to Gondar to pay taxes to the king because if he stays on the scene he could be dangerous and foil the conspiracy against Belew. To dishearten Belew, on the other hand, Amberber tells him about the Ras's change of mind regarding his marriage to Fatlework. Fitawrari Wasie, he informs him, has been secretly sent away to arrange her marriage to the son of the Semen region. The portrayal of the antagonist has been better thought out and executed than that of the protagonists.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

The majority of Abbe Gubegna's Amharic plays are pre-occupied with the political conditions of Ethiopia in which the corruption of the administrators and the misery of the common people are depicted. Most of them are based on historical materials both from without and from within the country. He goes back in history to depict the era of princes in Ethiopian history to warn the people not to commit their mistakes if the country is to develop. Abbe sympathises not only with his country-men but also with the oppressed peoples of the world, especially of Africa and Asia. In some of his plays he urges them not to trust the UN Organization due to the partiality it has shown on several occasions. He exposes the organization's impotence in resolving conflicts and avoiding brazen aggression. The author, on the contrary, manifests his belief in the Almighty God, who is solely responsible for the miraculous independence of many of the colonized nations.

Abbe Gubegna has, of course, his own weak and strong points. In the presentation of his political themes, however, there are some contradictory ideas which are difficult to accept as they are. He incites the people to rise against their oppressors but, on the contrary, he "hand-cuffs" them not to act violently to wrest power from them. Abbe lacks the skill of harmonizing politics and religion to solve society's problems. We see him entangled and disabled in reconciling these opposite camps.

As we examine the plays chronologically, we observe little technical improvements in them; his selection and

arrangement of events as well as his method of character delineation are poor. In play after play we come across the same characters which are sketchily drawn and are merely the cross-breeds of the author's idealized self.

As is evident in his various responses to some commentators on his works, Abbe does not like to accept criticism from others. He harshly attacks them instead making it personal. That is why a literary critic of his novels commented that:

Although he made his living for some twelve years by means of his writing and although he often overreacted to adverse criticisms of the quality of his narrative methods, his works showed less technical improvements than one would have expected.⁶¹

In spite of the various thematic and technical setbacks discernible in Abbe's plays, we cannot deny their strong social influence during the pre-revolutionary and the early post-revolutionary periods. It is their influence that explains the author's popularity at that time. The fact that Poletikanna Poletikennoch, for instance, became a topical issue on which contending members of political factions opened discussions in the newspapers, can be taken as an evidence that Abbe had managed to attract the attention of the public. There is no doubt about it that Abbe stood for the causes of the down trodden, especially the peasantry, in whatever form he did it. He reflected the life, the true aspirations, and grievances of the common people. He boldly attacked first the "imperial", and second the "socialist" systems by exposing their corrupt and power-hungry officials. Indeed, he was an uncompromising dissident writer of Ethiopia.

This singles out Abbe from the rest of well-known writers of the time who either from opportunism or lack of courage, kept silent about the misery of the people prevailing throughout the land. Some writers even went to the extent of condemning anti-government tendencies in the face of the violent waves of popular uprisings.

From the 1950's to the early 1960's Abbe stood out clearly in sharp contrast with those writers as a consistent, unwavering, and out-spoken opponent of the status quo. He had great ambition to serve the people and a great desire to contribute to the development of Amharic literature.

During the Haile Sellasie regime Abbe was many times rebuked, intimidated, arrested, and deported to Gore and Mocha on internal exile. He refused to submit to all of these pressures, however, and continued to challenge the system as vigorously as before.

With the passing away of the old regime, he hoped that a bloodless political change, which he proposed in his plays, would come about. The first years of the revolution through which Abbe lived did not fulfill his great expectations. The situation contradicted with his long desired "utopianistic dreams" of seeing his country transformed into a free, just, prosperous, and proud nation. The bloodshed between the opposing camps of the revolution, which he had been condemning right from the outset, must have frustrated him for his enthusiasm for hard work and for polemics waned as the years went by.

He turned out to be the cardinal opposer and outspoken opponent of the revolution. As a result He was many

times arrested and imprisoned. One of my interviewees told me the following story: "Abbe Gubegna made his small daughter wear two different kinds of socks on Revolution Day. When asked why, he replied: "Socialism and the world are garishly decorated like this." At that time it was bold of him to utter such words because nobody would have ever dared to publicly condemn that system as openly as this.

Although Abbe Gubegna's plays cannot be taken as exemplaries of good drama, still they cannot be discarded outright, especially in view of the period in which they were produced. They played an important role in raising the public's consciousness and in instigating them to express their discontent against the system, if not to rise up in arms against it. This much Abbe's writings have contributed to the Ethiopian people, and in this regard, remain significant.



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DECLARATION

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

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