

A Study of Some Major Characters and Themes
in Post-revolution Amharic Novels

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ABSTRACT

The world of Amharic novels of post-revolutionary period is a world in which opposing social forces come into clash. This world, however, does not decompose but grow and bear fruit. This paper modestly attempts to study the essence of the fruit and discuss characters who populate the world.

The Introduction part tries to point out what the thesis is about. The first chapter is devoted to the study of literary types. Each major character is considered a representative focus of a particular section of the society. In the second chapter the major pre-occupations of the novelists are examined. An attempt is made to bring out the theme of self-actualization and of class struggle as major and common concerns of writers in the post-revolutionary period.

The summary of the study is given in the last part. Moreover, certain common features of the novels are pointed out.

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INTRODUCTION

"We read fiction because it is about people and because we expect to learn something about them."¹ A study of creative writings of a given period, besides its appeal to our own sense of the beautiful, provides an insight into the various aspects of the political and cultural values of that society which produces the works. It is also true that the full meaning of creative writings can only be grasped if they are examined in the context of the society out of which they emerge.

Molvaer has underlined this point in the Ethiopian literary context. "Ethiopian authors of fiction are strongly concerned with the social and cultural life of their time, and it will not do Amharic literature full justice to evaluate it only on aesthetic grounds."² A good understanding of modern Ethiopian literary works can be gained if one relates fictional writings to the realities of life in the society.

However, the aim of this paper is not primarily to present the socio-political reality of the Ethiopian society, but to demonstrate the strong concern of the novelists with the social life of their time by examining the major pre-occupations and major type characters.

The strong concern of the Amharic novelists for the social and political life of their society is not a recent phenomenon. It was long before the eruption of the Ethiopian revolution that writers began to paint life as they saw it. Daniachew Worku in his novel, Adefris, has given us a panoramic view of the urban and rural situations. He has realistically reflected the role and conflict of the intellectual in his social milieu in the 1960s. Haddis Alemayehu in Fikir Eske Mekabir has portrayed the reality of life in rural Ethiopia. Taddesse Liben in his short stories of the same period has described the misery of city life, in a realistic way. Abbe Gobegna in his different novels has exposed the harm done to the people by corrupt and selfish political leaders.

Any exhaustive treatment of the historical development of Amharic novel is outside the boundaries of this paper. Nevertheless, by concentrating on the discussion of the recurring themes in post-revolution Amharic novels, this study will try to trace certain leading ideas in the literary writings which are basically created by and embodied in social revolution. It will also seek to bring into view the major type characters through the actions and lives of which the spirit of the time is expressed. Moreover, an attempt will be made to hint at the new fictional heroes introduced into the Amharic novels.

The many significant characters populating the world of post-revolution Amharic novels can be reduced to a certain number of literary types. But, so far, no major study has been made on the typology of Amharic fictional characters. Critical works which have already been done on Amharic novels either deal with individual literary pieces, or with the literary works of an individual writer, and many of those critical works have been devoted to the study of point of view, language or to the analysis of character and theme in just one novel or novels written by a single writer. Thus, this paper may fill in part of the critical void by throwing light on major literary types and recurrent themes in post-revolution Amharic novels.

This study in its discussions of the two major pre-occupations-self-actualization and class struggle - and of the four basic literary type characters - the intellectual, the female, lower class and feudal characters-will try to show the values reflected and the role assumed by characters drawn from the different sections of the population.

This paper deals mainly with those Amharic novels published in the years between 1966 and 1974 (E.C.). It specifically examines some major literary types and themes even at the cost

of ignoring related aspects of the art of fiction. No attempt is made to take issue with other critics.

Chapter I

MAJOR TYPE CHARACTERS

1.1 The Intellectual Characters

Most of the main and relatively live characters in Amharic novels have been drawn chiefly from the intellectual section of the population. The life as well as the role of the intellectuals in the society they work and live in has been one of the major issues that has preoccupied the minds of many Ethiopian writers since Ethiopia's independence from Italian occupation. It has been an established tradition in the history of Ethiopian literature to present the hopes and fears, failures and successes, vigilance and dilemmas of the intellectuals in their relentless struggle to change the way of life of the people. Whenever reckless courage, strong enthusiasm and strenuous effort are needed to destroy backward beliefs, the intelligentsia, particularly the progressive section, has been customarily first to show itself. The novelists have taken full advantage of the dramatic possibilities offered by the courage, effort and enthusiasm of the intelligentsia, and no serious literary work of the pre-revolutionary or post-revolutionary period has been without its dedicated dreamer and doer, one of the intelligentsia.

In post-revolution Amharic novels, the intelligentsia is no longer presented as a homogeneous group but one which comprises opposing forces with varied interests and social backgrounds. There are important differences in ideas and deeds directly or indirectly depending upon the class origin of the individual members. Thus, a reader of post-revolution Amharic novels can notice three distinct groups of intelligentsia. The first group of the intelligentsia from which the heroes of many Amharic novels are drawn, is credited with progressive

ideas and has revolutionary consciousness. Stern in its hatred of political corruption and economic injustice, it builds its life on what it considers revolutionary ethics. Most of its members, which usually come from poor family backgrounds, spare no effort to be influential in changing the life of the society and in shaping the country's future. Tilahun in Wonjelegnaw Dagna, Tarekegn in Maabel, Haddis in Baalu's novel of that name, Sirak in Derasiw and Goytom in Le Key Ababa can be taken as good examples.

All these characters have had college education but they have no money. All of them are genuine and courageous but they have no reputation and no importance in the net-work of the government bureaucracy. Nevertheless, their civility and tact, their sincerity and courage, are richly demonstrated in their understanding of the real problems of the people with whom they work, and in the noble deeds they perform in the world they live. These characters represent all that is intelligent, vigorous, courageous and creative in man in their respective fictional worlds. Secure in their moral and intellectual superiority, they demonstrate strong commitment to fight for what they are certain is right. Haddis Alemayehu in his second novel takes an opportunity to tell us about the moral principles of this type of intellectual:

ቀናቸው መንፈስ ጠንካራቸውና አላጣጣቸው ደግሞ እነርሱ ከተማረተ የኑ ስርዓት ሌላ ያገራቸውን ሀዘብ ከተያዘበት የደህነትና የድንቁርና በሽታ የሚያደኑት ወደሃይት እንደሌለ በፍጹም ልብ አዎነው ያን አዎነት በመከተል አስከ መጠረኻ ድረስ ወገናቸውን ለመርዳት ጥረት ያደርጋሉ።

Those genuine and high-spirited individuals wholeheartedly believe that there cannot be any medicine that shall free the people from the grip of poverty and ignorance, except the social system they have studied. Firm in their belief they try to help the people.

Progressive intellectuals in Amharic novels are primarily

motivated by the desire to rid the country of its evils and of its human parasites. They fight against backward beliefs which have a tenacious grip on the life of the society and at the same time emerge as the most outspoken and visibly committed opposition force to archaic feudal lords and malicious bureaucrats who obviously have had political and economic power. Because of this double nature of their struggle and because of the seriousness and strength of their enemies, the anguish they suffer in the process is spiritual as well as physical. They are usually shown in dangerous encounters with ignorant feudal landlords and arrogant bureaucrats. Their aims are constantly frustrated by the inertia of backward beliefs. However, thanks to their courage, will-power, self-discipline and endurance, these glamorous young educated men emerge victorious from apparently hopeless difficulties. In their relentless pursuit of justice and truth they show their real greatness. Baalu, through the mouth of his intellectual hero, Haddis, tells us what real greatness and courage mean in the life of an upright intellectual:

ነገ ሰው ፍር ሃት አይሰማውም። ስለማይፈራም ነገ ነጥን
 አክብሮ ያስከብራል። ነገ ሰው ከጥቅኛና ከገፍ ሌላ
 የሚመለሰው ነገር አይኖርም የሚመለሰውን ነገር ለማሰጠገድ
 ደግሞ አይፈራም።

A free man is not stirred by fear, and for this reason he respects his freedom and makes others respect it. He only hates oppression and injustice and is not afraid to get rid of what he hates.

Haddis has demonstrated a hard-won victory in his relentless struggle to build a new school with the aim of providing the opportunity of education to the sons and daughters of the village poor. Haddis dreams that out of his bitter struggle good will come and that the very foundations of life are to be cleansed and redesigned. Earlier he had realized that his countrymen, far from being one of the most

civilized people in the black world, which the old government *propaganda* led the people to believe, in fact have been lagging *behind in poverty and ignorance*. Subsequently, he comes to believe that the only means by which the nation can get rid of its chronic social problems is through education.

Haddis is not a mere bookish dreamer. He is rather a man of deeds. With his noble dream of changing the society for the better and with his genuine determination to shape the destiny of the new generation, Haddis expends all his energy, knowledge and time with no regard to personal comfort. Despite selfish men's implicit and explicit threats against his life, the selfless man cannot prevent himself from associating with those helpless young people and from laying the foundation of tomorrow's better world. His conviction is clearly expressed in the following impressive sentences of his own:

የነገሩን የተሻለ ህይወት መመኘት ወይም ቁጥ ገሉ
ማሸተት አይባታም። መፍጠር አለብን የወደፊት ህይ
ወት ተዘጋጅቶ የሚጠበቅን ነገር አይቻሉም ስህተት
ደብዳቤ የምንፈጥረው ነገር ነው።

It is not enough to dream of tomorrow's better life without doing anything. We have to create it. The future life will not wait for us ready-made. We have to start creating it now.⁵

Haddis is endowed with many positive qualities. There is no mark of any human weakness in him. With his intellect, strong commitment and unfailing strength, he has overcome all difficulties he has encountered in his arduous experiment. By setting a unique example of obedience to his own conscience and of devotion to the well-being of the people, he succeeds in everything he undertakes with complete competence even under risky situations. Technically speaking, his infallibility sometimes gives the reader the undesirable sense of an external

force working on the character, and quite certainly, Baalu, the creator of the character, is repeatedly hard pressed to rescue his hero from the dangerous tide of events.

The other writer who portrays the life and experience of an intellectual hero similar to that of Baalu's Haddis is the known Ethiopian novelist, Haddis Alemayehu. His second novel, Wonjelegnaw Dagna, has one intellectual dreamer and doer at its center. Tilahun is an educated young man who commits himself to tending the sick and guiding the village poor to a bright future. Tilahun has achieved spectacular success in his struggle to construct the forgotten village anew despite different obstacles set by strong enemies of progress. With the help of his wife, he has changed the poor village into an earthly paradise in a relatively short period. Tilahun is everything in the forgotten district. He is a committed social worker as well as a medical doctor. He is a superb educationalist, agronomist and ideologist. He is also an engineer and a trained lawyer.

On one hand, Tilahun's all-round success or total perfection is certainly a positive aid that contributes to the glorification of his own heroic stature; on the other, however, it is a negative element that blurs the credibility of Tilahun as a creative representation of a man of this world. Tilahun is an all-knowing person and a saintly figure who overcomes the weakness of the flesh. To the readers' surprise, He assumes the position of God himself towards the end of the book. We hear him saying,

የተሸከሞቻሁትን ከባድ ሽኩቻ ከባድ ቀንበር ከተከሻቸሁ
ለጦር ጁ አኔ ተሸከሞ አናንተን ለማሰረፍና የማይቁር ከ
ሆነህ ህይወታቸሁን በዋቲ ገዝቼ አናንተን ከማጻን በቁር
... ለእኔ ህሊና ለገዛውህ ቢሆን ሰላም ይሰጣል የሆነ
ሰው ለሰላም ነገር ፈልጎ አሳገኛለሁ።

except by delivering you from the heavy burden and yoke or setting you free at the cost of my life ... I cannot find anything that gives temporary relief to my conscience.

Haddis Alemayehu generously endows his character with all desirable qualities and seems to devise events and coincidences in defiance of probability in order to make him the hero of the people. The pitiless meddling of cruel fate in the life of the virtuous man in the first four chapters is compensated for in the latter chapters with enormous success and exaltation. Tilahun's bad luck in the opening scenes calls for as much suspension of disbelief as his good luck in the last scenes. The author introduces many more coincidences than should be expected, so much so that they hinder the natural flow and logical culmination of events. Despite certain conspicuous shortcomings, Wonjelegnaw Dagna is, however, a worthwhile literary piece for it attempts to explore the related problem of the intellectual when suddenly immersed in the social atmosphere.

There are other background but significant characters who are remembered for their defiant challenge to economic exploitation and political suppression. Such, for instance, are Tarekegn in Maabel, Mekbib in Le Key Ababa. These young intellectuals are highly sensitive, observant, devoted to penetrating and understanding the events about them, the social milieu. Through their keen interest in the life of the society and through their filtering intelligence, all sorts of political, economic and social injustice are seen.

Mekbib exposes the malicious endeavour of the negative forces to demolish the democratic ideas that begin to sprout in the society he lives in. Tarekegn has instigated and also participated actively and provocatively in the formation of new ideas in the people's movement. His own words can testify what he is really upto:

አኛ ግድረገ ያለብን ህዝቡ የሚፈጸምበትን በደል እንዲያውቅ ወቅቱን ነው። የሆኑ አገዛዝ ይውደዱ ስንል ህዝቡ ግን ያህል እንደ ተወቅኑ አየተገነዘብ ይሄዳል። አኛ ወረተኛ ላራሹ ስንል የሆነውን ምረቅ ይባባሳል።

What we have to do is to make the people aware of the injustice. When we say down with oppression and when we say land to the tiller, they become bitter of being a tenant.7

These young men who belong to the first group of the intelligentsia and who occupy a principal role in post-revolution novels have, to a similar degree, devoted their energy and knowledge to the exposure of social evils. They commit themselves to the noble cause of promoting moral regeneration. They untiringly instill the idea of change into the minds of the people and beam a ray of hope to the distressed. As a result, a new belief in self-action and a new seed of struggle to obtain change start to take root in the society.

The second group of intellectuals who largely serve as background characters in Amharic novels are those who have adopted a policy of not indulging in matters of political and social affairs. They are presented as passive observers of the social reality. However, because of their inability to achieve an orderly outlook, they sometimes swing from left to right or vacillate between fear and hope. Such, for example, are Getachew in Ye Key Kokeb Tirri, Assaye in Wonjelegnaw Dagna, Doctor in Band Deret Sost Tut, teacher Kewle and teacher Miser in Haddis and Masresha in Maabel. All these characters are inadequately prepared and insufficiently independent to look and search for social reality. Thus, they have scarcely allowed themselves to think of a bright future.

Getachew in Ye Key Kokeb Tirri, though he is a highly educated journalist, represents hypocrisy. The desire for position, wealth and respect pulls him one way, guilty consciousness and freedom pull him the other way. He seems to be entrapped in this kind of dilemma. But, actually, the dilemma is not deeply rooted. It is only superficial. The truth about his real essence is that he is too weak to do anything meaningful. He

has no courage to make himself act when action is indispensable and thus becomes a bundle of contradiction. Getachew is a weak person who seeks to hide from life and even from himself with the help of liquor at a time when the world he lives in is plunging into civil war and when the masses of the people are demanding the knowledge he has acquired through education and experience. He isolates himself far away from bitter reality.

The two teachers in Haddis are passive onlookers who cannot see any purpose in life. They have no principles and no mission at all. They are simply human mechanisms devoid of any ideas of their own. The following extract from Haddis will best describe these people, in particular, and the second group of intellectuals, in general:

የተለየ ሰብዕና የሌላ ጉዳይ ስያቸው ዘመን በለው ወጥተው
ዎንም ዓይነት ገንባታ ስያቸው ዘመን በለው የሚሄዱ ሰያቸው
የተለየ ወልደኛ፣ የተለየ ስም፣ የተለየ ጠባይ፣ የሌላ
ገዢ የዓለም ወገናት ናቸው።

Those non-entities simply come and go without leaving a trace. Such people who have no distinguishing marks, names and characters of their own are ghosts of the world.

Assaye in Wonjelegnaw Dagna also belongs to the second group. Assaye is essentially a good person but a coward with no spirit to practise what he believes. He often wonders why the poor people have not been able to discover the causes of their sufferings for many years while he himself comes to know them in a relatively short time. Sometimes, in a tone of despair and a notion of defeatism, he ventures to accuse the people of lack of insight and strength.

Masresha is one of the principal characters in Maabel. This principal character has not only been a passive onlooker

at the world he lives in but also a victim of his own illusion. He has denied his poor father and run away never to cast eyes on him again, but the ghost of the old man haunts him day and night and drains his physical and mental strength. He hopes to win security in marriage but there is no mutual understanding between him and his wife. He tries to find peace in liquor but it takes away all his peace. He creates a world of fantasy to shelter himself in, but all in vain. He feels suffocated in a world of his own creation with its odour of mould and decay. A sense of darkness and nothingness have taken possession of him. Despite his college education, he appears to be another human mechanism devoid of any honour and incapable of doing anything to liberate his captive mind. His reaction to situations is always nostalgic. He simply broods over his past guilts and weaknesses which is in some way an expression of the failure to act at times when he might have saved himself and others who are dear to him.

At crucial moments he stands motionless and unwisely allows others to decide his destiny. Masresha usually lets deceptive and selfish people guide him through complicated situations from which no return is possible. The conversation between Masresha and his ignorant mother-in-law, W/o Zerfeshiwal, clearly reveals his weak personality:

"ሠርገቸሁ በየካቲት አንዲህን ተወሰኔላ::"
ወ/ሮ ዘርፈሽዋል ቁጥ አድርገው ተናገረ::
"ግን ወሰን? ... አንዳት ለህን ይቸላል?"
ሴላ ለዘቦ አድርጎ ጠየቀ ግሰረሽ

"ወደደኩም ጠላሁ ወሆን ያለበት ነገር ነው::"
አሉ ወይዘሮ ዘርፈሽዋል:: የወሰንኩም አኔ ነኝ::

"It is decided that you should get married in Yekatit," said W/o Zerfeshiwal decidedly. "Who makes the decision? How can it be?" asked Masresha modestly.

Whether you like it or not it must be.
And I am the one who makes the decision,"
said W/o Zerfeshiwal.⁹

Masresha has nothing to do or to say in response. As usual, he accepts the decision of W/o Zerfeshiwal, a decision which is very crucial to his present and future life. Birhanu describes the situation in which his character is engaged in the following words: "ከዘለቃ በኩል አሁን እርግጠኛ ለልሀነት ፍቅር ነፃ ነትን ሰጥታል። የወይንን ቤተሰብ አደገገና እኔ ነኝ ልሀን ክብሩን አውልቆ ጥሏል።" /He sacrifices his freedom for love which he is not sure of on Zeleka's side. It is when he bows and becomes a lackey of a family of the nobility that he loses his self-respect./¹⁰

His inability to decide and act in situations which demand decision and action, consequently, leads him to a state of doubt and disdain. At one point it drives him to a state of despair and madness. Here is his doctor's testimony:

በሽታህ ከሀይወት ለመሸሽ መቆከር ነበር። ምን ግለት ነው ባንድ በኩል የእንጂራ አባትህ ጉዳይ ሀላፊህን በወቀሰ ሲያሰቃየው ከእርሱ ገር የሚሰቃህ በደል ሲያሰርህ መንፈሱህ ሁለትንም መሸከም ሲያቀተው የሚያሰብ ስለአምርህ ሁሉንም ነገር ለመርሳት የጠጠረ ምሽግ ሠርቶ ወደ ውስጥ ገባ።

Your illness is an attempt to escape from reality. It means that, on the one hand, the case of your stepfather tortures your conscience, and on the other the wrongs of your wife torment you. When your thinking faculty is unable to carry them your conscious mind builds a strong fort and buries itself in order to forget everything.

This is how the weak Masresha is portrayed in the first two books of Maabel - Yabyot Wazema and Yabyot Mebacha.

After a long slumber and self-deception, at last, under the impact of events which have a cumulative effect on him, he gains an insight into his major failings. Under varied pressures, Masresha is spurred to some self-examination. Time and bitter experience have given him some self-knowledge. He starts to open his eyes and see what is happening around him and appears as a man discovering himself. He even dares to make decisions and take action. In that moment of self-revelation, he has the honesty to see that he had been engulfed in self-deception and self-destruction. But, this self-knowledge as well as the will to act comes too late. It comes at the last thread of his life. Masresha like other members of the second group of intelligentsia passes away without leaving much of significance behind him.

The third and the last group of intellectuals are those who indulge themselves in all sorts of human vices. The most disgraceful type of intellectuals deplored by the positive characters, which mainly represent the first group of intelligentsia and lower class characters, and presumably condemned by thoughtful readers, are those learned men who devote their mental and physical energy to defend the interests of the oppressors and exploiters. With a few exceptions the large majority of this group of learned men are from wealthy family backgrounds. Like their families they pursue their own selfish interests and personal ends by squeezing the fruits of the labour of the people. Among this group of intellectuals, Wondirad in Wonjelegdaw Dagna, Assaye and Yirga in Haddis, Gebeyhu in Maabel, and Laake in Ye Key Kokeb Tirrri could be cited.

Wondirad in Wonjelegdaw Dagna is a worthless educated young man whose main concern is to get through life with the maximum of words and lip service. Whenever he opens his mouth and says anything either trivial or serious, the very words that come out of his mouth expose how inconsiderate, arrogant and

might be said about Wondirad is that he is simply the voice of misery and destruction. In his confession we hear Wondirad saying, "ሌሊ የሚቆዩትን ይጠላል፣ ወልቅም በሚያደርጉልኝ ይቀናል፣ ያልበቃለኝን ወበቀል ይሻል።" / My heart hates those who love me, envies those who do good to me; and wants to take revenge on those who have done nothing against me/14

There is also another character in Wonjelgnaw Dagna who can be grouped in the third category of the intelligentsia. This particular character is not, however, as venomous as Wondirad. What, actually, the author wants to show through this character is the corrupting power of money and privilege. Wubetu, who used to express so much detest for corrupt activities and who was once high-minded and revolutionary, later becomes powerless to resist the temptation of ease and luxury which money and position can only afford. He starts to use his position to enrich himself. Having cut himself free from the pull of radicalism Wubetu indulges in corrupt activities.

While Wubetu was a genuine and an upright fellow, he used to say, "ሀብትና ጣሕት የፈጠሩ የቸውን ሰዎች ወልቅም ለመገዛትና በክፋ ወንገድ ለመቆራት ሀይል ያሳኙ የክፋ ሥራ አማልክት ናቸው።" /Wealth and idol are gods of evil that have the power to govern and lead their creator in the wrong direction./15

But later, when he climbs to a higher government position and is inflated with ill-gotten wealth, Wubetu completely abandons his former radical theories and begins to propagate a diametrically opposite view: "እውነተኛው ነገር ሰውን ከንቁት ከውርደት ከቸገርና አነሱን ከሚወስሰው ሁሉ አድፍ አጥርቶ ሰውን ሲፈጥር ቋተደበለለት የከብር በታ አቁ በእውነተኛ የሰውነት ወልቅም የሚያሳየው ሀብት ብቻ ነው።" /The fact is that, it is only wealth that cleans the dirt of contempt, poverty and the like, and places man in the respected position originally intended for him when he is created. It

is only wealth that shows man in his true colour." ¹⁶

After passing through the process of corruption, the man who used to talk passionately against corrupt activities later evolved into a new sort of man - a worshipper of money and privilege.

Similarly, Assaye and Yirga in Haddis are portrayed as the embodiments of corruption. Both men remain blind to the social reality. Their appetites are only capable of consuming the pleasure a large sum of money can buy. Assaye is one of those worthless intellectuals whose sole purpose in life is to join the wealthiest class at the expense of the toil of poor peasants. He is presented as a very indiscreet individual who does not hesitate to sacrifice his friends and even relatives for the sake of money. Assaye cares for nobody but his own comfort-loving soul. The luxurious life he leads out of ill-gotten gains erodes his thinking capacity and further draws him into corrupt and murderous activities.

Yirga is another corrupt school director who is determined to sell his conscience for material comfort. Love of money has spoiled the ethical behavior required of him as a school director. He is a callous person who seeks to darken the future of poor young boys and girls by securing the right to learn only for the 'haves.' Corrupted by bribery and nepotism, he opens the gate of the school to the sons and daughters of the rich. Ridden by incompetence and arrogance, he stands in the way of genuine teachers who strive to improve the teaching-learning process.

Gebeyhu in Maabel and Laake in Ye Key Kokeb Tirri are unforgettable characters for their inherent vileness. They are depicted in their respective worlds not only as simple counter-revolutionary forces but as young villains who bear the stigma of spiritual affinity with the old feudal ruling class.

Gebeyhu engages in subversive activities to demolish democratic elements that start to take root in the society. Like his feudal father he disrupts the life of the poor peasants. His gun always aims at revolutionary individuals and democratic forces who are struggling to change the old social system. By unleashing a war of destruction on social progress, Gebeyhu reveals the moral stigma of his class origin.

Baalu also portrays an obstinate intellectual, Laake, as a dishonest chatterbox. Laake is a self-styled revolutionary inflated with ill-digested opinion and immense arrogance. His egoistic behaviour leads him to worship the vision of himself as a saint leading people to freedom. Plagued with such arrogance and engrossed with petty bourgeois vulgarism, he actually indulges in the most wanton acts of repression.

1.2 Female Characters

The world of Amharic fiction is to a great extent a man's world where a large population of female characters with only few exceptions play a secondary role. Women characters in most cases secondary, are used either as symbols representing the decadence of their class or as cases illustrative of social problems. Many female characters populating the world of post-revolution novels are only participants in the events of a story shaped by men. Of course, the question of equality between men and women is raised in almost all the novels, but it neither gets a qualified answer nor is it seriously discussed in any one of them. What we are told by the novelists is the alleged domination of men over women, and what we actually see in most of the novels are men depicted as being made of tougher moral fiber than women.

Female characters make their appearance in different scenes of different novels, but most of them soon fade into the background leaving the hero to accomplish a definite mission in his

own way. Conviction and action are chiefly affairs of men, mere contemplation and passivity are largely that of women. What is common about most of the female characters living in the world of Amharic fiction is that they are incapable of tackling events of complicated social phenomenon without the assistance of strong men. Women are not shown by themselves in the position of responsibility.

Our novelists have never endowed most of their female characters with a specific talent or with a strong commitment to work toward a definite goal. But, technically, female characters either by complement or contrast, serve to broaden and deepen the feelings and acts of male protagonists. They help to characterize the male characters by revealing the good or the evil in them. For instance, Masresha in Maabel and Deribe in Ye Kay Kokeb Tirri are best understood in the relation they have with Zeleka and Hirut respectively.

Female characters in Amharic novels have certain typical patterns that correspond to their respective environment. The majority of the background and nameless female characters who are victims of a harsh city life in a class society are the prostitutes. Prostitutes in most Amharic novels propagate no doctrine, display no preference to anything and demonstrate no purpose in life. But, by their way of life they show the sufferings of the helpless women in city life. Among the prostitutes, Shitaye and Zinash in Haddis; Tsigie in Derasiw can be taken as examples.

These uneducated and unsophisticated women are bitter about the present situation in which they live. They do not see any bright future. And so, they are nostalgic for their childhood period. Sometimes, their nostalgia causes them to talk about the "good" old days of which they know very little. Some other times, they indulge in superstitious practices in order to escape from bitter reality. Whenever they turn to reality, they feel

neglected and distressed and hold men responsible for whatever misfortunes befall them. They tend to believe that the sole cause of their sufferings is the cruelty of men. Most prostitutes in those Amharic novels seem to be obsessed with a mistaken notion which labels all men as the enemies of women. The following words of Zinash are expressions of the common obsession: "ግንዛቤ ምን ገምገማ የዘገነ ለገደ ነው። ፍቅር የ ግንዛቤ ሲቀርጠት

የሚቀርጠው ሲቀርጠው ደግሞ ለሌላ ለቀረብ የሚል ከሃጻፍ ለደገኛ ፍጡር ነው።"

/One who trusts a man and one who grips cloud are the same. My love, man is a betrayer and dangerous creature. He retreats when you come closer to him and weeps to come nearer when you go away from him.¹⁷ This is the catchword of prostitute women in Amharic novels.

Embittered and frustrated by their own bad fate, prostitute characters do not show any concrete endeavor to reform the situation in which they live. Usually, they engage in slander and gossip and gloat over each other's misfortunes. They look for the generous hands of drunken men to meet the needs of survival.

The other long enduring victim of the coarse village life is the peasant woman. She is a simple and honest house wife. She is polite and helpful to her husband and relatives, friendly with neighbours, and reserved with the rest.

The peasant woman, more often drawn as background character, is a loving house-wife whose ambition consists not in being superior or even equal to the man she loves, but in seeing him superior to everyone else. She never speaks to her husband anything outside home life. She admires his manhood, but never shows any involvement or interest in his commitment and thought.

The peasant woman who has never been to school in her whole life appears to be quite unconcerned about the economic and political life of the society. Being an uncomplaining victim of the feudal system, she does not feel free to express

herself. She does not even give herself a chance to know how and what she really feels about her social environment. Her reaction to situations is more instinctual than rational. Zeyne in Maabel and Alem in Wonjelegnaw Dagna are typical examples of such women.

Zeyne is presented as a very simple, innocent and uneducated woman who gives more generously of herself than many educated women can afford to. She is worried about nothing but her own disposition to be kind and loyal to her parents, faithful to her husband and helpful to her brothers. Her sincere devotion is clearly shown by the unfailing assistance she renders to her father and mother in the time of disastrous drought. Her faithfulness is correctly exemplified by her forbearance of the sickening fact she learns about her husband. The terrible knowledge of her husband's sexual impotence, as a result of the psychological effect of police torture, does not shake her feminine integrity. Her response to the knowledge is not a desire to abandon him, but rather a commitment to live with him for the rest of her life. To the very end generous and faithful as always, she cheers up her dear husband and supports her old father. But, she has never exerted herself in the bitter class struggle as her father and husband do. With feminine tenderness and affection, she lives, works and always remains in the kitchen.

A completely different type of woman character who stays out of the kitchen and who is more interested in social affairs in Amharic novels is the educated young woman. She is a pioneer in enlightening and awakening the female population by raising the question of equality between the sexes. She has a higher level of political consciousness than the prostitute and peasant women. Unlike the prostitute, the young educated woman has never pointed her accusing fingers at men as being the enemy of women. She rather denounces the social system as being the sole cause of the sufferings of women. The following words of

one learned female character in Ye Key Kokeb Tirri affirm this new consciousness:

... የተበላሸ ሀብረተሰብ ነው። አየህ ሴት የሰጣት
ግርኪያ መሰሪያ አይደለችም አሰዋሽ ሰው ናት ከገብረ
ሰጋ ገንጥነት ውጭ ሴት ልዩ ከወገድ ጋር ለመካፈል
የምትፈልገው ሰጣት አመለካከትና አስተያየት አላት።

It is a corrupted society. You see, a woman is not an object for sexual satisfaction. She is a human being. Apart from sexual relationship, she wants to share her views and feelings with men.¹⁸

The educated woman, unlike the peasant woman is economically independent and a little bit sophisticated in her manner and thought. But, like all women in the fictional works, she seeks to take a shelter in the strength of a man. She needs a strong man for self-protection, for defence against the attack of loneliness and for sexual love as does Seble in Derasiw or Finot in Ye Key Kokeb Tirri or Taffessu in Maabel.

The formal education all these young women have has enabled them to know more about the social environment. Their sensitivity to social affairs has helped them not only to draw the attention of desirable men, but also to discover the root cause of the social injustice and of the inequalities between the sexes. But, amusingly, all of them are depicted in their respective fictional worlds as having split personalities. They are half-disappointed at the inferior position women have in the society and at the same time half-satisfied at their own success in obtaining the recognition of learned men and at their own ability to discuss social problems. None of these women, however, have assumed a heroic position to emancipate women from domination.

These characters have quick and bright minds that can detect the good and the evil in their social milieu but they lack strength and commitment to bring about practical change in

the life of the society. They feel proud in their discernment but also they feel sick when they think of the subordinate position they have in the world they live. The view they have towards themselves is a blend of self-acceptance and self-rejection. The crisis between self-approval and disapproval is the unresolved problem in the life of these educated women. But, to get a kind of mental solace and keep the balance on the side of self-acceptance, they constantly try to establish a close tie with a man whom they admire for his courage and knowledge or for his special talent. Finot, for example, has a mental and physical relationship with a playwright, and Seble with a novelist, and Taffessu establishes the same kind of relationship with a man who courageously and consciously questions the dictatorial tendencies of the political group of which both of them are members.

The fourth type of female character in post-revolution Amharic novels is that who represents moral degeneration. Hirut in Ye Key Kokeb Tirri, and Zeleka in Maabel are typical examples. Both of them are from feudal families. They are vulgar, dishonest chatter-boxes whose acts and thoughts reveal nothing but moral degeneration. These two girls, impulsive and seductive as they are, tend to divert the attention of men away from vital matters and away from their ideological principles. The only dearest thing to them is their own self-image. They are portrayed as objects of appreciation and public gaze to which they willingly subject themselves. Their remarkable appearance, their big eyes, their rosy cheeks and full lips, their soft voice, their tears and smiles are all weapons that have enormous power over men to make them serve the girls' futile ends.

They are evil agents who derive pleasure from others' misfortunes. Hirut unmercifully inflicts pain and suffering in the life of her innocent admirer and poor lover, Deribe. She always irritates him with her snobbish attitude. Her

emotional instability, which is largely caused by her extreme fondness of lustful satisfaction on the one hand, and by her snobbish sense of class on the other, has always been the cause of enormous sufferings in the lives of her acquaintances, and is the cause of her own tragic end.

Zeleka is also another agent of destruction. To understand the whole of Zeleka one should not try to dig into her hidden self for she has no secret self at all. She is a totally comfort-loving character. She believes that the easiest way of getting ease and comfort is by engaging in trapping and cheating men of higher position and good fortune. Unfortunately, her dangerous venture finally leads her to destruction.

The motto that leads her to ultimate evil is laid out in her letter to her husband whom she has deserted after draining his physical and mental strength:

በዚህ ዓለም ሁላችን የምንኖረው አንድ ጊዜ ብቻ ነው።
አንድ ጊዜ ብቻ በኖርን ምን ማለት ነው? አንድ ህይወት
ብቻ አለን ማለት ነው። ሌላው አንደኛው ሰለጠኛ ሰለ
ገብረገብነት ስለጸደቀ ሊያወራ ይችላል። እኔ ገን ይቸን
አንድ ብቻ የሆነ ህይወትን በደስታና በምቸ ለሰጠኝ
አረጋግጠዋለሁ። ... ከልደኝ አንስቶ አንጻሻኝ ወሆን
የረገጠሁትን ማድረግ የምጠይ ነኝ።

We only live once in this world. What does this mean? It means we only have one life. Others can talk about moral, virtue and salvation. As for me, I want to live this single life in pleasure and comfort ... starting from early childhood, I have always been fond of being what I want and of doing what I like.¹⁹

Throughout the three books of Maabel, we come across the same Zeleka with her eager quest for comfort and sexual sensation and with her vanity of her own perception and family background. She always loves the romantic view of herself. Her self-esteem with no mark of intelligence does not ever lead her to question the reality of the society in which she lives. She

recognizes the marks of status but with no thought for its meaning. Zeleka creates her own world and tries to live it, but in vain. There has never been anything like it. Even she herself realizes this fact, though the realization comes at the last thread of her life and only under a torturing pressure. Undoubtedly, this bitter realization has left her mortified and deeply hurt. Even her proud heart painfully crushes its pride and she falls vanquished by terror. The ultimate price Zeleka and Hirut have paid for their stupidity and moral depravity is their own lives.

Another type of female character who is rewarded for her good manner is the girl secluded in the home of her father. Such, for instance, is Aynalem in Haddis or Hulun in Band Deret Sost Tut. Infact, these girls have no significant role in the respective novels in which they are portrayed, but their youthful innocence shines out brightly and adds a touch of colour to each story.

Both girls are under the strict control of their fathers and do not get much chance to enjoy the benefits of social environment. Because of their age and of their limited exposure to social life, they certainly lack deep social insight. These girls in their fictional worlds are at the same time loving but restrained, admiring but detached by the fear of violating the social norms about which their knowledge is very little. Whatever they do, they do it to please their parents and to support a self-image of being good and obedient girls. Fortunately enough, despite their limited knowledge and inability to express their feelings, they have been able to win the confidence and affection of educated young men. The reward they get for their innocence and good manner is a desirable marriage.

The new type of female character which appears in the Ethiopian literary scene during the post-revolutionary period

Stationary working class woman. The politically conscious
in the working class

is a revolutionary working class woman. The politically conscious proletarian woman has indestructible faith in the working class movement. She is resolute in fighting against all forms of oppression and exploitation and determined to build a new socialist society. Danse in Le Key Ababa is the lonely example.

Danse is big and strong. Her whole being seems to be devoted to the working class movement. Despite her lack of formal education, and hearsay knowledge of revolutionary theory, she dispenses loud-voiced advice on everything concerning revolutionary practices. Thanks to his generosity, the author has spooned her substantial knowledge on revolutionary tactics which are instrumental in defeating the enemy of socialism.

The proletarian woman has no secret resentments or desires. What she only dreams of or worries about is how to lead the socialist revolution to victory. The new woman character seems to be incapable of complex feelings. Whatever spiritual or physical ailments she may suffer, whatever victory or defeat the popular revolution may meet, her reaction is always firm and revolutionary.

Danse seems to be immune to sensations or thoughts beyond those connected with revolutionary ideas or practices. She is studiously kept free of sexual desire. The impulsive and seductive qualities of a woman are ignored in favour of selflessness and dedication to the cause of socialist revolution. According to her or her creator's judgement, an open romance even with a fiance is considered unworthy of a class-conscious woman.

Deanse has lost not only her femininity but also her individuality. We are not told the distinguishing marks of this factory woman in detail. Though she is one of the major characters, there is hardly any instance in the story in which Danse thinks and speaks in a peculiar fashion that can distinguish her from other characters.

The author of Le Key Ababa is very unsuccessful as a creator of plausible and live characters. But undeniably, he is the first writer to bring into the Ethiopian literary scene a revolutionary working class woman, though she is without flesh and blood.

As it has been mentioned earlier, women in Amharic novels play secondary role. They are not shown in positions of responsibility. They are either apathetic to social activities or simply show an interest in the hero's act without taking an active part in it. Leaving the lifeless Danse aside, a lonely exception to such conventional women is Sofiya Mulat in Wonjelgnaw Dagna.

Sofiya has no parallel among the population of female characters in Amharic novels. She is endowed with the best qualities for a responsible role. She has the qualities of self-sacrifice, endurance and an unfailing faith in what she thinks is right. She is a versatile, resolute and self-fulfilling woman.

Sofiya, together with her husband, plunges into exhausting and unpaid work just to reform the living conditions of the poor villagers. She willingly accepts the task of improving the lives of the people, and at the same time continues to carry on her responsibility of making life comfortable for her dear husband. Her sense of duty of doing good for the people and her sense of responsibility for her husband are always kept in harmony. This is what she says:

“... ተላቶ እንደባሉ አወድሃለሁ፣ ተላሁን ረደባ
እንደ ሰው ያኛተህንና አላጭህን አከብራለሁ። ስለዚህ
እንዲህ ለሰው ያኛተህና እንዲህ ለሰው አላጭህ ስት
ሰሩ በግድርከብህ ሁሉ አላለይህዎ፣ አልተውህዎ ደስታህ
ደስታዎ አዘንህ አዘኔ፣ ህይወትህ ህይወት ቀተህ ቀተ
ይህኛል።”

Tilaye, as a husband, I love you. Tilahun Feyissa, as a person, I respect your ambition and aim. Thus, I will stand by you when you work for the realization of such an aim and ambition. I will not abandon you; I will not desert you. Your happiness is mine; your grief is my grief and your death is also my death.²⁰

Sofiya has a marital life based on love, mutual sympathy and appreciation of efficient social service and dedication to that service. She impresses friends and enemies alike by her physical charm as well as by her physical and mental strength. People regard her as having a special power and knowledge conferred upon her by a supernatural being. That is why people have nicknamed her and her husband: "የቃል ቸቸ ነገሥታት" /kings of witch doctors./

Sofiya's additional outstanding feature is her femininity. Though she engages herself in unfamiliar and in mentally and physically demanding jobs, Sofiya is not devoid of desirable qualities. She is gentle, soft-voiced and impulsive. She has a loving nature. Sofiya usually appears in different chapters of the story with an elegance of mind and sweetness of character which have placed her high in the esteem of people of real understanding. She also appears very hard with people of mean character. Her resistance to evil action is so powerful and her reaction is so dignified that she really proves her strength and maturity by passing triumphantly through a long and varied sequence of events.

1.3 Lower Class Characters

Sympathy for the lower class people is the dominant recurring emotion in post-revolution Amharic novels. But, usually, those lower class characters whom the reader is called upon to sympathize with have no individual life in many of the novels as seen in the story of Wonjelegnaw Dagna, Haddis,

Derasiw and Band Deret Sost Tut. The lower class characters in these novels tend to be background characters performing the role of a chorus. They back genuine people, give wise advice to friends and control the passionate.

In most instances, the lower class characters tend to be predictable in words and actions. The sequence of events through which the lower class characters evolve seems to be similar in pattern. The event usually starts with the presentation of the miserable life of the unfortunate people under the old feudal system. Along with it there is a long description about their power of endurance and patience. Then, it is followed by the event of people's revolt against individual feudal lords which eventually grows to a strong opposition movement against the oppressive social order. In the final event the lower class people are transformed into staunch and conscious builder of a new social system.

If we identify all lower class people through all the events, we shall see qualities they share in common. They have physical strength and strength of feeling. They share to a similar degree a sense of duty. They are honest and unsophisticated and endowed with the power of good understanding and self-sacrifice for genuine cause. Baalu in one of his novels has described the qualities the lower class people have in common in the following way:

ለጥቅም ቅርጽ ላይ የመደብ ስህራይጅ ነው። ያለትገል
አገረውቅን አንደላይበጠስ ያውቃል። ለአንዲት ለጥር
ቁር ቁዋዛ ህይወት አይሰጥም በመስዋዕትነት የሰፊውን
ሕዝብ ተገል አንድ አርምጃ ወደፊት አንደላይገደምድ
ያውቃል።

Determination is the class character of the oppressed. The oppressed knows that he cannot break his shackle without struggle. He is not eager to live this short and miserable life. He knows that by sacrificing his life, he can further the people's struggle a step forward.21

In post-revolution Amharic novels an atmosphere of optimism founded on the ideological certainty of victorious revolutionary change is prevalent. The process of this revolutionary change and its uninterrupted development is hastened to its inevitable victory by lower class characters. Of course, in some novels the intellectual characters from lower class origin take the initiative and the lead to transform the feudal society into a new democratic society. But, the intellectuals can only be successful in their mission, if they are able to secure a favourable response from the lower class people. The lower class characters help genuine intellectuals realize their mission either by giving sage counsel as in Derasiw or by guarding them against the attack of evil agents as it is dramatized in Wonjelegnaw Dagna or in Haddis.

So far, it is only in three novels that the lower class characters fully grow out from their choral function to assume the role of a protagonist. Those novels are Maabel, Ye Key Kokeb Tirri and Le Key Ababa.

Birhanu has introduced revolutionary peasant heroes into the history of Ethiopian novels. Birhanu's peasant heroes exemplify certain principles of honour, courage and endurance even in a life of tension and hunger. The chief point about the heroes is their indestructible faith in what they believe *is right even under a physically and mentally torturing situations, and what counts is how they conduct themselves while they are being crushed by natural calamities and by the cruel hands of feudal lords.*

Muhe, the peasant hero in the first two books of Maabel, is a selfless old man who derives pleasure from doing something useful for the society. His wide and bitter life experience mingled with his love for the people has made him at once

sensitive and sensible. He is very sensitive to all kinds of injustice, malice and deception. He is sensible in a sense that he always backs what is good and right, gives advice to young men, controls the passionate and cherishes the wise men. When people are horribly discouraged by the needs and indignities of the time and when poor villagers are clouded with cold despair, Muhe appears with his strength of feeling and gives them hope and life.

Kassahun, the succeeding peasant hero in the third book of Maabel is also an upright young man who staunchly defends freedom and justice. Kassahun beneath a surface irritability which sometimes flares up on the slightest provocation, has a real hatred of all that is mean and deceptive. He is always satisfied not with what he gains for himself but with what he does for the benefit of the society. If there is any hectic situation in which life is at stake and decision means life or death to those involved, Kassahun is the first to appear with his decision to save others from unhonourable death.

In Ye Key Kokeb Tirri, we come across a working class protagonist who is endowed with the quality of higher thinking and human feeling. Of all Baalu's protagonists, it seems that **this working class character is the hardest to understand either emotionally or rationally.** It is only because he is handled with a real understanding of human feeling and sound characterization. Deribe, Baalu's working class protagonist, has never been squeezed into caricature of the ideal revolutionary man who is always victorious and successful in life. Deribe is a lifelike character who is constantly confronted with conflicting situations in his fictional world.

Baalu in his other two novels of the post-revolutionary period tends to focus more upon a single individual rather than upon the interplays between characters. He usually takes the reader into the minds of characters particularly into those

he is sympathetic with. Thus, it is simpler to the reader to see Baalu's main characters from inside than trying to understand them from outside. But, Deribe in Le Key Ababa does not easily fall within the scope of this generalization. The real Deribe can be understood better in his relation to other characters. One way in which Baalu reveals the real self of Deribe is through his relationship with another character. It is partly through this relationship that a certain completeness is given to the central character.

When we first meet Deribe in Ye Key Kokeb Tirri he is a faithful and an obedient servant in the house of a rich feudal family. He had no formal education nor ambition of any sort except to be loyal and honest to his masters. Unfortunately, the poor innocent man is seduced by a beautiful but worthless daughter of his master, Hirut. Deribe never gets a chance to persuade himself that the new relationship he has made with the sensuous girl is wrong, indiscreet and hardly capable of success. Consequently, he is soon left grieved and sleepless by her contempt and sudden rejection of his love. He has begun to feel his own status with bitterness and humility, and starts to think of ways of making himself his own master.

Though the relationship he has with Hirut is very unpleasant, it is, on the other side, a force that prompts him to look into his innerself. He then vows to himself that he will make every effort in order to change his own way of life. He believes that the only accessible means through which he can liberate himself from the attacks of humiliation and poverty is education. With this new enthusiasm he soon starts going to school. His good behavior added to his keenness to learn has gained him love and respect among acquaintances and later a job in the Ministry of Information and Public Guidance.

Deribe, eventually, begins to climb up the social ladder. He starts to take an active part in revolutionary squad. Deribe,

however, does not become totally successful in life. He does not become his own master as he wished to be. His deepest sympathy and love for Hirut remains unabated, though he knows well that she always thinks ill of him.

Deribe responds to every situation by becoming a really split personality. He, on one hand, being chairman of the revolutionary squad, has a primary duty of defending the revolution from the attacks of the enemies, and on the other, being seduced by the weakness of the flesh, he cannot control his passionate love for Hirut - a notorious enemy of the revolution. Deribe is constantly confronted with the choice of two things which are mutually exclusive. He is torn between his sense of revolutionary duty and his passionate love for a worthless and reactionary girl. He cannot bring himself to give up one for the other. Finally he chooses both, which is but another way of saying he gets neither. Deribe feels emptiness and loses the thread of things. He does not know what to do and where to go, and his story closes with the following paragraph:

እርዎኛው ወዳት አንደጣጣሪው ሊታየው አልቻለም።
ሰቡ ተንሰረረ። በርድ ቢሆንም አልባታል። ልቡ
በጣደር ገንጥ አየተንቀረቀረ ይመርዳል። ደርባውን
አልባታል። ... እና ጡንቻዎቹ ስቃይ ይሰጣቸዋል።
መንገዱ ወዳት ያመራል? መንገዱ ወዳት ያመራል?
መንገዱ ወዳት ያመራል? የሚል ጥያቄ ከእርዎኛው
ከተንፋሹ ጋር ከሰብ ተርታው ጋር ስልተ ይዞ ያስተ
ጋባል። አእምሮው ውስጥ።

He does not know where his steps lead him. His heart floats. Though it is cold, he sweats. The sweat drips down on the sides of his neck. His back perspires ... and he feels pain in his muscles. Where does the road lead? Where does the road lead? Where does the road lead? This is the question that echoes in his mind in rhythm with his step, breath and heartbeat.

The other writer who chooses two factory workers to be

the protagonists of his novel is Taddelle. Taddelle in his novel, Le Key Ababa, Portrays two workers, husband and wife, as representatives of the vanguard force of the revolutionary movement. Both characters envisage a society free from political suppression and economic exploitation, and commit themselves to its realization.

Taddelle is, however, more tempted to tell the role the characters play in different phases of revolutionary movement than to show them in plausible action. We are not given an opportunity to have a view of the reactions individual characters have to different events. We are not even prompted to visualize what Danse and Hansamo look like. All matters to do with individual life might have been known only to the author.

The author's main intention in this particular novel is to reflect the conflict between the social forces and project the nature of the social conflict and its final resolution. His intention seems to be good in that it touches the heart of the life of the society. But, his craftsmanship is so poor that it fails to bring out that life and conflict with the action of characters who bear the goals, aspiration and interests of opposing social classes. In other words, in Le Key Ababa ideas and characters are not contained in action and expressed through it. Characters are reduced to being the mouth-pieces of the author.

1.4 Feudal Characters

Fierce indictment of the feudal system is obsessively present in the novels of post-revolutionary period. The most corrupt and ignorant characters who abuse their duties and misuse their power and whose conscience is manipulated by relentless greed for money and privilege are usually drawn from the class of feudal lords.

Feudal characters in all post-revolution novels are seen indulging themselves in all sorts of human vices. Nearly all of them are devilish by nature, shameless by experience, ignorant and cruel in their thoughts and actions. All sorts of mockery, ridicule and hate are implicitly or explicitly expressed by the novelists whenever they happen to describe the physical and mental states of their feudal characters. The feudal characters are usually very repulsive even in their physical appearance. Such, for instance, are Dagnachew Ferissa in Wonjelegnaw Dagna, Zerfeshiwal in Maabel, The Gulilat family, (Gulilat himself and Amsale), in Ye Key Kokeb Tirri. Balanberas in Band Deret Sest Tut.

The feudal characters are always held responsible for large-scale destruction inflicted on the economic, social and political life of their social environment. The misery and suffering of the peasants are caused particularly by the corrupt activities of these greedy characters. Possessed by egoistic behaviour, we see them contending for honours in public administration and for profit in business. Ridden by greed, they engage in bullying and clubbing to exort every last cent from the starving peasants. They are human parasites who feed on the fruits of others' labour. Their relentless greed and their animal violence are always on display in all the scenes of post-revolution novels.

Feudal characters are devoid of good thoughts, of love, honesty and reason. Because of their moral depravity, they lack human integrity and richness and do not feel the hopes and fears, joys and sorrows of their poor subjects. In all the novels, feudal rulers are portrayed as monsters of cruelty and debauchery. The following extracts may suffice to show how the novelists satirize the futility of ideas and enormity of the crimes of the feudal characters. Balanberas, a feudal character in Band Deret Sest Tut reveals the rubbish of his

own mind in the following words: " ባላገርና አሀያ የሚያከብረውን አይወድም ... ዛሬ ለሆነ ይተገራሉ ብለን ዘም ብንላገው ነገ አንደሆን አይረቸሁ እንኳ አይሉንም..." /A peasant and a donkey do not love who respects them. ... If we today, leave the peasants alone because they are in trouble, they won't even say 'Good morning' on the morrow./²³ Dagnachew Ferissa, in Wonjelegnaw Dagna, at one instance says: "ባላገር ባላለገው ልላገም ባለም ... ልክ የሚያስገባ ብርቱ በያዘው አቅጣጫ ሆነ ሀብቱ ተዘቆ አያልቀም ከራሱ ጠገኛ አስከ አገር ጥፍረ አቅጥኖ ሀብቱ ብቻ ነው።" /If a peasant is not reluctant or if there is some strong person to put him aright when he relucts, there is no end to his labour and riches. From head to toe he is full of resources./²⁴ This ill-digested opinion of Dagnachew is similarly expressed by another feudal character in Maabel: "አያያዙን ባወቁት ባላገር የጠክተን ሁሉ ይቸላል ... ወሎ አሀል ጠፋ በሉና ... ደገም ባላገር የሚሰላው ቢያጣ የሚከፍለው መቸ አጥቶ ይውያል።" / If one knows how to treat a peasant, a peasant can carry all the load given him ... Tell us, then, that there is no crop in Wollo ... A peasant has always something to pay, even if he does not have anything to eat./²⁵

These sentences do not only expose the depravity and arrogance of their speakers but also their empty-headedness and inhuman behavior. The characters' high-living and low level of thought evoke our disdain. We feel contempt for the greedy and corrupt feudals who fatten themselves on the fruits of the peasants while the vast majority of the peasants are languishing in grinding poverty.

These devilishly charged characters always do something evil to hurt good people and are envious about genuine individuals. They seek to inflict pain and misery on the lives of the people even if they know that they will not benefit from it. They like to hamper the progress of the people, disrupt peace and freedom and they always give their guilty acts a nice name - patriotism, defending the unity and strength of the nation, protecting the

culture of the society. Haddis Alemayehu in Wonjelegaw Dagna helps us to know the feudals' understanding of the word patriotism or heroism:

የግግረና ያከባቢ ሀዘብ በመንግስት ላይ ሸፈተ ተብሎ ሲዘመተበት በመንግስት ወገን ሆነው ቀጥሮ ስፍር የለለው ሀዘብ የፈገገ በዙጫው አወደ ያደረጉ መሆናቸው ስለ ታወቀባቸው ስመጥረ ጀገና ተብለው ለገልገሉታቸው ዋጋ ስልጣን ተሰጥቷቸዋል።

When the Gimira and the surrounding people were said to have revolted against the government, Girazmach sided the government in the campaign, killed countless number of people and destroyed many villages. Owing to these services, he was honoured and given prize.²⁶

A similar description is given in Birhanu's novel:

ነፍሳቸውን ይግባና ይገዛማቸው ባለሀኑ ኖሮ ወለዋን ግን ይቸለሱ ነበር ግን ነገ ጠባ ግደዎ ነው ነገ ጠባ ግደዎ ነው። ታዲያ አያገደው ደርባውን ሲገለጹ ስጦት ልክ ገባ ፀጥ ለጥ አለ።

'God bless his soul.' Had it not been for Dejazmach, who would have challenged Wollamos? They revolt day in, day out. They plot day in day out. And so, when he laid them down and flogged their backs, they kept quiet. They submitted.²⁷

Both writers, Haddis and Birhanu try to arouse the reader's indignation against the atrocities of those evil agents. They also seek to attack the whole political system that honours the individual for its evil doings.

Denekew Assaye in Band Deret Sost Tut and Baalu in Ye Key Kokeb Tirri have also tried to show the tyranny of the feudal rulers as well as the misery of the poor people. The feudal characters that we meet in the novels of both writers, like their counterparts in others' novels, tend to be shallow and mean in their thoughts, cheap and uncivilized in their acts.

They even tend to be dishonest with themselves.

Clinging to superstitious precepts, the archaic feudal in each novel distrusts any innovation as does, Dagnachew Ferissa, or Tilahun Shewarega in Haddis, or Amsale in Ye Key Kokeb Tirri, or Zerfeshiwal in Maabel. All these characters encourage conformism to old ways and discourage any creative endeavour. "የተኛውን ወርፏ ሰር ተው ያሳ የተን ሀዘብ ነው ለውጥ የሚሉት" /Which needle have they made and shown the people, to tell them of change./²⁸ This is the famous catchword of the feudals which is recited to ridicule learned men who are enthusiastic about introducing progressive ideas. Their whole entities advocate a return to the past ways. These ignorant feudal lords are engulfed in a blind and fearful struggle against the present and the future which they do not want to understand nor foresee. They deride every thing new, despise poor people and denounce progressive intellectuals. They sing only in praise of everything old.

It must be mentioned, however, that there is one feudal character whose thought and action may not be in line with the general conception of the behavior of feudal characters. He is Teka Ejersa in Haddis. Teka, unlike other feudal characters, is sympathetic to the poor peasants. With no

apparent hesitation he helps poor people lessen their burden.

But, he has never sought to dry the source of their agony.

Teka largely plays in the story a role of mediator between the feudals and the peasants so long as it brings no disruption to social order.

There is of course a substantial reason why Teka assumes such a position which is not preferred by most of the feudals that we find in Amharic novels. It is because of the fact that he is resentful of the regime that gives him no place in the government bureaucracy. He thus seeks to console his own frustrated soul by taking a shelter in the people's sympathy. However, his snobbish sense of class which reveals itself whenever he feels the heat of the

peasant revolt. But, under normal circumstances, he is different from the rest of feudal characters in action and thought.

Feudal character, in general, with its superstitious precepts, evil thoughts and cruel acts has been duplicated and reduplicated in different Amharic novels and now it seems to be a stock type involved in a stock-situation. It always indulges itself in all sorts of vices and is always a stumbling block to change and progress. Outwardly, it seems to be an omnipotent force which cannot be overthrown without the will of God. But, when it confronts new and unexpected situations in the sequence of events usually presented by social unrest, it suddenly feels weak, unstable and insecure. It loses its apparent high-spirit and becomes so feeble that it cannot resist the new situation with the decisiveness and self-assurance with which it seems to deal with things when situation is in favour of it. As a rule, the stingy feudal character is finally doomed to failure by the indefatigable struggle of genuine intellectuals and of poor peasants.

Chapter II

Major Themes

2.1 Theme of Self-actualization

Self-actualization theorist, Abraham Maslow, asserts that self-actualization is a process that demands self-knowledge, self-acceptance, full commitment to a sense of mission and courage to pursue that mission regardless of pain.²⁹ With a clear intention of stimulating the readers to self-evaluation and self-fulfillment, many Amharic novelists of the post-revolutionary period show their hero characters undergoing a process of discovering their values with the promise of self-regeneration through a more selfless love for others and a commitment to a sense of mission. They create fictional worlds in which positive characters are urged to a varying degree to reassess their own values and raise their self-images in various phases of their existence.

The Amharic novels of the post-revolutionary period have either a central message or contain an idea which affirms that the will and the courage to unfold the inner-self and develop the potentiality are positive aids that contribute to find a purpose in life as well as to make future life brighter. In most of the novels the message is not simply conveyed by presenting a straightforward portrayal of achieving men. It is rather expressed through the involvement of human varieties that comprise the grouping of cowards or gamblers or weak and pretentious individuals on the one hand, and self-fulfilling persons or men engaged in the process of self-discovery on the other. So, a study of the themes of the novels is to some extent a discussion of characters.

In almost all the novels, we find characters who lack virility to be true to themselves and courage to attain the goals

interaction between his imaginative mind and the character he has been portraying in his unfinished novel provides him an opportunity to get rid of his hypocritical attitude. In such an interaction Sirak is bound to be much concerned with his own conduct and feeling. The following sentence will throw light on the practical consequence of the interaction between characters and their creator.

ከምረጥረጥው ገጠባህሪያት አጥብቆ የምጠይቀው
ምገባራዊ ድፍረት ተሀትናና ፍቅር ታግኝነትና ሀቀኛ
ነት ቀራጥነትና መስዋዕትነት በእኔ ባህሪው ጠላት
የት አለ . . . ስለራሱም ሆነ ስለህይወት የነበረው
ተልቅ ገምት ከስረ ተንደባት እርቃኑ አስቀያሚ ገጽ
ታው ገር አየተያየት ነበር እቤት የደረሰው።

The courage, politeness, love, honesty and genuineness, uprightness and selflessness which I strongly demand from my characters are not found in myself The inflated conception he had of himself and of life had lost ground and he reached home looking at his own naked and ugly features.³⁵

Indeed, Sirak makes use of his own characters. He is prompted to re-evaluate his whole essence as he seeks to penetrate the psychological feelings of his characters. At long last, Sirak manages to have a full understanding of his real self. With this self discovery, his hypocritical attitude and inconsistent view-point give way to a clear and firm idea about himself and about life. Furthermore, he makes a big stride to self-actualization.

Two Amharic post-revolution novels which have given us portraits of young men who seek and achieve self-realization in their undertakings to shape up human history are Wonjelegnaw Dagna and Haddis. If characters in these novels are examined in the light of Maslow's theory of self-actualization, certainly Tilahun and Sofiya in Wonjelegnaw Dagna, Haddis in the novel of that name will prove themselves to be the best and exemplary.

The authors have expressed through their works the optimistic belief they have in the capacity of educated young men to change the life of the society for the better.

Baalu's novel, Haddis, is dominated by one figure, the figure of the title hero, Haddis. Similarly, his Derasiw has one dominant figure - the figure of Sirak. By probing into these figures, Baalu projects his vision of an ideal educated young man and of a writer who eventually assumes to be true to himself.

In Haddis, Baalu depicts a self-actualizing young man who inflicts a crushing defeat on the agents of ignorance and poverty. The protagonist, Haddis, is very intelligent in his academic standing and very handsome in his physical appearance. He is very poor in his economic position and familial standing, but endowed with desirable human qualities. Haddis strongly believes in the fact that his country could prosper if and only if its citizens get proper education. He fully believes that education is an effective instrument that enables a society to liberate itself from backwardness.

The slogan, "Free Education for All" is his everyday recital.

He has also convinced himself that the responsibility for putting slogan into practice has fallen on the shoulders of educated individuals. It is this sense of duty that rings in his mind and urges him to re-assess himself.

ተምህርት አለምን ለተሻለ ህይወት የምንለውበት ለይተኛ
ወቅት ለህን ይገባል። የአውቀት ጥቅም ከምን ላይ ነው
አለምን ለማደግ የሚያስችልን ወቅት ለሌሎች ላይ ነው
ውነት ስንተኛው ላይ ያለውን ሀላፊነት ለመለከት ለማድረግ
ከባድ ነው። የነገራችን ተወልዶ የነገራችን ልሎ የመከተል
የሚነጻ ሀላፊነት ነው። ለና ስንተኛውን ይህን ደባይ ሀላ
ፊነት ለመሸከም የሀላፊ ዘገደት አይርገናል ? ለኔ በጣም
ነው የሚከብረኝ።

Education should be the vital instrument in changing the world for the better. What is the use of knowledge if it does not serve as an instrument that enables us to change the world? Indeed, one can see that the

responsibility put upon teachers is very heavy. It is a responsibility of shaping and cultivating posterity and tomorrow's world. And so, how many of us are mentally prepared to carry this responsibility? For me, it is very heavy.

Haddis in his search for fulfillment is constantly spurred to re-evaluate his own value in order to find a rationale for his existence. And his sensitive soul always feels the urge of responsibility to do something meaningful. In the process of unfolding his inner-self and of actualizing his potentiality, Haddis encounters enormous difficulties. The backward beliefs in the society, the the corrupt activities of certain individuals, the reactionary attitude of the ruling feudal class towards new ideas and initiatives are among the many problems which make the accomplishment of his mission very difficult, if not impossible. Haddis faces all sorts of barriers with courage and endurance. He only dreams of the bright future that will emerge out of the present struggle, and so never does he mind the pain and suffering inflicted on him by negative agents. When his wife once asked him.

“እንዴት ነገር ከፍጻሜ ደርሶ በውስጡ ተስ ይላል አይደለም?” / Is it not pleasant to see things which one has planned successfully accomplished? / His answer was “በጣም አገድ ያሳለፈት ገሃነም ሁሉ ይረባል። አዳ በው ከገጹህ ስራው ፊት ሲቀም ራሱ አገዢ ይሆናል።” / Indeed! All the sufferings undergone in hell-fire will be forgotten, and when a man is seen standing upright in front of his genuine accomplishment, he becomes God himself. / 37

Haddis expresses his heart-felt pleasure with the following words when he visualizes the fruits his present struggle will bear:

ለገ ሕጻናት ስራ ተሰጥቶ ሰይ አገዳት ልበላህ
በውስጡ ገጽ የነገው ብረህ አለም ይታያል። አዳ
ካለም ወራት ላይ ፍራ ሰዘራ አያለሁ። የተዘረተ ፍራ
ያቸ ብር ይዘው ሲያበቡ በአይኔ ይመጣሉ። ክፍል በገ
ባሁ ቀጥሮ ያበባ አተክልቸኛ ወሃል የቀምኩ ነው የሚ
ወሰለኝ።

What can I say when I see small children gathered in infront of me? Through them I visualize tomorrow's bright world. I see myself planting seeds in a fertile land. I can see the seeds taking root; and in blossom Whenever I enter the classroom, I feel as if I am amidst a garden of flowers.38

Haddis envisages and seeks to protect the future by making every effort to bring up the sons and daughters of the forgotten masses with appropriate education geared to meet the interests of the people. This is his declared mission in life. He has persued this noble mission with total commitment regardless of hardships and sufferings, he has played his role with great agility and strength of feeling and has therefore proved to be a man of deeds. He strongly hates those learned men who indulge themselves in theoretical discussions for the sake of intellectual exercise.

የምንናገረውን ለምን በሰራ አንገልጽም ? ከብዙ
ጭብቶች ተንሽ ሥራ ተበልጣለች ብዙም ተናገራለች...
ጥያቄው ምን አንባል ሳይሆን ምን አናደርገ ?
አጃቸን ምን ይሥራ ነው::

Why don't we translate what we say into deeds? A little work is better than a lot of shouting and it has a lot to say, ...
The question is not what to say, but what to do? What shall our hands do?39

This is his message to us. He tells us to commit ourselves to every job that has to be done, to take initiative, give hands and make a start.

The other self-fulfilling character who is quite similar to that of Baalu's Haddis is Tilahun Feyissa of Haddis Alemayehu. Haddis Alemayehu expresses the theme of self-actualization through the act of a brilliant and handsome character with a college education. Tilahun is from a lower class family, but endowed with noble thinking. Like that of Baalu's self-fulfilling young man, Tilahun's vitality expresses itself in his

Unflinching and powerful belief that he is born to do something important, to guide and inspire some human history.

After the author's brief narration about the characters' unfortunate life in the University and family background, the character, in lieu of the author, introduces himself to the reader in the following sentences:

ከህይወቴ ጀምሮ አሁን እስከረሰሁት የተገዛሁትን የሕይወት ጉዳዮች መሰሰብ የሆነው ከቸገር ጋር አያ ተገላግሎ ለሌሎች አገልግሎት ደስ በማሰገት ብቻ ደስ አንዲት ሆኜ አደርገን ረገጥ አስቀድሞ መደብ በረገጥ ጋር የተጻፋሁ ይመስለኛል።

When I look back and view in retrospect the life path I have marched through from my childhood to the stage I have reached now, I classify myself among those who God has created with a destiny to derive pleasure by serving and pleasing others while at the same time struggling against poverty.40

Tilahun is not boasting as he utters these words. Far from it. The bitter experiences and economic problems that have confronted Tilahun as a student make him physically and mentally strong. Later, his unflinching search for a meaningful existence provides him with tremendous opportunities to be able to discover and define himself. In response to strong and sometimes compelling situations, he slips from uncertainty into decision, from mere contemplation into action. The combination of the courage to decide as well as the strength to act based on unlimited deliberation springs from and in its success increases enormous feeling of responsibility to do something useful for the betterment of the society.

We follow Tilahun from the capital city to the countryside and then back to Addis Ababa watching his growth to self-fulfillment. When we first meet him in Addis Ababa he, apparently, allows events to overtake him rather than determine the course of events himself. It is in Teppi, a little village in Illubabor

Administrative region, that Tilahun proves to be a well-matured person when circumstances give him the chance to assume responsibility for himself. In that forgotten village, he engages himself in organizing poor tenants, redistributing land to the landless villagers, damming rivers, constructing irrigation systems, tending the sick and educating the illiterates. In his undertaking of the socially important tasks, he constantly comes in clash particularly with selfish people whose material interest are terribly threatened by his upright principle, and generally with the social system that allows the few to exploit the many. His morale, however, is kept high by his sense of duty well-done and his peace of mind ensured by the result of his endeavour. His love for the deserving wife gives him strength. Tilahun, engrossed in his noble ideas and securing the sympathy of the people, finds it necessary to pursue his mission of relieving the people of their hellish life despite the threatening circumstances created by the evil forces.

Thanks to his own courage and to the unfailing assistance and affection of his wife and to the overwhelming support of the people, Tilahun emerges victorious from all kinds of predicaments. He affirms his greatness by struggling towards the realization of an objective so vital that it calls for the sacrifice of material comfort and personal interest.

Tilahun is not alone on his way to self-fulfillment. There is always Sofiya, his dear wife, on his side. Sofiya is a strong and intelligent woman who throws away the crushing weight of the feudal social values. She chooses independently and prudently to marry the man who returns her love and whom she admires and respects for his genuineness. As she becomes more educated through love and life experience, she learns to overcome her restrictive background and takes a move to assert herself. She eventually becomes truly notable for her ingenuity and efficiency in carrying out tasks that contribute a lot to the progress of the society.

Sofiya willingly marches with her husband towards the realization of socially important objectives though she knows, beforehand, that the way is full of violence, pain and suffering. Such a sacrifice of personal comfort for the accomplishment of noble tasks is in a profound sense an attainment of self-actualization. A brief extract from her speech can tell what a great woman she is:

አሰቢ አሰላሰዬ ለወሰንሁት ነገር አንኩዋንሰ አንድ ጊዜ
አሰር ጊዜም አየተመሳሰሁ የምቀተ ቢሆን አሳፈራም:: የም
ታምንበትን ከሰባድሽ የተወደውን ጠላሁ ከላለሽ የተፈላጊ
ውን ከሰተውሽ ወይም ለመኖርሽ አላጣ አደርገሽ በፊትሽ ያቆ
ምሽውን ከሰለወጥሽ ተገደያለሽ የምባል ቢሆን ወይም ገደለሽት
ሰፍራ ቀር ሰይለሽ አንዲያውም አየዘመርሁ መሄድን አንደም
መርጥ ይገባሁ::

For the decision that I have made after thorough deliberation I will not be afraid to die ten times over let alone once. If I am told that I will be killed unless I betray my principle, hate what I love, abandon what I like or change the goals that I have set for life, you have to know that I will prefer to march to my death spot with no hesitation. I will even sing as I march.⁴¹

A reader who carefully follows Sofiya from the beginning to the end of the story of Wonjelegnaw Dagna will definitely affirm **that she lives up to her word.** She is really a devoted wife

and a self-fulfilling woman.

In general, what can be said about post-revolution novelists is that they do share a common belief which they want to instill into the minds of their readers. This common belief is that great and genuine men are the ones who are committed to the development of their own potentialities.

2.2 Theme of Class Struggle

The society which the Ethiopian novelists live in and seek to write about is a society in turmoil. It is a society under the grip of an all-pervading social transformation. The society

which is ready to consume the fruits of the artistic creation of its talented members is a society troubled by a civil war between members of the defunct feudal regime who want to stage a comeback to power and the revolutionaries who tenaciously hold on to their hard-won victory.

This civil war leaves no one in the society unaffected. Those literary men, being keen and perceptive in expressing the spirit of the time, seem to feel the urge to measure the heat of the social turmoil. They show a sense of commitment and seriousness to capture the social reality in the framework of their creative works, and seem to feel an obligation to offer to their readers the causes of the class war and its historical solution.

The fierce struggle between opposing classes has inspired all literary artists of post-revolutionary period. The situations and actions in which this dominant theme is presented, depict the cross-section of the society's cultural and economic realities and engage the characters and presumably the readers in moral and political struggle. The stories in most of the novels contain descriptions of the miseries and humiliations endured by the masses, expositions of the inhumanity of the feudal class, and reflections of the people's revolt of remarkable breadth and duration and the final disintegration of the oppressive social system.

The main impulse of post-revolutionary writings seems to be a violently anti-feudal attitude. It brings out the people's bitter disappointment in the decadent feudal regime and their growing determination to bring a new social system into reality. The following extract may reveal the impulse felt to slap the oppressive social system:

ህዝቡ የሚፈልገው ከብዙም በላይ ነው።
 ለደርግ ከሚከተሉት ከአባቶቻቸው ከባለቤቱ ጋር።
 የተባዘኩት የተባዘኩት ህዝብ ምንጊዜም ቢሆን መሰረ
 ታዩ ፍላጎት ነፃነትና ለኩራት ነው። ለነዚህም
 ደግሞ ያለበት ነፃነት ለውጥ አይገባም።

What the people want is to liberate themselves from exploitation and oppression, and to extricate themselves from illiteracy, poverty and disease. The basic needs of the oppressed people are always freedom, equality and justice. These, of course, cannot be achieved without a radical change.

Prominent writers like Haddis Alemayehu in his Wonjelegnaw Dagna, or Baalu in his novel, Haddis or Birhanu Zerihun in his First book of Maabel - Yabyot Wazema have all projected the reality of life in rural Ethiopia in pre-revolutionary period. With a retrospective imagination, all of them show the tyranny of feudal rulers and the misery of the poor peasants. In their respective novels, they present the system dominated by disgustingly weak authorities who are governed by the most ordinary feelings like vanity, greed and jealousy. These weak authorities are always busy with plots and intrigues against genuine people and at the same time engage themselves with malicious endeavours to extort every possessions from the exhausted and starving peasants. In Wonjelegnaw Dagna, we come across a merciless regional administrator who, illegally, plunders the wealth of the region. We find in Haddis narrow minded and corrupt officials who are engaged in misappropriating public funds. In Yabyot Wazema, we observe ignorant feudals wallowing in luxury and pleasure while the poor are starving to death.

At the same time, we observe new social forces emerging with great enthusiasm and courage to change the system which has been dominated by the banal authorities. The effort of the new social forces to realize a new system are continuously

frustrated by the inertia of the negative forces and obstructed by the old ideas and beliefs. Consequently, the clash between the social forces of good and evil, the haves and the have-nots becomes an inescapable job. It is this clash between classes that is dutifully emphasized in the novels. The final and inevitable triumph of the new over the old is also stressed in every novel.

It was in fact clear from quite an early date before the revolution that some of the Ethiopian writers dwelt upon this theme and somehow felt the need for social change. But "if one seeks specific indications of the direction Ethiopian authors want their country to take in the future, what sort of change and what kind of society they want, one will find that few of them commit themselves to any programme or to any precise answers."⁴³ The Ethiopian revolution seems to serve as an agent to crystallize the long-conceived idea of change and to give it much greater clarity of purpose. Most of the writers have now become more conscious of the need for greater literary involvement in the political struggle to build a new socialist system. They do not only expose the evils of the feudal regime but also feel the urge to arm the oppressed section of the society ideologically. The following passage will definitely convey this sense of commitment:

በኪነታዊ ረጠራ ውስጥ የሰሻሊስታዊ አውነተ አለማዳኝነት የተገኘ ገደብ ከአስከፊው ገጽታ ጋር እንዲያደርግ ይቻላል። ለዚህም ምሳሌ ለሆነው ለደብዳቤ ተለክሎ የሰሻሊስታዊ አደጋዎችን አመለካከት በአንገላለጽ አለፎ ውስጥ አንድ ቀረጽ ከግድግዳ ላይ ነው።

In an artistic creation, the aim of socialist realism is to fight for the demolition of the rotten wall of history with all its horrid features, and its main purpose is to inculcate socialist and revolutionary ideas in the minds of the readers.⁴⁴

What is projected in almost all the novels is the process of the breaking up of the old social system and the victory of the establishment of the new. The main butt of the Ethiopian novelists' attack is the corrupt activities of the feudal lords and aristocrats. The object of their praise is the endurance and strength of the common man. The main conflict on which the stories of different novels develop, basically reflects not only the spiritual and physical confrontation of the old and the new, but also justifies and affirms the superiority of the new.

Of all writers Birhanu and Taddelle seem to be much more fascinated by the themes of the revolution. Birhanu, with more fact and less fiction, has documented the transformation of feudal Ethiopia into a new socialist state. The vehicle for this transformation is class struggle. Birhanu, in his preface, tells the reader what his book is about:

በበዘባዥና በተበዘባዥ፣ በገዥና በተገዥ ወይም
ወባዥና የነበረውን ገንጥነት ቀራኒ የእነዚህን
ህይወት ስሜት በተወሰነ ወይ-ረክ ለማሰየት የሚሞ
ክር መስኮት ነው። በመጻፈው ውስጥ የተገለጸው
ስጦታዎቹ ሁኔታ እንደነበር ምንም ጥርጥር የለበ
ትም። ከመዘገብ የተገኙ ማሰረጃዎቹን የጠቀስኩትም
ይህንን ለማመልከት ነው።

It is a mirror on a particular platform that reflects the lives and feelings of the different classes, the contradiction and relation between the exploited and the exploiting, the ruled and the ruling classes. There is no doubt that what is portrayed in the book is the general condition that existed in social reality. And it is to indicate this reality that I have quoted evidence from official documents.⁴⁵

The intention conveyed by this account shows the intensity which Birhanu appears to have felt about the need to document the different courses of class struggle. Birhanu has managed to give us a full view of the revolutionary process by guiding his positive as well as negative characters through a long and varied sequence

of events in which the interests of the two opposing forces frequently come into clashes. However, because of the urge to express historical facts, Birhanu is more frequently tempted to describe events in their sequence of occurrence and record the direct experiences of characters than to reveal their mental states.

Maabel is a historical novel in three books with proper emphasis on the times of stress and strain. The first book, Yabyot Wazema, deals with the eve of the revolution. It brings out the terrible scene of mass annihilation caused by unbridled feudal exploitation and natural calamities. In this book, the writer does not seem to be much concerned with the psychological exploration of his characters, but is rather interested in showing the contrast between the state of poverty which the ordinary people undergo and the luxury and greed of the rich:

የእንግሊዝ የደርመን የአሜሪካን የጃፓን የሌሎች
የፈረንሳይና የሶቪየት አውቶቢሎች ለማን በበዛበት
የአዲስ አበባ ጉዳይ ይርመሰመሳሉ። ቀጥረው እንደ
ሰማኙ በየቀኑ እየጨመረ ይሄዳል። ደም ቀጥቶ ውስ
ታታው በየጊዜው ይለወጣል። ... በተፈረኑት ጉዳይ
ዎች ጉን አዳዲስ ሰማይ ጠቀስ ሀገራዎች የተሞሉ ሲሉ
ዎች ይሰራሉ። ...

Automobiles made in Germany, U.S.A., Japan, Italy, France and Sweden swarm the streets of Addis Ababa which are flooded by beggars. Their number increases everyday as the number of the beggars does. Their beauty and brightness changes now and then ... New storey-buildings and beautiful villas are being built adjacent to the congested and dilapidated huts.⁴⁶

Birhanu by way of contrast compels the reader to visualize the reality of life on the eve of the revolution. He exposes how thoughtlessly the rich are wallowed in luxury and pleasure while the broad masses live in abject poverty. He hints at how the class strife between the two sections of the population becomes very intense.

In Yabyot Mebacha, the second book of Maabel, Birhanu concentrates on telling a story about the opposition movements which involve the mutiny of soldiers, workers' protest against the ever-worsening living condition, students demonstrations in solidarity with the oppressed people and revolts of the peasantry. In the second book, Birhanu seems to put much more emphasis on telling historical events than showing plotted action. In other words, he prefers discussing factual events to giving the characters much chance to express themselves vividly in action. In Yabyot Mebacha characterization is subordinated to political discussion and description of revolutionary events.

In the third book, Yabyot Magist, the writer brings out the nature of the class struggle between the class conscious-working people and the reactionary forces. He dramatizes the villainess **of the reactionary elements** as well as their inability to stand long in the face of the great wave of the revolutionary movements. Most of the anti-revolutionary characters that we meet through the long distance of the three books of Maabel are shot dead while making attempts to subvert the course of history. Some of them have totally disappeared from the scene with no further significance, and the remaining few run away from the country. Only the progressive class starts a new life. It makes the first stride **toward building a new social system**. The victorious class beams a ray of hope to the poor country which had been devastated by the cruel hands of reactionary forces.

In regard to its thematic presentation, Maabel is a political novel in which the causes of the revolution, the class struggle and the gains of the revolution are portrayed. Its story starts with misery, darkness and despair, and ends with victory, enlightenment and hope, and class struggle is considered to be the instrument by which this change is effected. From the artistic point of view, presumably, no one would fail to appreciate

the skillful portrayal of some lively scenes and the presentation of human variety in the novel's long journey.

The other writer who is carried off by the themes of revolution is Taddelle Gebre-Hiwot. The desire to present the Marxist theoretical foundation of social revolution, the ambition to show the different facets of class struggle and the urge to tell the historical mission of the working class movement are abundantly present in his work. Le Key Ababa is simply a novel into which the author has repleted his theoretical knowledge of class struggle. But, in those qualities which make a novel a good one-creation of character, development of situation, use of literary language, it is admittedly inferior to other novels of post-revolutionary period. Le Key Ababa seems to be more of a political pamphlet than a serious novel. It is full of lifeless characters and revolutionary slogans frequently marred by incoherent ideas. A brief extract is sufficient to show this:

የአሰራሪዎች ተቆይቶ ክፍለ ዘመን መጀመሪያ የአመጽ መጀመሪያ
አንደኛው ሁሉ የሃያ አንደኛው ክፍለ ዘመን መጀመሪያ
ለኢትዮጵያ የአመጽ መጀመሪያ መሆን አለበት። በ 1776
አሜሪካኛ ከአንገሊዝ ቀን ተገዢነት ነጻ ጠቀሱ። በ 1966
ደግሞ ኢትዮጵያን ከአሜሪካውያንና አጠቃላይ ሁሉ አንጻር
ነጻ ጠቀሱ። ጠንቅሎ ሀገር ማሰባሰብ ነበረባቸው። አሁንም
ሆነ። የኢትዮጵያ አላማ ግን አንደ አሜሪካን አለምን ለመጠጠ
ቀን ሳይሆን በአለም ላይ ነጻ ሀገር ለመሆን ነው። የአለም
ባርቶ ከኢትዮጵያ ባርቶ አኩላ ነፃ የሚጠቀሙትን መንገድ
ኢትዮጵያ ተቀይሷል። በዘባዝ አንጻራ ማርክሲዝምን ኢትዮ
ጵያ ታስፋፋለች።

As the beginning of the 18th century was the commencement of revolution the beginning of the 21st century should be a period of an outbreak of revolution in Ethiopia. In 1776 the Americans were liberated from British colonialism. In 1974 the Ethiopians had to build a strong country by freeing themselves from the Americans and their stooges; and they did it. But, Ethiopia's aim is not to oppress the world like America does but to be a free nation in the world. Ethiopia shall work out a means of emancipating the slaves of the world along with its own slaves. In

order to wipe out exploiters, Ethiopia shall disseminate Marxism.⁴⁷

Lack of coherence and good diction are not the only flaws of the novel. The writer is excessively omniscient in discussing his political views at the expense of the independent lives of characters. Taddelle has certainly failed to express his idea of class struggle in the action of well-delineated characters.

The other writer who has taken much interest in the theme of revolution is Baalu Girma. In Ye Key Kokeb Tirri, Baalu gives us the picture of fierce class struggle that has taken place in Addis Ababa just after the eruption of the revolution. He brings to our attention the antagonistic attitudes and motives of the warring political factions. The feelings and interests of the different social classes are expressed through well-delineated characters. The feudal morality is physically represented by At. Gulilat and W/o Ansale. Both characters, husband and wife, dream of the 'good' old days. They are frustrated by and are bitter about the present situation. The anonymous characters in the story do represent one reactionary political group. Most of these characters are either handicapped or deformed. With no exception all of them are cynical in their behaviour and blind in their power-mongering venture. Hirut, the sensuous girl, a self-conceited young man and a few immature school boys belong to an underground political organization. Some of the members of this clandestine organization involve in political struggle just because they have considered politics to be the fashion of the day. Without having sufficient understanding of politics, these inexperienced and immature young men plunge into a life-risking political game. The protagonist of the story does represent a political force which has a legal platform in national politics. Besides representing a political force, the protagonist assists the author in linking the different political factions. He has direct but inharmonious contact with

all the groups involved in the class struggle. It is through the experience and knowledge of the protagonist that learn about the clashing interests and motives of the different political groups, and through his political involvement, we come to see the nature of the class struggle. What are duly emphasised in Ye Key Kokeb Tirri are the causes and effects of the overt and covert clashes between those political factions which represent different social classes.

From what has been said so far, we can perhaps conclude that one of the major and all-pervading themes of post-revolution novels is the struggle between the haves and havenots. This theme of class struggle is considerably and almost uniformly elaborated with the use of symbol. First appears a dark sky and then it gives way to a glowing sky or there comes a wind which blows from west to east and then changes its direction and blows from east to west. The first ones always symbolize misery, defeat and injustice and the second ones stand for hope victory and freedom. The following two quotations taken from two different novels indicate the application of symbolism:

ጊንቦርቅ በምዕራብ ስተጠለቅ የተሰማው ሰማይ ቀይ ሆኖ
የተገረደበት ስለመሰለ አንጻንድ ሰዓቸ አንደ መጥፍ ፡፡
ርተ ወስደውታል፡፡ ከዚህ በተረፈ የተረፈው
አየር የተሰማጣጥ የሚያዘገግ ነገር ፡፡

When the sun sets in the west, the surrounding sky looks as if covered with red sash. Some individuals took it for bad omen. Apart from this ... the air was refreshing and good for health. It was February. 48

And the other is:

ሃይለኛ ገፋስ ከምስራቅ ወደ ምዕራብ ድንገት ይነፍስ
፡፡ ከጥቂት ጊዜ በሁለት የአብዮቱ መገረጃ ተገ
ለጠ፡፡ ቀቀ ከሀይወት በላይ ገዙፍ የሆነ መሰሉ ነበር
የሚታየው፡፡

A strong wind suddenly started to blow from east to west. After a while the

curtain of dust disappeared. Wako
(a peasant hero) looked like a huge
being more than life itself.⁴³

The red colour in the first quotation, and the strong wind that comes from the east in the second one have symbolic significance. They symbolize revolution and in their contextual meaning, they signify the victory of the new revolutionary change after a great tide of class struggle.

CONCLUSION

Nearly all the novelists in post-revolutionary period are not new to the history of Amharic creative writers. Some of them were known as good novelists even before the revolution. Their works were well appreciated and are still admired for their realistic portrayal of life under the oppressive social system.

Novelists like Haddis, Baalu and Birhanu have still continued to reflect the life of the past without forgetting the present social reality. In their retrospective imagination, they look into the history which constitutes the political suppression, social corruption and economic exploitation, and portray in their new novels how the rich used to rob the poor of the fruits of its labour and how bureaucracy was riddled with nepotism and incompetence. They also bring to our attention the stifling effects of suppression of thought and new ideas.

In fact, these novelists do not restrict themselves to exposing the social evils. Apparently, educated by the flux of revolutionary ideas and practices, they have been able to extend their imagination to incorporate in their works not only the necessity of social change but the inevitability of its victory. Some of the writers even go as far as using literary works as a means of promoting revolutionary ideas and of forming political consciousness.

Amharic novelists of the post-revolutionary period have shown a sense of commitment and seriousness to capture the social reality and help us discover something about the values and motives of contemporary society. The novelists do not only mirror the life of the society but also try to influence and shape the social and political phenomena by dwelling upon relevant themes and by depicting significant characters which are meant to set up standards of exemplary behavior.

Urged by a strong desire to guard the society against

political suppression and social injustice and to revolutionize old institutions, the novelists largely deal with political themes. They seem to feel an obligation to offer political solution to social problems. So, most of the writers do pay more attention to the ideological contents of their works than to their artistic forms. In a novel like Le Key Ababa, the price paid for the didactic message is the sacrifice of the independent lives of characters and the logical development of events.

With no exception, all Amharic creative writers whose works are studied in this dissertation have expressed their optimistic beliefs in man's ability to overcome social problems. The fictional world, Amharic novelists depict is not a world that decomposes or disgusts like that of Amah's The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born, or Mwangi's Kill Me Quick. But, it is a world that is fertile and bears fruit. This fictional world does not belong to degenerate men who are "incapable of any amendment" as the world of Gulliver's Travels does. But it is a world which is eventually influenced and shaped by men of noble ideas.

In almost all post-revolution novels, we can notice a drift towards the portrayal of type characters. We can only think of significant characters merged with their social classes and mostly engaged in stock situations. Most of the characters in these novels seem to be incapable of having complex human feelings. They tend to be predictable in words and actions. Positive characters which mainly consist of lower class people are immune to negative influences and deeds. Conversely, negative characters which largely represent the upper classes are always engrossed in selfish motives and bad morals. The portrayal of the representatives of the upper classes as repulsive, serves as a technique for glorifying the attractive qualities of the lower class characters, and as a device of making the struggle legitimate and impressive.

In almost all the novels, the sequence of situations in which

- 15 Ibid., p.186.
- 16 Ibid., p. 137.
- 17 Baalu Girma, Haddis, p. 157.
- 18 Baalu Girma, Ye Key Kokeb Tirri (Addis Ababa: Commercial Printing Press, 1972), p.76.
- 19 Birhanu Zerihun, Maabel: Yabyot Mebacha, p. 150.
- 20 Haddis Alemayehu, Wonjelegnaw Dagna, p. 57.
- 21 Baalu Girma, Ye Key Kokeb Tirri, p. 27.
- 22 Ibid., p. 252.
- 23 Denekew Assaye, Band Deret Scst Tut (Addis Ababa: Birhanena Selam Printing Press, 1967), p. 82-83.
- 24 Haddis Alemayehu, Wonjelegnaw Dagna, p. 196.
- 25 Birhanu Zerihun, Maabel: Yabyot Wazema, p.54.
- 26 Haddis Alemayehu, Wonjelegnaw Dagna, p.186.
- 27 Birhanu Zerihun, Maabel: Yabyot Mebacha, p. 138.
- 28 Baalu Girma, Haddis, p.33.
- 29 Abraham Maslow, "Psychological Data and Value Theory," New Knowledge in Human Values (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1959), p. 125-129.
- 30 Baalu Girma, Haddis, p. 33.
- 31 Denekew Assaye, Band Deret Sost Tut, p.4-5.
- 32 Haddis Alemayehu, Wonjelegnaw Dagna, p. 331.
- 33 Birhanu Zerihun, Maabel: Yabyot Wazema, p. 43.
- 34 Ibid.

- 35 Baalu Girma, Derasiw (Addis Ababa: Artistic Printing Press, 1972), p. 194.
- 36 Baalu Girma, Haddis, p. 119.
- 37 Ibid., p. 229.
- 38 Ibid., p. 119.
- 39 Ibid., p. 117.
- 40 Haddis Alemayehu, Wonjelegnaw Dagna, p. 55.
- 41 Ibid., p. 420.
- 42 Baalu Girma, Haddis, p. 107.
- 43 Reudulf knut Molvaer, Tradition and Change in Ethiopia, p. 231.
- 44 Baalu Girma, Derasiw, p. 151.
- 45 Birhanu Zerihun, Maabel: Yabyot Wazema, p. 3.
- 46 Ibid., p. 38.
- 47 Taddelle Gebre Hiwot, Le Key Ababa (Addis Ababa: Commercial Printing Press, 1972), p. 88.
- 48 Birhanu Zerihun, Maabel: Yabyot Mebacha, p. 3.
- 49 Bealu Girma, Haddis, p. 227.

Notes

- 1 Charles Child Walcutt, Man's Changing Mask: Modes and Methods of Characterization in Fiction (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1966), p.5.
- 2 Reudulf Knut Holvaer, Tradition and Change in Ethiopia (Leiden: Briu, 1980), p. 1.
- 3 Haddis Alemayehu, Wonjelegnaw Dagna (Addis Ababa: Kuraz Publishing Agency, 1974), p. 5.
- 4 Baalu Girma, Haddis (Addis Ababa: Artistic Printing Press, 1975), p. 79.
- 5 Ibid., p. 246.
- 6 Haddis Alemayehu, Wonjeleganw Dagna, p. 477.
- 7 Birhanu Zerihun, Maabel: Yabyot Mebacha (Addis Ababa: Central Printing Press, 1973), p. 35.
- 8 Baalu Girma, Haddis, p. 81.
- 9 Birhanu Zerihun, Maabel: Yabyot Wazema (Addis Ababa: Central Printing Press, 1972), p. 55.
- 10 Ibid., p. 230.
- 11 Birhanu Zerihun, Maabel: Yabyot Magist (Addis Ababa: Central Printing Press, 1975), p.9.
- 12 Haddis Alemayehu, Wonjelegnaw Dagna, p. 437.
- 13 Ibid., p.437.
- 14 Ibid., p.128.

* All dates refering to novels and articles originally written in Amharic are in Ethiopian Calendar

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- Denekew Assaye. Band Deret Sost Tut. Addis Ababa: Birhanena Selam Printing Press, 1967.

central characters evolve, seems to be patterned. The stories of almost all the novels start with a gloomy situation dominated by evil agents, under which the positive characters particularly protagonists greatly suffer. As the story in any one of the poor periods of these novels moves along, we begin to observe a change in situation as a result of the unflinching struggle of the protagonist. In this period of transformation the protagonist is offered an opportunity to assume social responsibilities and gather the necessary sympathy and support to realize his own potentialities. Finally we are led to a new situation in which the evil agents meet a crushing defeat and in which the hero of the story affirms his greatness. Victory and hope prevail in the new situation.

The other common feature in post-revolution novels is that social duties or political events are always set in motion by some sort of love affair that ranges from a painful sexual relationship to a real love based on mutual sympathy and understanding. In Naabel we sadly watch a hopeless marriage between Masresha and Zeleka. We see a girl's beauty which is destructive to its possessor as well as to its lover. In Ye Key Kokeb Tirri, there is a story of sexual love which is devoid of any respect and understanding, and which eventually becomes a source of anguish to those involved. In Derasiw, we come across an unhappy couple whose marital life is saved from ruin only in the nick of time. We are invited to a lovely wedding banquet in Haddis and Bani Deret Sost Tut. In Le Key Ababa, two factory workers, Danse and Hansamo, decide to live together with a spirit of comradeship. In Wanjelegnaw Dagna we find a young man and an attractive woman happily married in mutual love and understanding.

The theme of love, however, is not treated independently in any one of the post-revolution novels. It is always a subsidiary to the two major themes discussed in the previous chapter. The prime concern of Amharic novelists seems to enrol the people in the struggle to build a new society free from all sorts of social injustice.

Wellek, Rene and Austin Warren. Theory of Literature. New York:
Penguin Books, 1949.

DECLARATION

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

Name: Getachew Sahlemariam

Signature 

Place: Institute of Language studies, Addis Ababa
University.

Date of submission: June, 1985