

ETHIOPIAN LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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Abstract

Looked at from the point of view of the hoary Geez and Amharic literatures, creative writing in English is a baby tradition in Ethiopia. However, this baby tradition has, so far, attracted some venerable writers in Amharic like Tsegaye Gebre Medhin and Daniachew Worku and as such it must needs be subjected to some critical appraisal. This, thus, is the main aim and purpose of this dissertation.

Before I come to examine in toto creative writings in English, I have attempted to make some descriptive assessments of some of the Amharic works of some of the writers by way of giving a preliminary insight and a background information. Out of the seven writers I have dealt with in this dissertation, I have delineated in chapter one, though understandably cursorily, the Amharic works of four writers as these are the ones who can be said to have produced some creative works in the vernacular.

In chapter two I have given primarily thematic treatments to seven novels. Among these, The Thirteenth Sun, as a matured and intricate work, has taken much more space than the others. Sahle Selassie's three novels, arranged and treated chronologically attempt to show his progress in artistic deftness and thematic manipulation. The rest have one novel each and their shortcomings notwithstanding, their attempt to use a foreign language in tackling noteworthy issues is brought out to the attention of the reader.

In chapter three I have dealt with the poetic works of Tsegaye Gebre Medhin and Eyasu Gorfu. Here, I have found out Tsegaye to be a conscientious poet with a strong commitment for the cause of the black people and the resuscitation of their cultures. Conversely, Eyasu tackless issues that have only a marginal relevance even to his home land.

Among the five English plays we have in chapter four, four of them are authored by Tsegaye Gebre Medhin. Two of these are written in prose, whereas the remaining two are couched in beautiful verse. The fifth play is Abbie Gubegna's and it is one of the shoddiest works to appear in English.

Finally, in a brief conclusion, I have tried to give an overall picture of the present state of creative writing in English. As long as stringent censorship is prevalent in the country and as long as Ethiopians have something to say artistically to the outside world, Ethiopian literature in English will continue to come forth, even if in lulls and at intervals.

Introduction

When I write of Ethiopian literature in English, I refer to creative writing in English done by Ethiopian writers. This is a recent phenomenon in Ethiopian literature. It has a brief history of only two decades. When we look at the amount of English writings produced in some other African countries, the output in Ethiopia strikes us as scanty, intermittent and not very encouraging. Yet, there are at least, two basic reasons that account for this laggard development and paucity of creative writing in English in Ethiopia.

First and foremost, Ethiopian writers have a strong literary background in Amharic that disallows them to resort to or, at least, give an undivided attention to writing in English. Amharic literature traces its history to the first half of the 14th century. Since then, even if it has developed through a series of lulls and intervals until the 19th century; it has, however, established a strong, consistent tradition ever after. Furthermore, a foreign language has never been the first official language in Ethiopia; and as a result, the Amharic Language and its literature have developed extensively to claim strongly the attention of the native writer.

Secondly, English has not been given much emphasis in Ethiopian schools. The first curriculum for the study of the language was systematically designed in the late 50's. Hence, lack of adequate mastery or command of the language inevitably barred those who might otherwise have aspired to write in English.

Initially, I intended to examine only those works that have come out in book form. In trying to be very inclusive, however, I have also tackled some significant works I could find in some

collections and journals. Thus, I have dealt with all the published novels and plays, though for understandable reasons, I have left out works that have originally been conceived and written in Amharic and then later translated into English. The short story is not a popular genre with Ethiopian writers in English. Apart from a few works by various writers in some periodicals, there is not a single book of short stories, so far. Hence, I have altogether left out the genre from my work. The case with poetry is different, however. Two writers, Tsegaye Gebre Medhin and Eyasu Gorfu have collected and presented their poems in one form or another. These, I have attempted to critically investigate in my dissertation.

My overall approach is thematic; though a frequent recourse to characters and characterization, I find out, is necessarily inevitable. Furthermore, as the writers are manipulating a second language, their success or failure in this regard cannot, of course, be overlooked.

Of the seven writers that I have dealt with, I have interviewed the three prominent ones: Tsegaye Gebre Medhin, Daniachew Worku and Sahle Selassie Birhane Mariam. However, I have not included in the appendix all the proceedings of the interviews, that, in fact, took hours. To save time and avoid superfluity, I have taken only those answers that I consider are general and important. Nevertheless, I would like to make note of the fact that the lengthy interviews have helped me in the overall critical assessment of their works.

Obviously, as I have classified the whole work according to genre, I have not followed a chronological arrangement. Nor is my arrangement alphabetical in each genre. Rather, I posed a subjective question to myself as who should come before whom and placed each writer accordingly.

In cases where a writer has more than one work of the same genre, however, I have ordered his works chronologically.

Finally, I would like to mention that where different writers have differently spelt some proper names like Theodros/Tewodros, I have done likewise.

The Writers In the Vernacular

The stable traditions of Geez Literature, didacticism and the all-pervading religious atmosphere have all gone into the subsequent Amharic literature. Even such great writers as Hirouy WoldeSelassie whom Albert Gerard considers as 'the genuine founder of modern Amharic literature',¹ and Kebede Michael whom this same writer regards as 'the founder of serious modern drama in Amharic',² hold tenaciously to these traditions. The state of such lingering traditions that used to stifle the life-like portraiture of the society invited a writer - critic's apt comment.

The vice that bedevils contemporary Amharic literature is not its preoccupation with topical subject matter and theme, but the flow of crude didacticism that overwhelms it. In such a state of affairs replete with all sorts of bogus profundity every peddler of moral platitudes assumes the role of the prophet and moral philosopher.³

In the late 50's and 60's, however, a group of young writers emerged whose main intention was to disinherit the didactic approach and portray life objectively and realistically. Among Ethiopian writers in English, who have ever tried their hand at writing in Amharic: Daniachew Worku, Abbie Gubegna, SahleSelassie Birhane-Mariam and Tsegaye Gebre-Medhin belonged to this group. Before we come to the vernacular works of these writers, however; it is significant to make some passing observations upon some other prominent members of the group like Mengistu Lemma, Birhanu Zerihun and Taddesse Liben.

Mengistu Lemma is a great poet, playwright and translator. Of his three books of poetry so far, Synod of Poems is the most significant one. It contains his most beautiful poems, "Life" and "When She Has Three Days Left." It introduces also into Amharic poetry some new styles of versification. His comedies which he has translated into English.

Snatch and Run and Marriage of Unequals have won the admiration of a great many people. As a translator, among other works, he has rendered in Amharic Anthon Chekhov's The Bear and J.B. Priestly's The Inspector Calls. The major theme in both his poems and plays is the cultural conflict between the young and old generations.

Birhanu Zerihun, essentially a novelist, occasionally writes plays and short stories. Among his novels are: Letter of Tears, End of Injustice, When the Moon Emerges, The Tears of Theodros and his recent important work, Tempest. The Tears of Theodros is one attempt in an array of such books by young writers that vindicate the disreputed name of King Theodros by some older writers like Mekonnen Endalkachew. In Tempest, he depicts the famished peoples of Wollo and the nonchalant feudo-bourgeois officials on the eve of the '74 revolution. Birhanu is noted for his lucid language, though he shows a minimum sophistication in the application of artistic techniques.

Taddesse Liben can be regarded as the founder of modern Amharic short stories. So far, he has compiled his stories in Maskaram (name of the first month in Ethiopian calendar) and The Other Way. In the words of one anthologist, 'he utilized realism and psychological sophistication and introduced a new style of crisp, short sentences.'⁴

Coming to writers who authored creative works in both Amharic and English, we find three of them to be mainly novelists and one an excellent playwright and an acknowledged poet.

Among the novelists, Daniachew Worku has a much-coveted unique place in Ethiopian literature. His one Amharic novel, Adefris (name of the hero) is noted for its sophisticated artistic contrivance, depth of characterization, beauty of descriptive language and timely relevance.

and significance of content. Though it deals with a plethora of themes, this novel is thinly plotted.

Adefris, a college student is assigned to teach at Debre-Sina for his year of National Service. Before he starts his teaching job, however, he goes to a small village of Armeniya with his uncle, Tisso, at the invitation of a feudal lady, Assegash. There, Assegash's daughter, Tsione falls in love with him mainly because of his simple but "citified" manners. Her erstwhile boyfriend, Gorfu - a rural lad, resents this and abducts her. As soon as she is rescued undefiled, however, she follows Adefris to Debre-Sina. Here he frowns upon her protestations of love and advises her to return to her mother. Meanwhile Assegash accuses him of elopement with her daughter. In a desperate moment at court, Tsione exclaims that she has not been a girl for sometime. This confession shocks both Adefris and her mother and they let her go her own way. Despairingly, Tsione takes refuge with her uncle, Woldu, and begins to lead a kind of ascetic life. Adefris continues teaching until the day when in an attempt to restore peace between student demonstrators and soldiers, he is struck with a stone and dies. Such is the thin plot which Thomas Kane rightly considers as 'a subordinate framework on which to hang conversations on countless subjects'⁵

Truly enough, Adefris is a thought-ridden book with numerous conversations in it. Adefris, posing as a revolutionary, discusses various contemporary themes with people of the older generation such as Tisso and Woldu. He tries repeatedly to convince them out of their ideals and beliefs. With characteristic vehemence of college students of the 60's, he pinpoints the foibles and vices in the status quo; albeit he has no definite and convincing solutions to propose.

Adefris is a prototype of Daniachew's English novel, The Thirteenth Sun. Both are scantily plotted. Themes of corruption, exploitation and revolution abound in both. Although there are more characters in Adefris, there is still a significant similarity in here too, as some of the characters in The Thirteenth Sun are modelled upon some characters in Adefris. Woynitu and Tsione, Goytom and Adefris, Tisso and Fitawrari Woldu in Adefris and The Thirteenth Sun respectively do share some common opinions and attitudes.

Daniachew is not only a novelist; but also a playwright and a poet of some standing. In the late 50's he has produced his plays like Thinking There is A Man and Fire, Your Lingering Love at the National Theatre. Moo ye, Oh Men is his only book of poetry which he published at the outbreak of the '74 revolution. It contains 13 poems, the majority of which he wrote as a student. One of these, "The Young philosopher" is a diatribe against the snobbish, educated elite. In the title poem, he chastises the conservative sector of the society that developed bias to civilisation and used to embrace lovingly and perseveringly all evils and viles in the name of age-old tradition and "cherished" cultural values, with biting sarcasm, pointed irony and humorous cynicism.

Abbie Gubegna, a well-known writer with more than twenty Amharic works to his credit, died this year at the age of 45. This writer who is described by a fellow writer as 'a hard working writer who has the distinction of having authored the first best sellers in the history of modern Amharic literature'⁶ is a prolific novelist, playwright and poet.

Confession of Crime, Melke'am*, Sword of Flame, My loitering Sister, I will not be Born and An only one to his Mother are some of his novels, among which the last two are the most reputed ones.

* Allegedly an epithet of Moses', Meluk'am

An Only One to His Mother is a historical novel based inevitably, on the life of Theodros. In this massive book that runs to 688 pages, Abbie traces the life of Theodros from birth to death. Furthermore, in a Shavian manner, he gives us a lengthy introduction on the character of his hero before we embark on the actual reading of the novel. This is a well-researched work; though the darker side of Theodros' character is understandably underplayed. Since much space is given to the life of the hero from the time of his birth to his coronation, the book suffers from a lack of proportion. Since the fictionalization of certain historical facts is, at times, handled unsuccessfully, some chapters read like a history text. Otherwise, An Only One to His Mother - lucid in its language, powerful in its evocation of atmosphere, exuberant in its local colour, lofty in its theme - remains to be a phenomenal work in Ethiopian literature.

I will not Be Born is one of the rare novels with political overtones to come out of the censor's desk. It is a slim novel that invited the wrath of the past Haile Selassie government to befall upon the author. To give some idea of its unusual content in Ethiopian literature, it is worth sketching its plot.

A nameless hero while still in his mother's womb develops consciousness and tells his mother that he will not be born since there is no freedom in the society. Nevertheless, she goes to the hospital to deliver him and there this uncanny child criticizes the doctors for preparing persons for a lifetime of suffering. Later, as this child grows up he gets an employment in a firm. But then he incites the workers to rebellion, heads a strike and is sacked from his job. He then founds an agricultural colony with his friends and fares well for sometime. His

Utopia is shattered, however, when a high government official comes to lay claim to the land he is farming. Meanwhile the corrupted government is toppled over by a certain Marshal Jafros. Jafros forms a new government which, initially, appears progressive only to become more oppressive than the previous one. It reimposes a stringent censor and arbitrary imprisonment for airing one's political views. It sets aside special privileges for army officers. Not much later, a revolution in which the hero has actively participated comes and overthrows the military government. The hero declines a portfolio he is given for his role in the revolution and returns to his agricultural colony. After a while, accused of sedition, he is arrested and sentenced to death. Finally, after pronouncing his last will to be buried in an open field as church compounds are spotted with liars and swindlers, he dies.

This novel which mixes fantasy with realism is one of the earlier works of Abbie and as such betrays naivete in political thoughts and immaturity in artistic execution. Nevertheless, its crude though caustic allusions to contemporary Ethiopia and its future were significant enough to offset its relatively small artistic worth.

Abbie's book of poetry, Window, is an experimental work which, among other things, contains Amharic poems that are modelled upon Geez poetry. In addition, in writing his poems he has utilized the various forms of versification in the Amharic language. In fact his intention (as he tells us in the preface) in preparing this book is to show a bit of the rich tradition and potential of Amharic poetry to those who look upon it ignorantly and condescendingly. We gather from the preface that, what infuriates Abbie most is an article in which a critic defends a certain poet who is severely criticized by the home press for his new and

difficult methods of versification. Some lines in this article read:

It is difficult to believe that the journalists fail to see the sparse beauty of his rhythm in several dimensions. One assumes that his offence has been to break with the sedate tradition of Amharic poetry which, put grossly, amounts to variations on the kind of poetry that Alexander Pope wrote.

Abbie thinks that Amharic poetry is much more than what the critic says it is; and in many of the poems he has compiled in his book, he has capably proved it.

Among Abbie's plays are The Trap of the Weak and Politics and Politicians. The former is conceived to be a tragic play with some faint resemblances to Othello. The latter is written and produced at the Patriotic Theatre after the '74 revolution. It is a humorous play that depicts the attempt of emerging opportunists and pseudo-politicians to turn the tide of the revolution in their favour.

Sahle Selassie's only work in Amharic is a novel, Let Youth Judge it. It deals with love and marriage. Two friends, Ashe and Seyoum fall in love with Ayne-regrb and Felekech respectively. Initially, Ashe's love encounters ordeal because of Ayne-regib's bodyguard who jealously keeps her away from him. After a while, this same man rapes her and she conceives. She feels incapable to face Ashe, and to avoid open ignominy she consents to marry an elderly bachelor immediately. When, because of some problems the marriage is deferred to a later date, she despairs and vanishes without letting people know her address. This hurts Ashe deeply. With his love forsaken and despondent, he remains in a dreamy, deplorable state. On the other hand, Seyoum cannot feel at ease with his love since Felekech is a prostitute and his parents disapprove of their relationship. In fact, they want to marry him to a respectable girl; but then her parents who have come to know his affairs with Felekech decline the proposal.

Meanwhile, Tessema, his father's friend, wants Felekech for himself. He threatens her and she runs away to Debre Zeit. Seyoum follows her there and they get married. After some time, they get a child. Finally Seyoum returns to his parents with his wife and child and secures their forgiveness.

In relating these parallel love stories with different endings, Sahle Selassie achieves a minimum artistry. Moreover, we at times find an overplay of sentimentality. 16

Tsegaye Gebre-Medhin is the most prominent living playwright we have. His Amharic plays range from one Acts to full time plays, from farcical comedy to modern tragedy. A Crown of Thorns, A Man of Tomorrow, A.B.C. in Six Months, Petros on that Hour, Autumn are some of his prominent plays. Some of his earlier plays like Mumps, The Ugly Girl and Cheap Cigarettes are barred by censors from getting published for their allegedly censorious remarks upon the then government.

In A Crown of Thorns and Autumn, this prolific writer deals with love themes. A Man of Tomorrow which is modelled, in a way, upon Harold Pinter's The Caretaker depicts the conflicts between the young and the old generations. Petros on that Hour is a historical play based on the life of the Ethiopian patriot, Abune Petros. In A.B.C. in Six Months he shows the miseries of the Ethiopian peoples under the past feudo-bourgeois government. This play is one of a series of plays and the first at that - that Tsegaye has started writing since the outbreak of the revolution. After it, The Second Initiation and Epistle of Proletariats have been produced. These plays can be considered as dramatic records of the revolution. In between the last two plays, Tsegaye has written and produced another play, Mother Courage. This play, despite the writer's assumption otherwise, has

apparently nothing to do with Bertolt Brecht's play of that name.

Tsegaye usually writes episodic plays. In place of well-constructed plots, he has a concatenation of loosely-linked scenes that follow one another arbitrarily. His characters are usually naturalistic, though their articulateness and tendency to philosophize and intellectualize over whatever issue is at hand, make one feel that they are manipulated as mouth-pieces. Nevertheless, by dint of his beautiful language and strikingly superb imageries, he is able to write very memorable plays and secure an assured place in Ethiopian theatre.

Tsegaye is also a translator. So far, he has translated into Amharic some works from Moliere and Shakespeare. His Shakespeare's renditions which Solomon Deressa says, a bit exaggeratedly, 'Should be envied by anybody at anytime who has tried to get Shakespeare out of English' ⁸ are all published but one.

Apart from dramatic poetry, Tsegaye has written a great number of poems; some of which are collected and published in his Fire or Flower. His poems, like most of his plays evoke a sombre, harrowing atmosphere.

Thus, one can see that some of the writers in English are noted writers in Amharic as well. In fact, apart from Sahle Selassie's, in terms of output their Amharic works outweigh their writings in English.

N O V E L S

The Afersata

In terms of output, Sahle Selassie Birhane Mariam comes first among Ethiopian novelists in English. Born in Chaha (a Gurage land in Shoa) in 1936, and trained as a political scientist, he has so far, three English novels to his credit: The Afersata, Warrior-King and Firebrands. Before he tried his hand at writing in English, however, he had written one novel in Chaha - his mother tongue, and as explained in the previous chapter, another in Amharic. His Chaha novel which was translated later into English under the title Shinega's Village is, in a way, similar to his first English novel, The Afersata. In both, Sahle Selassie aims at portraying the culture and life of the Gurage people.

The Afersata bears the name of an old Ethiopian institution of crime investigation and thereof implies a detective novel. But a detective novel is replete with thrills and suspense that accrue from intricate plotting which this book badly lacks. In fact, The Afersata contains a very thin plot: one night the hut of a villager, Namaga, is burnt and the villagers try, though unsuccessfully, to find out the man who stealthily set the hut alight. Between these two points, that is, the burning of the hut and the abortive attempt to disclose the criminal criss - cross a number of episodes whose relationship with and relevance to the main story line is not clear. In a well-plotted novel the tight linkage of various episodes that have significant relationships with the main story line is observed. But here, episodes like the journey of the Addis Ababans (Melesse and Tekle) to the Gurage village, the Meskel Festival with all its concomitant incidents, like the filing of knives at the blacksmith, etc., have no direct and significant bearing on the major course and resolution of the plot. Hence, one suspects and rightly so, I guess,

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that Sahle Selassie used this brittle vehicle of a plot as an expedient to carry through the tenor of Gurage culture and life.

The various aspects of Gurage culture and life could have been handled better though, had the writer, among other things, observed thematic unity in his work. The importance of an over-all dominant, central theme that could knit the various episodes together into one whole cannot be over-emphasized in a literary work; and The Afersata is tremendously and negatively affected by its absence. The Afersata theme which, from the point of view of the plot can be regarded as the central one is overshadowed by various themes such as tradition, modernization and land reform. The various themes break the flow of the story and deprive the novel of a sharp thematic focusing. And this results in slackness of plot and multiplicity of episodes.

The Afersata does not only betray a lack of artistry in the rendition of themes; but also in the manipulation of characters. Most, if not all, of the characters in this novel do not come out strongly and conspicuously to imprint on our minds a lasting impression. They are dull, flimsy and non-exciting. Take, Namaga, for instance, who, with regards to the general trend of the plot, can be viewed as a major character. Some mishaps befall him: his hut is burnt and he has lost his savings as well. But how does he react to them? Has he grieved? Or has he made us feel his grievances? To an Ethiopian peasant, his loss cannot be belittled. It may perhaps be said that his confidence in his fellow villagers is comforting enough to offset his bitterness. But still, his reactions should have not been underplayed or sidestepped as insignificant, for depriving him of his due reactions, i.e. his just emotions is to suck him dry and make a robot of him. In fact, the writer, after evoking a dramatic

moment (i.e. the burning of the hut) has failed to give us a character that can play it capably well. Furthermore, Namaga is portrayed as an obscure character who recedes to the background whether it is at the house of the Cheka Shum (an official in the village) or, surprisingly enough, at his own home. In his own home, Aga (his tenant) and his wife come to the fore and discuss things when he (Namaga) silently sips his coffee (even to attribute such a dumb action to him needs an imaginative reading!)

Namaga is indeed a passive character. It is only stinginess that prompts him to some activities. Lest the villagers call him a miser (which they in fact do behind him) he wants to cover up the fact, that he had buried his money in the ground before it disappeared. This worries him tremendously and he ponders over it anxiously:

How can I say such a thing at the cost of confirming the villagers' false belief that I am a miser? Why, didn't Mela propose twice that I should buy a mule, and didn't I tell him twice that I couldn't afford it? What would he think about me now If I confessed that I buried all that sum in the ground? No! No! I shall never reveal where I hid my money. That's no one's business but mine! (p. 68)

Of the more than a dozen characters in the novel, only two seem to capture our attention and tickle our interest. These are Aga and Beshir who are looked upon condescendingly by the villagers for different reasons. Aga is taken for a fool, though his insight into the life of the society is at times, somewhat penetrating: 'If all people worked there would be no thieves and criminals. And if there were no thieves there would be no afersata.' (p. 40) He is a homely figure, a bit garrulous and a little petulant with his wife.

'I don't believe it,' he said, and stretched his hand to the earthenware container to pick up a slice of pumpkin, 'AW!' he cried and withdrew his hand, 'you are burning my fingers!'

'Good God gave you a pair of black eyes. Don't you see that I am dumping the food into the container?'

'That's no excuse for burning my fingers, woman,'

'You should be patient for a moment until I present it to you in the proper way,' she reprimanded him, 'one would have thought that you had had nothing to eat for the last two days,' she added.

'Do you mean I am greedy, woman?' (pp. 82 & 83)

The above and such-like dialogues (Alas, they are not many!) deftly portray Aga and makes him illumine the almost dull pages of the novel.

Beshir is the other character with some vitality and pith. Unlike Aga however, he is quick tempered and, in a way, defiant of the status quo. The villagers accuse him of some misdemeanors and he seems not to take heed of them. A black sheep of the society, he flings his jeers in the face of its respectable villagers. When Namaga evades and circumvents the governor's enquiry as to where he kept his money before it got lost, it is Beshir who exposes him: 'He must have buried it in the ground!' (p. 86)

Among the villagers, no one vocalizes the bitter lot of tenancy more than Beshir. He shows his resentment in various ways among which is his failure to pay land tax in time. He goes out boldly and charges with theft the agent of his landlord who took his cow in his absence in default of some payment. His financial problems usually accrue from a deliberate neglect to till the land; and we sympathize with him when he relates his reasons to his uncle, Melesse: 'But I don't want to sweat in order to fatten another man's pocket. If I work hard and earn more money my landlord would charge me more irbo*. That is why I don't want to work hard.' (p. 31)

* one kind of payment a tenant makes to a landlord.

Beshir's exclamation against feudal land tenure is taken up later on by Melesse and it becomes an issue that triggers a lengthy harangue. In fact, this issue seems the only reason for Melesse to appear as a character. Otherwise, his role is very insignificant. The reason given for his travel to Gurage village with his friend Tekle is whimsical and unconvincing. All those discussions about land reform and Gurage culture could have been done in a coffee bar as well. Sahle Selassie in an attempt to make his own view point clear on land reform must have realized that Beshir, simple and inerudite that he is, is unknowledgeable to discuss and intellectualize over the question of land. So he drags Melesse into his novel and makes him a mere instrument through which he pumps his ideas freely. This becomes more clear when we realize that Tekle, the other discussant, is most of the time, a listner, and at times, a mere utterer of the then current conservative opinions. Placing Tekle at a disadvantage thus, Sahle Selassie allows Melesse to sound his ideas meticulously:

'I still don't agree with you on this point. What reasons have you got to dispossess the landlords?' (says Tekle)

'You didn't listen to me, it appears. But I told you the reason before. The land always belonged to the people who cultivated it. Their fathers and their grandfathers owned that land. For less than a century their lands have been mysteriously transferred to the absentee landlords. Now the land must be given back to the peasants.'

'You are infected by foreign ideas, it seems to me....' (pp. 55 & 56)

In his haste and zeal to forward his progressive ideas, Sahle Selassie becomes very unrealistic. He makes Tekle, who, we are told has college education, a veritable ignoramus. In connection with this it is good to make note of the fact that Tekle, an Ethiopian and a social scientist by training is made to lose himself in admiration with each and every bit of Gurage culture. Surprisingly enough, he says: 'I used to

think that the Gurage were simply porters in Addis, shoe-shiners and pedlars. Now I see a people with a distinct culture and a respectable way of life.' (p. 50) Surely, Sahle Selassie's concern and love for his oppressed folks and their culture is more than his artistic skill could handle; and such portraitures as Melesse and Tekle are additional testimonies to his glaring shortcoming in character manipulation.

And more: when he fails to place too much material upon the shoulders of his fragile characters; he, himself, (paradoxically enough!) becomes their mouthpieces. Hence come his lengthy commentaries that read like sociological extracts.

Though inadequate in thematic focusing, plot structuring and character portrayal thus, Sahle Selassie shows an encouraging attempt in language use. He writes in simple, clear English and rarely do we find some clumsiness and lack of suavity in his writing. His descriptive power is praiseworthy too, as can be seen from the following extract.

A long, thin stick in one hand and a sheet of paper in the other, Namaga set out for the village of the Cheka Shum. It was early afternoon. The blue sky was veiled, at various points, with patches of white clouds which shaped themselves now into animal figures, now into human forms, and now into giant monsters, and finally disappeared into nothingness to reappear, once again, in other forms. The black shadows of eucalyptus trees which lined the dusty path leading to the village of the Cheka Shum stretched out and contracted as the trees swayed regularly with the wind. Namaga walked on the grass. The dusty path was too hot for his bare feet. He walked fast leaning on his stick, and wondering how much the Cheka Shum would charge him for writing the report to the sub-district governor. (p. 8)

Sahle Selassie in this slim novel with its poor claim to artistic excellence though, gives us an overall view of the humdrum life of a provincial setting. Furthermore, considering the fact that modern Ethiopian literature is mostly replete with love themes, his attempt to tackle cultural ones is a commendable diversion.

Warrior - King

Sahle Selassie's second English novel deals with the ascent of a certain bandit, Kassa, to a magnificent height of a Theodros, King of Kings - Emperor of Ethiopia. It was not an easy ascent as the time was rife with feudal war-mongers, power thirsty, anarchic chiefs and hard-to-control vandals. This period, known as the 'Zemene Mesafint' - Era of the Princes, is the most tumultuous one in the annals of Ethiopian history.

Taking this grotesque period as the setting of his novel, Sahle Selassie tries to portray Kassa with love, sympathy and respect. Wary not to mythicize him, he bases his novel mostly on solid historical facts. Most of the characters are historical personages and the battles and their chronological order are also taken from history books. If he rarely neglects historical actuality, it will not be on significant issue⁹. On the other hand, realizing the fact that Kassa is also a legendary figure about whom a number of adventure stories, prophecies, amazing and inspiring anecdotes are told, Sahle Selassie makes use of such stuff in his novel. The prophecy of the monk, the joint of meat episode, the indigence of Kassa's mother to the extent of selling Koss^{*} are some of these.

Kassa's courage and defiance is traced back to his childhood days. It is given in flashback that at Mahbere Selassie Covent, where he was educated, his unruly behaviour was more than his priest-teachers could handle. Rather than passing his time praying and poring over books like his other friends, we are told that he used 'to roam about in the nearby woods hunting birds with sling shots or doing some other mischiefs.' (p. 17) The conspicuous characters of Kassa such as his kindness and

* a purgative against tape worm.

remorsefulness are not overlooked. Moreover, his unwavering faith in himself and his messianic mission, his strong sense of destiny coupled with his strong belief in the prophecy of a monk, who is said to have foretold that he would be a great ruler, come in the novel repeatedly. In a response to his friend's enquiry as to how he would justify the fact that he was a highway robber, Kassa raises the issue of the prophecy in view of his mission:

It was in a way the beginning of my career. One has to start somewhere, you know. I think I have told you about the prophecy of the monk a longtime ago when we were at the convent. I had to start my career somewhere, sometime; I had indeed a justifiable purpose in becoming a highway robber. (p. 18)

The novelist has depicted Kassa as very chivalrous and very sensitive when it comes to the question of honour. We see him fight two battles, one at the border and another at Gur Amba mainly for the sake of safeguarding his honour. The battle at the border wherein he was about to lose his life is planned and assigned to him by Woizero Menen, the wife of the nominal emperor, Atse* Yohannes, with a deliberate attempt to get him killed. Outnumbered by and less armed than his enemies though, he refuses the entreaties of his friends to decline the assignment, because, as he tells them: 'first of all there is a question of honour involved; If I turn down the assignment Woizero Menen will think that I am afraid to fight the Turks.' (p. 52) Kassa is unforgiving and unleashes his wrath and revenge upon all those who dare attempt to defile his honour. The boastful general of Menen, Wondirad, is made to gulp down a jar of kosso and die thereof for his uncouth exclamation against his mother. After defeating Menen at the Battle of Beleha, Kassa finds it hard to forgive her for all the pleadings of Tewabech - his wife and Menen's granddaughter - for he vividly

* King of Kings

remembers the wound she inflicted upon his honour and pride after the battle of the border. He reminisces bitterly and vows revenge:

You remember, Tewabech, that I came back from the Sudan border with a bullet sunk in my flesh, a bullet that even the best of Quara physicians could not extract, a bullet that I am still carrying in my flesh, and that I shall carry to the end of my days. And Woizero Menen, at whose command and in whose name I had led an expedition, slighted me with her tongue, and sent me, as a further insult, a rotten piece of meat by which to heal my wounds... What is most enraging to me in your grandmother is her attitude, her haughtiness, her arrogance, her disdainfulness, her contempt for others. She shall know what being slighted means, now that she is in my hands; she shall know what being humiliated means.
(p. 93)

Among the enemies of Kassa, Menen is the more strong and conspicuous one. Haughty and aggressive, shrewd and very intriguing, she, many a time, poses considerable circumventions for and threats to him. She is so calculating that, at times, he seems almost to fall in her trap. Her machinations are so elusive that they even escape the grasp of Kassa and his friends. Her motives (from what we gather as she relates them to her son), for instance, for giving her granddaughter in marriage are different from what he and his friends think they are. Even Ingida, who has been her vassal for some time and who is said to have a knowledge of her temperament fails to explain them.

But for all her machinations and subtleties, she proves unequal to Kassa who has a compelling cause of uniting Ethiopia by wiping out feudal parochialism, religious dissensions, conservatism and social unrest. In fact, not only Menen, but all the other arrogant chiefs who somehow concoct excuses to wage wars with the main aim of quenching their thirst for power melt like ice before the army of Kassa. Through out the novel the writer plays upon this theme profusely and I think, it is meant to signify its importance. Bezabih, inflamed with the hatred of Menen and Wondirad defects to Kassa and thinks of an easy acceptance. But Kassa checks him,

expounding to him at the same time the terms of his enrollment into his army by underscoring, once again, his obsessive theme: the cause,

We are fighting not simply because we hate some individuals. We are fighting for a positive cause. We are fighting in order to rebuild the Ethiopian Empire that was. If you fully accept our cause you are welcome. If not, you have no place with us.
(p. 71)

Kassa states and restates this same theme to his soldiers, to his friends and through his friends to the public: 'By the way, don't fail to explain to him the cause we are fighting for. Many people still think that we are mere adventurers seeking fortunes for our selfish ends.' - he says to Gebreye when he is to leave to visit his sick father.

In working out this and such-like themes, Sahle Selassie, becoming a bit excessive in his sympathy and adoration, gives us a one sided, metaphysically conceived portraiture of Kassa. Emphasizing the good qualities in his character, he shuns the less attractive ones. The strong points in his behaviour come to us without any strong contrast with his weaknesses; and such an undertaking, among other things, deprives us of a balanced picture of the man. Though Kassa has never been the man Alan Moorhead considers as 'a mad dog let loose, a sort of black reincarnation of Ivan the Terrible and the Russian tyrants,' he has no doubt, some frailties of his own. Whereas his perseverance, courage, soldiery, love and considerateness are all given to us rather meticulously, where one may ask, lie his irrationality, pride and arrogance that conscientious, reliable historians like Professeur Sven Rubenson attribute to him? Of course, here and there, we detect some adumbrations and insinuations to the relatively dark side of his nature. His treatment of Wondirad to a jar of kosso, his revengeful utterance against Menen, the grumblings of a neglected soldier and probably some few others can be

cited. But these should not have taken so much as a drop with regards to pints of ink the writer must have expended on writing about his good qualities. But, is it not axiomatic in artistic execution that to accentuate and vivify the good, it must be juxtaposed with the bad?

This one sided characterization plays on a different level as well. Most of Kassa's fine attributes, like courage, honour and perseverance are related to his life as a warrior with a unique mission and an unflagging cause. In other words, his soldiering is considered as the be-all and end-all of his life, thereby depriving it of its natural variegated hues and considerable breadth. Since he is portrayed from a very limited perspective, the warrior eclipses the man considerably. War anxieties stalk him incessantly even when he makes an infrequent recourse to his wife's tent. His domestic life with its own little worries and pleasures is left untouched. Truly, where is the man behind the warrior? What does he look like when he doffs his warrior's garments? Is not Kassa really more than the warrior Kassa? With some other sense and nonsense? With some other likes and dislikes? With some other regrets and joys?

Furthermore, in an attempt to aggrandize Kassa, Sahle Selassie seems to have found it expedient to belittle his companions. Ingida and Gelmo - who, we are told are the initiators of the rebellion - are they more than mere confidants and war veterans? Is the writer's handling of these characters convincing enough to make us feel their contributions in changing the lance to the sceptre? And witnessing Gebreye scour here and there at the slightest sign from Kassa, does he give us the impression of a would-be general? (a fitawrari?) At the Battle of Beleha, his male chauvinist attitude aside, he is made to regret the wounding of Menen though he knows too well that it meant winning the day.

'But why? What's the matter with you?'
'You want to know the truth? The bare truth?'
'Yes, of course.'
'I am ashamed of myself, Dejazmach*. Honest to God, I am
ashamed of what I have done!'
'But why? I just don't understand you, Gebreye!'
'Because I soiled my spear with a woman's blood. Because
I dirtied my spear with the blood of a hag!' (p. 91)

Surely, the writer, in a god-like envy for his hero, manipulates the dialogue in such a way as to belittle a character that seems somehow to grow out of his hand to an undesirable height.

Sahle Selassie in an attempt to pay an undivided attention to Kassa-the warrior, plays down the objective factors that must have contributed immensely to his success. He slightly and casually touches upon the economic, social and political situations of the time that facilitate his ascendancy, albeit through considerable circumventions and snags. It is not, as Sahle Selassie wants us to think, through Kassa's sheer courage and allegiance to his Messianic mission that powerful personages of the 'Zemene Mesafint' like Menen and Goshu fell in his hands. History is neither the handiwork nor the brainchild of one or a few men. Kassa's compelling cause must needs find an apt context wherein to realize itself. Without the economic, social and political context the portraiture of a historical figure like Kassa remains a very fragmentary one and as a consequence his role will be defined idealistically in terms of his aims, ambitions, callings, etc. Incidentally, what Georg Lukacs says about such an undertaking is worth quoting:

It is the personality of the man portrayed which is to be the guide to his special calling. His biography will provide the inner, psychological proof of his calling. As a result the character is inevitably exaggerated, made to stand on tiptoe, his historical calling unduly emphasized while the real objective causes and factors of his historical mission are inevitably omitted.¹¹

* a traditional honorific title.

Sahle Selassie has made a very meagre exploitation of the setting. We have an insufficient glimpse of 19th century Ethiopia. This period in which the peoples of Ethiopia had, more than ever, gone through economic, social and political unrest and upheavals is touched upon very lightly. The frustrations and exploitations, the aspirations and achievements of the peoples under war-mongering feudal chiefs are considerably overlooked. This is deplorable as the people have ever been in the heat of the struggle (whether they enlist in the army or not) and not edgy figures that merely gossip from a distance.

The three domestic scenes at Mulatu's home that can be considered in a way, as constituting the subplot of the novel are worth mentioning here with regards to the above issue and something more. In these scenes (and in the gossip scenes as well) we discern the writer's attempt to make us intimate with the life - though a very small fraction of it - of the people. Apart from the second scene, however, the two other scenes are mere technical devices in the structuring of the novel and the characters in them are more or less passive commentators upon Kassa and his mission.

The second scene which is conceived in a bit humorous vein pictures the verbal duel between Gebreye and a certain priest, Aba Tekle. Gebreye's aggressiveness here, is a bit excessive and he betrays lack of decorum. On the other hand, Aba Tekle's reactionary views underscore the conventional theme that the church is always the handmaid of the ruling class and that it frowns upon any kind of rebellion. Moreover, this scene makes a break in an otherwise successive flow of war themes.

The third and the last scene besides bringing us to the end of the novel is also a scene of realization. Aba Tekle, who we find in the second one jeering Kassa's aims and objectives as 'Dreams! youthful

dreams!' confesses in this concluding scene to Gebreye's father: 'No doubt, Ato Mulatu. There is no doubt he means business.' (p. 148)

By 'he' he refers not to Kassa, the bandit, anymore; but to Theodros - King of Kings, Emperor of Ethiopia.

Firebrands

Corruption-change-corruption (and hence disillusionment) is the salient loopy theme that Sahle Selassie tackles in his recent novel, Firebrands. It is, indeed, a vast and multi-faceted theme that requires a writer of Tolstoy's stature to deal with it with some depth and magnitude. Nevertheless, Sahle Selassie limiting himself only to some of its aspects like bureaucratic mismanagement attempts to portray situations on the eve and early days of the '74 revolution.

Among the various strata in the social hierarchy, the novelist focuses his attention mainly on the intelligentsia and therefrom culls out some characters that enact, relate and interpret the various events in the novel. In addition to these, he has a few personages like Dejazmach Azbete who are the real pillars of the feudo-bourgeois institution. All these characters, however, are not subsumed only as change seekers and change repellers. Such a dichotomy though not (and cannot be) forfeited altogether, is all the same enhanced mainly with various characteristic contrasts among the change seekers themselves.

The central character, Bezuneh, a fresh graduate from a university and his younger brother, Worku, a university student, concur on the need for change; though they differ in its urgency. Worku is impetuous and hurried to pull down the rotten feudo bourgeois system from its pedestal whereas Bezuneh is a bit more cautious and reserved. Worku holds a different opinion from Takori, another university student, on tribal issues though both are the fiery young men - the firebrands - who clamour at the top of their voices for the advent of revolution. Dr. Mandefrot, a university lecturer, has a marked difference from Worku and Takori in his theoretical exclamations on change and his reactions to it. Yet, he

tells them that they 'are all on the same side of the fence.'

On top of all these contrasts come the predominating conflicts, particularly between Bezuneh and Kibret which, in fact, constitute the gist of the plot of the novel. Kibret, the managing director of the corporation in which Bezuneh is an internal auditor, is a young, presumably educated man who has made his way to a comfortable niche in the feudo-bourgeois state machinery. When Bezuneh as auditor detects and reports to him the presence of some embezzlers in the corporation, he deliberately fails to react upon it. Moreover, after cancelling a bid for a fleet of lorries by fabricating lame excuses, he makes a secret deal with a certain foreigner who has promised to bribe him. Bezuneh takes a countermeasure on the latter, as a result of which he is fired from his job. Consequent upon another countermeasure to kill Kibret, he is sent to jail to serve a ten years' prison term. Before he finishes his term and not much later after the break of the revolution, however, he is released.

From the time of his employment to his imprisonment, Bezabih has fought the corrupted bureaucracy in the corporation with great determination but little knowledge, with persevering honesty but unbecoming naivete. It seems that his university training has not helped him in knowing before hand what a corporation in the feudo - bourgeois set up looks like. The magnitude and depth of the corruptions in the corporation come to him only when he finds himself neck-deep in the rotten organisation. He contemplates with anxiety and pathetic understanding:

What sort of a place is this?... What sort of people does it contain? The branch managers collect revenues and fail to deposit them in the banks. They delete vouchers or give out unofficial receipts and keep the collections for themselves. The head of the maintenance department steals materials. The lowest clerk tries to cheat wherever he finds

a chance to do so. And how the managing director makes a separate deal with Richardson and expects to collect ten thousand dollars in hard cash!.... (p. 41)

It is only gradually that Bezuneh comes to see why Kibret contacts him through an intermediary, why he (ie Kibret) approvingly speaks of the embezzlers' attitude against him and why his just auditing and control to minimize pilferage is considered as 'a sort of witch-hunt.' When the fulsome activities in the corporation unfurl before him, Bezuneh hurriedly starts to take measures against them. On the other hand, Kibret initially seems to take him only as one of those fresh graduate enthusiasts who aspire to amend all the wrongs in the world until such time that their enthusiasm is blunted by self-seeking ambitions and self-preserving deeds. This must be the reason why he passes him at first with only a slight rebuke for his lack of practicality in business matters. Bezuneh, however, does not retract; for he knows well that to be practical means to make a breach in business ethics, in professional integrity, to be sheepishly subservient to fraudulent bosses, to watch others get bribed and allow oneself to be bribed; and more, to go against his own brother's admonition: "you are not going to be like the stone-age graduates, Gashe Bezuneh? You are not going to accomodate yourself to the old rotten system, or are you?" (p. 41)

Bezuneh's refusal to be an accomplice to Kibret's fraudulent attempts shows his strength of character and his determined desire to remain honest. Conversely, his handling of the whole confrontation exposes his inexperience, immaturity and naivete. When he realizes that he is to be sacked from his job for being uncooperative 'with the head of a Mafia organisation,' he goes home and falls in a kind of hysteria. He seems to be unprepared to accept the inevitable aftermaths of his own conscious

doing. His exclamation, 'yes, that's the reward for honest work. But why? why? why?' demeans him before the tremendous task he sets out to accomplish. Truly, this is not only naivete; but also a glaring index to his unrealistic approach to the whole affair. Is he expecting Kibret to pat him on the back for stabbing him in the back? Is he looking for a reward, a promotion perhaps, for saying halt! to all the embezzlements and cozenages in the corporation which he himself described as 'a Mafia organisation?' What brand of a fighter is he who anticipates to be coddled by his enemies?

And more: where is he intending to accuse Kibret for heading a Mafia organisation? For attempting to take bribes?

Yes, I accuse you, Sir of an attempted theft! Ha-ha-ha!
you shall be tried in the court of conscience, sir, the court that is invisible and untouchable, and yet that is real, sir...
The court of conscience which is the only source of truth and justice, sir, a court which can neither be seen nor touched sir, but which is real all the same... (p. 69)

Is Bezuneh trying to tell us that Kibret is above the conventional court of law (where he thinks he himself will be tried) and that he can only be his own judge? If so, has he himself not said in court that Kibret has no conscience? And Kibret - has he ever felt guilty conscience for attempting to take bribe? -- no, not at all! Is this then a hollow rhetoric (if there is one!) that emanates from a hysterical mind? -- very unlikely.

In fact these and other utterances related to his court case, 'I don't want to shun punishment if I am found guilty,... but I am convinced I have committed no crime,' 'there is nothing to defend. There is only the truth to be told,' 'Not guilty according to the law of conscience,' etc. reveal his metaphysical and idealistic conception of reality. According to him, guilt, crime, truth, conscience stand on their own without a social context.

and that truth will absolve him whatever the circumstances are.

It is not only Bezuneh that lacks understanding of real situations; Worku and Takori are no better than him. We are told that after they have watched the trial 'from an objective point of view,' they thought that Bezuneh deserves 'a national award of a gold medal for his bravery in fighting corruption single handed.' (p. 103) But what is an objective point of view? To scrutinize matters from an objective point of view is above all, to have a fair knowledge of reality. These young men who expect from a feudo-bourgeois government, an award - a national one at that! - to be bestowed upon an individual who fought one of its appointees are said to look upon matters from an objective point of view! This is a sheer relapse, once again, to idealistic humbug. Woizero Kassech (Azbeta's wife) who thinks that Bezuneh should go to the gallows, is by far, a more realistic, down to earth woman.

What does Sahle Selassie want to signify by making these change seekers unrealistic in their approach to problems? Is he telling us that the educated ones shy away from looking at reality in the face? Or is he showing us, particularly in Bezuneh's case that the educated have a naive conception of struggle? Looking at the overall vehemence and seriousness of his attempt, there will be very little room to suggest that he is ^{boasting} disparaging or caricaturizing these characters. That he is sympathetic to them is indubitable. In fact, at times, he goes out of his way to court other characters to their side: the chief judge in the feudo-bourgeois court is one such character, for instance. The problem may have issued, first, from a hiatus ^{gap} that is created between his intention and his artistic realization of it. His intention to take these characters seriously is not revealed so much by his characterization as by the general import of

the themes and the plotting of the novel. Secondly, the problem may arise from Sahle Selassie's image of a change seeker - or, in a way, a rebel. (as in the case of these characters) If he thinks that it is through such characters as Bezuneh - who oddly and unrealistically handle situations - that corruption can be fought and change can come, his characterization will be correct; but still very unconvincing. For, are not a considerable knowledge of an enemy and a realistic assessment of problems the first item on the agenda of a rebel?

Be that as it may, among the change seekers, it is with Dr. Mandefrot that Sahle Selassie has fared well. Dr. Mandefrot is a representative character that calls to mind the university professeurs that used to hold bull sessions at Arat Kilo coffee bars before the revolution. He intellectualizes over economic, social and political issues; though very wary all the time not to take a stand and profess a political line. Though Dr. Mandefrot is very much aware of the need for change; he is at the same time a bit worried about the kind of change his country should endorse. Unlike Worku and Takori, whom he, not incorrectly labels as 'anarchists', he hesitates to discern change in the mere destruction of the system. 'You want to destroy everything while you are not capable of building anything' - is the poignant remark he levels at the youngmen. Notwithstanding his self conscious approach and scholarly understanding, however, he is not very clear about the student movement or about the various signs of the upheaval. He takes them as, 'something not yet defined; something not yet clearly focused; something amorphous.' (p. 119) True to his petty bourgeois character, he remains aloof from the heat of the struggle during the upheaval. He seems to mark time and is noncommittal. It is the novelist's apt irony that he, Dr. Mandefrot begins to have an active role

in the upheaval (at least, he starts to fill his diary with notes about the upheaval) only after a stray bullet grazes him slightly.

The change repellers are depicted quite adequately and realistically. Djazmach Azbete with all his feudal sentiments and fierce resistance to land reform and every kind of change is portrayed with some artistic deftness. Unreserved in saying and acting what he thinks is right; his political line is unambiguously drawn and his stand on every issue unequivocally expressed. He knows what he is doing and why. Unlike Kibret, he never entertains doubts about the power of the feudal establishment to resist change:

'By the way,' Azbete whispered into Kebret's ear as they walked towards the gate, 'are you interested in a piece of land in my province?' He always referred to the province he was assigned to as 'my province' as though he in fact owned it, as though it were his private property.

'who is not interested in a piece of land, Dejazzmach Sir?'

'But, Dejazzmach,' he said, on second thoughts, 'do you think it wise to purchase land at this time?'

'Why not?' he asked, rather surprised.

'People are making a lot of noise about those who own large tracts of land these days. Several land owners are actually selling out their lands and investing their money in the urban areas. Don't you think it's because of the loud noises made by certain people?'

'Heh-Heh-Heh!' Dejazzmach Azbete laughed in his peculiar manner: The laugh did not spring from his heart; it just bubbled out of his throat. It was the laugh of a nobleman who was amused, but not convinced.

'Are you afraid of an empty noise made by certain crackpots?'
Dejazzmach Azbete looked towards the young men on the wide veranadah.
'Are you?' (pp. 22 & 23)

Dejazzmach Azbete views the young generation with misprision and derision. He takes Dr. Mandefrot, for instance, for an impractical dreamer who babbles about peasants and land reform with no knowledge of real life. He tells Kibret (though out of character, this once) that he, Dr. Mandefrot, 'knows nothing about peasants except from his

desultory reading from some novels, probably Russian novles for they had a lot of peasnats there.' (p. 124) Such an attitude of his is an outgrowth of his overweening pride that goads him to turn deaf ears to other people's opinions. He, in fact, exemplifies one of those feudalists in pre '74 Ethiopia who through time had developed a sense of invincibility and showed an utter scorn to advocates of change.

The portraiture of outspoken and daring Azbete is counterposed against the shy, cowardly figure of Kibret. Usually addressing him with the deferential 'Dejazmach Sir,' he appears before him as a fidgety "adolescent," a mere pathetic figure. Sahle Selassie has nowhere succeeded better in showing what a shameful tribute the young must pay before they conveniently and confidently settle (perhaps in old age) on the top rung of the feudo-bourgeois hierarchy.

The excruciating mental and physical agonies Kibret has gone through because of the wounds he received from the 'steel' hands of Bezuneh along with the resultant shame and wounded pride, come to us through hallucinations and daydreamings. Such commendable methods have helped us to probe deeply into the mind of this character thereby giving us an opportunity to view him from one more dimension.

Some characters in this novel come from domestic scenes. The parent - son relationship in Taddesse's (Worku's and Bezuneh's father) household is depicted with verve and understanding. The anxious and tolerant mother, the drunkard but kindly father are our acquaintances; though, still very memorable figures.

Thematically, the whole novel is divided into two. While the first two chapters deal mainly with corruption, the remaining three focus on change and disillusionment. To integrate them into one whole, however, Sahle Selassie plants some prefigurative factors of change in the earlier

two chapters. In the very first chapter, for instance, we discern Dejazmach Azbete's disapproving awareness of dissatisfaction of the educated people with the status quo:

It is not easy to find loyal people these days. Even the younger men who have been educated by His Majesty, and placed in responsible posts talk of the need for rapid change, revising the constitution which His Majesty graciously offered to his beloved people, and the like. I should say they are unconsciously betraying their disloyalty to the regime by suggesting such drastic changes. (p. 17)

In this same chapter we find Worku sounding his impatience with the surfeit of rotten peace. With a characteristic vehemence and carelessness, he tells Dr. Mandefrot:

Oh, peace! peace! Why, Prof, we have had peace for over forty years. We are tired of peace. Stagnation and peace! What we need is a little action, Prof; a little action to stir the immobile peace, to shatter the petrified peace. (p. 28)

Furthermore, the general atmosphere being infested with bureaucratic corruption, embezzlement, bribery, nepotism; land and tribal problems, etc. points to the direction of change.

Sahle Selassie, after working out the theme of corruption in a life-like setting, finds it hard to do the same to the themes of change and disillusionment. The few characters and the limited setting with which he starts, come short of encompassing the multiform and multilateral changes the Ethiopian people have gone through as a result of the '74 revolution. In addition, he is unable to track the fate of his characters as they prod through each significant day of the revolution. Nevertheless, Sahle Selassie has overcome these problems quite fairly. Firstly he gives us a succinct account of the revolution in a live language in the form of narration. Secondly, by employing a subtle method in plotting, he brings Worku at the end of the novel to divulge to Bezuneh upon his release from prison, the story of the revolution and the fate of the characters.

Sahle Selassie who always discloses some artistic knack in his description of men, things and phenomena is here at his best when he delineates the Arat Kilo scene on the fall of the doddering feudo-bourgeois government. He captures the mood of the scene with vivid, brilliant language and remarkable dexterity. Its length notwithstanding, it is really worth quoting:

The square at Arat Kilo was not jammed. But it was another spot of hot action. Students massed against the long fence separating the square from the campus, and sang aloud:

Atenessam Wei
Atenessam Wei
Yegif agezaz
Aybkahim Wei

Awake
Awake
You've had enough
Of oppressive rule!

A throng of people on the pavements, opposite the campus, took up the refrain, echoed it aloud, and sent it back to the campus. The students repeated the song, and the throng echoed it back again. It sounded like a well-rehearsed chorus, although it was impromptu.

Army jeeps rolled up the slope, and rolled down the slope by the liberty monument. Four or five young officers were in each one of them, holding their arms high up in the air and waving now at the students and then at the gathering crowd, smiling as though in triumph and expecting applause which came without reservation. The students and the throng waved at the officers approvingly.

'You go right ahead with your plans,' they seemed to say.

'Go right ahead; we are all behind you!' The atmosphere was gay as though people were celebrating a national holiday.

The air round the square was very noisy. So was the air over the liberty monument. A green army helicopter shaped like a fat locust with a heavy breast was purring from a distance. It tore out of the blue sky and came nearer and nearer sending out waves of rumbling sound that became louder and louder the more it advanced towards the square. The huge blades of its propeller worked madly as though they too were in a gay revolt.

The throng on the ground looked skywards. Some men shaded their eyes from the dazzling sun with their open palms while others pulled the brims of their caps towards their noses. The bulky helicopter pushed its heavy front downwards and rumbled louder and louder. At a certain point in the air it dropped a jet of leaflets and turned upwards...

The leaflets twisted and turned in the air, teasing the expectant crowd. They danced in the wind and glided down slowly but surely. Some of these landed on the flat tops of the nearby buildings beyond the reach of the crowd, while the rest fluttered here and there till they were close enough to be grabbed by hundreds of outstretched hands. (pp. 138 & 139)

The last paragraph in the above quotation is too provoking to be taken only in its literal meaning. One can dare to say that it adumbrates the overwrought expectancy of the people in the face of problems for its realization. Hence, it takes us to the theme of disillusionment which comes out very strongly in the final chapters of the book.

Worku, in the final scene of the final chapter, by way of relating the whole story of the revolution to Bezuneh gives vent to his own disillusionment as well. He sees that the functionaries of the feudo-bourgeois order who withstood change for years, have now transmuted their colour and are posing as genuine revolutionaries. He deplores the fact that these opportunists and reactionaries stand in the limelight and blatantly utter newly and hurriedly acquired revolutionary slogans whereas the real firebrands are made to recede to the background. He bemoans and derides the existence of parvenu authorities who are stupid and ignorant enough to the extent of nationalizing fully government owned, state corporations. In fact, we see his previous, sparkling enthusiasm on the eve and early days of the revolution blinking. Dr. Mandefrot's fear and lack of conviction to take the revolution as genuine begin to tell upon his feelings. Even if he admits the seriousness of the change that takes place in social and political domains, he nonetheless, seems to agree finally with Dr. Mandefrot's assertion that 'the revolution is yet to come.'

The Thirteenth Sun

The Thirteenth Sun is a very challenging reading. Taking the idea for the title of his book from an advertisement of Tourist Organization: 'Ethiopia - a land of thirteen months of sunshine' the novelist depicts with remarkable gusto and verve the miseries and corruptions that were prevalent in feudo-bourgeois Ethiopia. In fact the 'thirteen months of sunshine' turns out to be - very ironically, the thirteen months of darkness. The uncanny thirteenth sun (of the thirteenth month presumably) is realized as a hyperbolic and symbolic representation of the intense darkness through which the Ethiopian masses went in the last feudo-bourgeois system.

Story-wise, it is a simple, scantily-plotted novel. An ailing Fitawrari*, attended by his two children (Goytom and Woynitu) goes on a pilgrimage to the shirne of Abbo - on Mount Zikwala - in search of a cure. Arriving at the shirne - after having a very hard time on the journey - the Fitawrari and his retinue lodge with a peasant family. The wife of the peasant is a conjure woman who claims to have knowledge of traditional medicine and sorcery. The Fitawrari in addition to frequenting the holy water of Abbo, also resorts to this woman for a cure. In the mean time, the peasant who from the beginning eyes Woynitu lasciviously violates her in the end. The Fitawrari, having obviously known this situation all along, kills the peasant on the night of the summoning of 'the unnameables,' and dies himself, shortly after.

Taking this simple story-line, the writer weaves together a number of scenes which characterize the dark, cruel faces of feudal Ethiopia. Feudal Ethiopia with its ironical claim to 'thirteen months of sunshine'

* a honorific title.

is seen dwindling and vegetating under insufferable darkness of poverty, ignorance and disease. Themes of corruption, exploitation, degradation, despair and remorse resound in each and every page. On Mount Zikwala (which is presumably Ethiopia in miniature) the people of Ethiopia are seen sinking in a sea of tears, in a quagmire of tribulations. Expecting 'manna from heaven', these people wallow in a lethargic, pitiable state - losing their energy, courage and hope. On this strange height - where time through the witchery of feudalism has hypnotized each and everybody to sleep, nature - and only nature seems to have kept so far its vitality and sap.

In dealing with themes of feudal exploitation and corruption, the writer takes only a few characters, among which are Fitawrari Woldu, Woynitu, Goytom, the peasant and his wife - the conjure-woman.

✓ Fitawrari Woldu is a feudalist with an unwavering conviction in the goodness and worth of traditional values. When sick, he resorts to christian and traditional (usually superstitious) cures. He considers the modern doctor only as a wielder of a 'butcher's knife'. He speaks of present day values and norms contemptuously and only in contrast with the values and norms of the 'good old days.' Being very much aware of the threat the present generation has posed against the old, he disparages it relentlessly. This can easily be substantiated by what he tells his son how he is a weak, little man, compared with himself:

When I was your age I used to walk ninety kilometers a day...
when I was your age, I used to kill a sheep by myself, with
every part of the meat cut from its proper place... I used
to saddle a horse, load a donkey, eat like a man, drink like
a man, fight like a man, love like a man... and look at you,
(p. 75)

Even though Fitawrari Woldu considers himself a successful man in life, some of his past misdeeds weigh heavily upon his soul. Now

that he feels his life to have come to a close, he looks back and sees clearly the wrongs he has done to innocent people. And this he does with pangs of conscience and uneasiness of heart. As a governor and a merchant he has committed some crimes among which is the death of a young man for an alleged charge of theft. The tortured face of this man haunts him and his words while being flogged 'All ye who see me thus, profit by my example' resound in his ears and disturb his peace. Thus, a victim of mental and physical agonies, his only consolation is his expressed will and desire to be buried at Debre Libanos. He seems to think that all his earthly confessions and penances do not wipe out his sins and bring about his salvation. Since the apocrypha grants complete absolution to all those who get the opportunity of being buried at Debre Libanos, the Fitawrari sees in this an only way to his salvation.

Through his sufferings, Fitawrari Woldu becomes sympathetic to others. When a mad girl approaches him, 'his face assumed a fatherly look.' As much as he wants other people to understand him now - in his last days, he himself becomes very understanding and sympathetic towards others. The love of his son and daughter - that he has disdained for long, becomes now more than ever, indispensable to smooth his already ruffled way to the grave'... and I know I haven't been much of a father, have I?' - he asks Woynitu with a tinge of self pity and contrition. What Fitawrari Woldu wants to regain in his final days is what he has lost, unheedfully, all his life long: filial love and respect. And gain - he does. Both Woynitu and Goytom, regardless of the differences they have against him, come to love and respect him in the end. He dies in the embrace of Goytom and a little while before his death he asserts himself forcefully by killing the peasant, who, he knew, has taken advantage of the loneliness of his daughter.

We may consider Fitawrari's death in the embrace of Goytom as a very striking episode. For at first the gulf between them seems unbridgeable, their conflicts irreconcilable. Yet, as is aforementioned, through his sufferings, Fitawrari Woldu's heart has softened and Goytom comes to love and respect him for it.

Goytom is an intellectual who has lost his bearing in the whirlwind of intellectualism. Society, nature, tradition... are his guinea pigs. He dissects them, investigates them and seems at times, to be knowledgeable of them. Take for instance, how he describes the rotten Ethiopian society with subdued irony and bitterness.

Beautiful Ethiopia: with all men of title - grazmatch, kegnazmatch, fitawrari, dejazmatch, ras, generals, ministers, princes and princesses - doing their best to alleviate the suffering in the hamlets. Begging manna from heaven, sending DDT, sending rat poison, sending insecticides, sending the police. To alleviate the pain and hardship in the hamlets. And hunger, ignorance and disease bestowing their bounty all over the country. God's way of putting an end to things. (p. 42)

After giving us such a clear picture of the ills of feudal Ethiopia however, he stops short of prescribing a cure for them for he is afraid and immature to know one. '... And I am supposed to save Ethiopia... save her from whom? From myself. I guess?' - he asks himself, not grasping clearly whether he is an enemy or a saviour of his country. He does not exactly know where he stands in the turmoil of conflicts in the society, what his commitment is and to whom his commitment must be. Selfcensorious that he is, he repeatedly lapses into self pity, cynicism and idealistic humbug:

And me a young man. An educated young man... Oh, yes, at least I have learnt to spit into a gaudy handkerchief. To use fork and knife... And I'm supposed to save Ethiopia.... Before filth I hold my nose with my fingers. Before injustice I hold my peace. What is it to me that these people live in hovels built with far less attention to needs than fences for

animals. For animals are more valuable in this country than men. At least we have started to export some... The old tradition must be smashed! New ones must be created! We must forge a whole new pattern for Ethiopia! Must have faith in the human soul. Must - Must-Must! Rot and contradictions, Fiddlesticks! (pp. 113 & 114)

Though Goytom does not know how to destroy the old and build the new, he discerns correctly, however, the rottenness and emptiness of feudal values and its seemingly glamorous accoutrements. That its medallions are awards for the greatest of cowards, that its respects and honours are lavishly bestowed upon liars and hypocrites - he knows well. Yet, it becomes very hard for him to see his way through its maze. In fact, he despairs before ever taking one concrete, bold step towards an expressed goal and a directed attainment.

To cool his mind which is overheated with maddening thoughts and to soothe his overstrung feelings, Goytom probes into nature and relates its ways and beauty with glowing terms. While facing nature he triumphs over his despair, cynicism and bitterness. He becomes, as it were, a little boy, care-free and happy with each and every bit of nature's artistry. 'The white clouds,' 'the wild flowers,' 'the singing of birds and the blowing of the wind'... all such phenomena of nature bring vitality and happiness to his over-wrought mind. He meticulously studies its aspects and derives illimitable pleasure from them. He, in fact, sounds like Henry David Thoreau when he exclaims,

How beautiful it would be to pass your life observing the wild life of bees, birds and animals that live around you watching the rugged land, the wild flowers, the rock cliffs, the air and the skies... Living like a hermit. Living a life as free as the wind. With every weed, flower, and tree on this mountain put before you. (pp. 112 & 113)

Goytom recurrently flies to the bosom of nature to escape the drab, suffocating life around him. Nature to him is a healing agent, a kind

softner of man's hardened heart, a benevolent transformer of man's wicked passions into good. He tells us how at first his feelings against the Fitawrari changed because of '.... the sounds of shepherds driving their animals home to the pasture' and because of the innumerable beautiful creatures of nature around him. He also tells us how nature has become an instrument for dissolving all the gritty feelings in the heart of his father:

And the next thing I saw was Fitawrari motioning Woynitu to him and embracing her. I even thought I saw some tears in his eyes. He must finally have realized that she was his daughter, after all.... With all the odour wafting through the air. The odour from the yard. The odour from the dead fires. The odour from the damp forest... They must have stirred up the quiet waters of his soul. (p. 136)

Goytom, not only loves nature; but also falls in love with a girl, Woynitu. But this is a branded love - an incestious love for she is his 'half-something', - his half-sister. Her beauty possesses him, haunts him, occupies him tremendously. Yet, he seems to be able to control his excessive admiration and love and keep his secret to himself alone. However, Woynitu is not unaware of his feelings even if she does not encourage him to wallow and consume himself in such an illicit love. Paradoxically enough, this love estranges them from each other. They are not very close, even for a brother and a sister. When Goytom witnesses the development of intimacy between her and the peasant, he is a little piqued with jealousy - and no more. Maybe to him she is an extension of nature, something to be admired and loved passionately, but not to be tampered with and be defiled. She is perhaps a fanciful world of sex whereto he banishes himself from the dreariness and hideousness of this poverty - stricken, disease-ridden environment. Some vagueness veils the true nature of this incestious love. As his understanding of the social

ills of the society is not devoid of some shortcomings, his reaction to this girl is also not without its flaws. Or are these two things not very different really? (we will come to this later)

Both Goytom and Woynitu have their own ideals. Whereas Goytom strives to change Ethiopia to Utopia, Woynitu attempts to have a decent life, untarnished by the blemishes of her mother's profession. She wants to keep her chastity and respectability, until she realizes towards the end that such ideals are not to sprout and fructify in the rotten society she is living in. She must sacrifice such ideals before she understands fully the destructiveness of the feudal society. That is why after being raped by the peasant, she bemoans her own fate with a deep feeling of self-pity: 'I have become one with my mother, after all.' (p. 106)

Of all the characters in The Thirteenth Sun, no one has a sombre cast of mind more than she. We do not find her smile, or indulge in humorous dialogue. Enwrapped with melancholy and loneliness, she broods over her past hopes, airy dreams and her current wretched state. Even nature - that great bestower of happiness and peace upon Goytom - fails to perseveringly give her relief from her miserable situation. In fact, it becomes a decoy that lures her to the peasant who violates her. Woynitu is so melancholic and lonely that she cannot but see the dark side of life. People around her are nothing more but wretched animals. When she sees two old men sitting side by side and talk, the image that starts in her mind is that of two 'big baboons.' Until her feelings towards him is softened later, the peasant appears to her like a jackal and a dog. The conjure woman 'goes on living like a scavenger sifting debris.' All these and other animalistic imageries coupled with her lamentations upon her own destiny make her a sombre character, indeed.

Though of a sombre frame of mind, Woynitu is very compassionate, however. Out of compassion, she even tries to rationalize and justify the misdeeds of her mother - her mother who wants to have her as a partner in her infamous calling.

No - I'm by no means blaming her. She would not have helped it, hemmed in as she was by house rent, municipal license tax, and the food and clothing she has to provide for both of us. Besides, she'd had to pay for my schooling. And the ever-increasing industry of taverns and night clubs she had to compete with! It's simply staggering. (p. 44)

Woynitu, seeing the small child of the peasant sit alone surrounded by sick people and darkness, pities him and, infact, wants to comfort him. But no sooner has she made friends with him than his father, the peasant, begins to throw lewdy looks at her. Still, he is not to blame wholly for what has happened later. She herself in a way, becomes a prey for his sexual incontinence. But why has she become an easy prey? What really attract her to him? Her motives seem to confound us.

As is repeatedly put in the aforegoing paragrap, Woynitu suffers deeply from loneliness. Amidst that dark, dilapidated surroundings, she stands alone. Neither her theory - mongering brother nor her ailing father can come to her rescue. In her bitter loneliness, thus, it is very natural of her to invite the companionship of one who has a very different temperament from hers; for the peasant suffers neither from loneliness nor from self-pity. And more, of all other people, he is there (whatever his motive) to help her, talk to her, strike friendship with her. In such a situation, what else can she do? - even those beautiful Oromo girls have repelled her gesture of friendship.

It is also possible to view her giving herself out that easily, as a subconscious act to come out from the melancholic state she is in. She may be on the look out (though, not consciously) for such kind of shock

treatment; for she is really not an immature, foolish girl, incapable of realizing the import of his lewdy looks to commit such a gross error of misunderstanding, otherwise. In fact, what his very first smile recalls to her is the smile she has been familiar with, in her mother's drinking place. And consider the dialogue she makes with him in the thick of the forest; it is filled with words that have sexual connotations. Surely, there must be something of sexual nature that lurks in her subconscious mind, and the peasant's 'I think you are calling for it.' - is not an empty statement. Whether she is cured or not is not hard to know: we do not find her substantially changed. And the peasant?

Well, he is not from the very first looking for such treatment. He does not need it - in fact. He is a self-complacent, remorseless, cheerful, humorous, simple man. Moreover, he is a down-to-earth, practical man. He does not tire himself with theoretical superfluities. Nor does he have the dread of invisible devils like his wife. He grasps what is at hand. He does not entertain any scruples, for example, when he eats the meat that is meant for the devil. He knows he must not miss chances, notwithstanding his wife's -- the conjure-woman's entreaties against them. Thus, as he is wont to do, he comments humourously upon her folly.

That meat is for the devil, she says. And I say, so be it, if he comes I will let him have his share. And I wait and wait for him, but he doesn't come. And so I take all for myself. Perhaps it is too small for him, most of the time -- a bullock may be his idea of a feast. I don't know. But me - no! I get such a chance only two or three times a year. (p. 67)

The peasant has equanimity of mind; and this stems from his unshakable confidence in himself. He is happy as he is. Unlike Goytom and Woynitu, he does not suffer from frustrated hopes or unrealizable ambitions. True, he has his own little problems (with his wife, and the preacher for

example) and his own little hopes and ambitions (like securing the gun Fitawrari has promised to give him), but these problems, hopes and ambitions do not consume his vitality and leave him a chaff of a man.

A very earthy creature that he is, we do not find him lose himself in a world of fantasy and make-believe. The 'now and here' possess him. Coupled with these he prides himself upon the dexterity of his hands, and this he keenly realizes to be the advantage he has over other people, including his wife.

Oh! me, don't I know my business? I make also the iron hoes. And how have I come to know all these skills? I learnt them all by myself. But my woman! she knows only what is given her of God... she is the conjure-woman. And I am not. And perhaps I don't want to be one, because I know what I am doing and she doesn't, Let her be all the conjure-woman she likes all her life. I don't care. I am also a conjure-ploughman. Yes I am. (p. 65)

He is, moreover, a very light-hearted man, with no regrets whatsoever. Whatever transgressions he makes, he calls them his 'little sins'. In raping Woynitu he does not seem to feel the seriousness of it. The possible wrath of Fitawrari Woldu or Goytom does not bother him. After hacking off ears of corn from the farm of the preacher, he approaches Abbo with an easy heart and asks him forgiveness, at least for 'those left uncut.' To widen his compound, he wants Abbo to commit some 'little sins' -- just like himself. 'Oh, Abbo, just make a gesture with your hand, that way, sending lightening on that tree which has become a hinderance to my removing the landmark;' - he pleads with a very humorous tone.

Unlike her husband, the conjure-woman is not very cheerful and humorous. She is unhappy with the life she is leading. Formerly a concubine of a fitawrari, she deplores her present station in life. 'This is the life we lead, but I had a better way of life' - she tells Woynitu sorrowfully. Her grudge against God is also well pronounced. She thinks

that all the calamities, the poverty, the disease the people of Zikwala are suffering from emanate from God's own doing. When the priest frowns upon her censorious remarks against God, she retorts with vehemence and bitterness.

Why shouldn't I? Isn't it He who brought on us all the calamities of the past months? Locusts destroyed our crops, then cattle disease broke out; and then to complete the misery, the summer and spring rains failed... Surely, I'm not blaming Him for nothing. (p. 60)

The conjure-woman however, is not an irreligious woman. As she resorts to the devil to find cures for other people's sicknesses, she looks to God's forgiveness for herself. If she sacrifices sheep and cocks to appease and please the devils, she also has her fastings, incense burnings and psalm readings to win the favour of God. She not only enlists the help of her husband, but also that of the priest in devil summoning seances. Just like the Fitawrari, she cannot see any marked difference or contradiction between religion and superstition. She, in fact, considers superstition as an aspect of religion and as a way to the glorification of God. Consider, for instance, her lamentations upon the death of her husband:

And at what I have done to merit all this. Were they all in vain - the fastings, the incense burning, the offering of sacrifices, the exercising of demons in the name of God, - why should this be my reward?...
Oh my God, help me to find out where I went wrong... Help me to make the unnameables respond to my calls tonight.
(p. 116 & 117)

To an Ethiopian of an orthodox faith, demonology and christianity have no clear demarcation that separates them from each other, and the conjure-woman makes this fact very obvious, indeed.

Though the characters in The Thirteenth Sun are encircled by a halo of a gloomy atmosphere that casts its shadow upon their souls; they do not give us the impression of monsters in a dark cave. They have their

witty sallies, their humorous dialogues and natural simplicity that salvage them from an otherwise monstrous appearance.

* * *

While writing The Thirteenth Sun, Daniachew must have had the theme of revolution as the foremost issue in his mind. To bring out this theme strongly and clearly, he has not only drawn a number of highly symbolic characters, but has also meticulously worked out the setting to represent much more than its literal meaning.

The Thirteenth Sun, on a surface level, is a story of a pilgrimage - a journey. But then, we discern from our readings of the literatures of various countries, the one stable tradition in all of them: journeys are usually loaded with allegorical and /or symbolic meanings. Here in The Thirteenth Sun, the journey, the pilgrimage to Abbo - symbolizes the arduous task the people of Ethiopia (and particularly the intellegentsia as represented here by Goytom) have faced to bring about the emancipation of their country from the cruel grips of feudal aristocracy (represented here by Fitawrari Woldu who symbolizes Haile Selassie) and the upcoming capitalist class.

Mount Zikwala represents the whole of Ethiopia as it has two most significant factors that are the hallmarks of this country: beauty of nature and misery in the society. In taking this place as an epitome of Ethiopia, the writer has successfully ripped off the veil that has for long masked the evils of feudal Ethiopia.

But the feudal Ethiopia that Daniachew portrays is not the feudal Ethiopia of Menelik or even the feudal Ethiopia of the pre-Italian war of 1935. This is feudal Ethiopia on the eve of the '74 revolution. Now, Feudalism is not as strong as in the old days. It is rapidly losing ground and giving way to capitalism. The old feudal values are smitten away and

capitalist and imperialist values are supplanting them. The old barons of feudalism cannot safeguard old feudal values as before. The triumph of the emerging capitalist economy over feudal economy - becomes an inevitable fact. A new capitalist economic system with its new social and political values appear on the scene to overtake the old feudal economic system with its old social values and political dominance. In such a situation wherein the old system is dying out and the new system is yet struggling to completely replace it, various aspects of class differences become very apparent.

Fitawrari Woldu does not possess even a tent, for example, whereas the merchant (representative of the new capitalist class) owns one. The Fitawrari can only pay some money and lodge with a peasant family. And even to the peasant, he is made to justify, though unsuccessfully, what brand of Fitawrari he is:

'you've heard of the name Fitawrari Woldu, I presume,'
'so many Fitawraries nowadays... hard to catch up with their names.'
'The real Fitawraries I'm talking about - those of Menelik not of the Italians.'
'I was too young then to know anything about them.'
'As if the present-day Fitawraries deserve the title!'
'We've two of them in our village; both of them left with title and medallions only.' (p. 12)

Fitawrari Woldu identifies himself with the powerful, rich, old Fitawraries of Menelik - though we know that it is Haile Selassie who appointed him. Moreover, even if the Italians' nomination of many Ethiopians as Kegnazmatchs, Fitawraries and Dejazmatches (all these are feudal titles) is a historical fact; the reference in the quoted line is generally to Fitawraries of the post-war era. Nevertheless, the peasant, not easily convinced of the greatness of this Fitawrari who shares with him his humble shovel, tries to evade the issue. Lacking credulity

the Fitawrari reiterates somewhat petulantly:

'your language smells very much of the soil. Did you not have by any chance a master who could teach you how to talk to your superiors?'

'oh, lots and lots of them. Why, anybody with money is my master for that matter.'

'I mean men of blood; men who could teach you how to conduct yourself in descent society.'

'How should I know about that? They seem gentlemen enough to me until they get low in the purse....' (p. 13)

The old allegiance of a peasant to a feudal lord is swept away in the face of cash economy. The peasant has put it clearly what he means by 'master' in the newly unfurling social set-up. Fitawrari Woldu's phraseology of 'real Fitawrarries' 'men of blood' 'descent society' do not mean much to the peasant - the peasant who has correctly observed that Fitawrari Woldu's type abound with mere 'medallions and titles.'

The peasant has solid grounds to be contemptuous of all fitawrarries. His wife - the conjure-woman, as has been mentioned ~~lover~~ ^{lover} is a former concubine of a fitawrari who has become so poor that he can not even prepare the yearly feast on Abbo Day. He seems to realize somehow that real power comes only from economic power. That is why people with empty pockets and high sounding honorific titles come short of his regard and deference.

The emerging capitalist economy has a tremendous impact upon the attitudes of the peasant. It makes him business-minded. No old feudal values or sentiments do prevent him from his incessant demand for money. He does not feel any uneasiness when he wakes the ailing Fitawrari in the middle of the night to ascertain whether or not he can safely pocket the rent, without the knowledge of his land lady. When Goytom becomes very anxious of his father's health and pleads him not to agitate him, his (ie the peasant's) response exposes his outrageous love for money:

' I do not understand you. If he wakes, my wife will take care of him for an extra dollar or two. You needn't worry about it...' (p. 23)

It is an attested historical fact that the conflicts of two old basic classes are aggravated and become very conspicuous by an emerging new class. Here, the conflicts between the peasantry and the feudal classes are made very explicit by the emerging capitalist class. This new capitalist class, with the intention of gaining more strength to crush the feudal class rallies around itself the peasantry and infests it with its own values and attitudes. Daniachew has grasped this fact admirably and by depicting the peasant with all capitalist ideals and complete disdain to Fitawrari's pretensions, has symbolically represented the true conditions of the conflicting classes in Ethiopia on the eve of the revolution.

In such times of tottering feudalism, the intelligentsia has its own role to play. It usually opposes the dominant basic class - the class of land lords and identifies itself with the down-trodden class - the class of the peasantry. However, since it is in its nature to titillate from siding with one class to another, it lacks ideological clarity and firm determination of goal. Such truism is borne out by the way Goytom is characterized.

Daniachew, in working out the theme of revolution makes Goytom pose as a revolutionary who seeks complete destruction of the feudal order and its being supplanted by a new one. But such a desire fails to materialize as he is at a loss to identify the ways that bring the desired goal. Lacking ideological perspicuity and unflagging determination, he, the educated young man despairs and upbraids himself: 'As if I am wearing blinkers all the time so that I won't see sideways or into the future.' (p. 114)

To Goytom's mind, Fitawrari Woldu is identified with Haile Selassie the arch-exponent of the feudal class. Looking at a piece of cloth on which is written 'welcome, your Imperial Majesty', he comments, 'yes, you have helped me to see the light', and recalls instantaneously the words of his own father, 'How come I have such a weakling for a son after all I have done for you...?' Such simultaneous identification besides underscoring the fact that Fitawrari Woldu symbolizes Haile Selassie and thereby the feudal nobility, pinpoints the fact that the conflict between the Fitawrari and Goytom does not emanate from son-parent relationship, only; but also from class differences. On the other hand, Goytom considers Woynitu as a symbol of Ethiopia. In part I chapter 9 of the novel this fact becomes very obvious. In speaking of beautiful Woynitu, he recourses to speaking of beautiful Ethiopia. They come to his mind, not separately and as different, but as one and the same. It is not hard to discern this blend of identity from the following paragraph.

And All those taverns will be amalgamated to form a company. Sputnik or rocket or Apollo Company it will be called. To make it sound scientific. It would appeal to the civilized tourists. And Woynitu will be rich. Ethiopia will be rich. Ethiopia will be industrialized. She will be a name of international renown. Woynitu and Company or Apollo or whatever it is. (pp. 31 & 32)

That Woynitu is a symbol of Ethiopia becomes more clear when we realize the fact that characters which are representatives of classes do battle to possess her. We know how Fitawrari Woldu has striven to make her love him. We also know how the peasant and Goytom both love her and want to possess her completely. In his last days fitawrari becomes aware of the wrongs he has done to her and to make amends, he gives her a cross (a symbol of tribulation, pain and sacrifice). Goytom,

at

Though he loves her does not know how to approach her; cannot see clearly the ways how to make her love him. He moves along a hazy route. Only the peasant has a determined way of fulfilling it. He takes her by force. Goytom who avoids the killing of the sacrificial sheep (symbol of all the sacrifices that await revolutionary individuals) in taking a tottering step towards the love of Woyintu is again outsmarted by the peasant - the peasant who is a very pragmatic man. Fitawrari Woldu realizes early the peasant's intention and seems to foresee and dread its outcome.

... and the peasant enters the hut. He doesn't look at the Fitawrari. And he doesn't look at me. But he looks at Woynituu. And with a smile too... He pinches at the fire. The peasant and the fire smiling at Woynituu. Fitawrari changes side and sleeps with his face to the wall. He doesn't want the peasant and the fire to smile at him. (p. 52)

Fitawrari Woldu has always been distrustful of the peasant. On the other hand, he has tried - not unsuccessfully - to win the love and sympathy of Goytom. What Goytom maintains from such love is a present of a watch, presumably a symbol of the old, futile times the people of Ethiopia have gone through. In the denouement, Fitawrari succeeds in killing the peasant who, in a way, has deprived him of his daughter. And on his death, his rotten corpse rests literally and symbolically upon the shoulder of Goytom; as his former servants become reluctant to carry it along the rough descent of Mount Zikwala.

In all such handlings of the symbolic plot and symbolic characters what does the writer want to signify? Does he mean that the class of the peasantry will hold power for a while only to be squashed again by the feudal class? Does he mean that the intelligentsia - the petty bourgeois class - will succeed the feudal class in taking over the political power? Does he mean that all the offensive legacy of the feudal class will go to the petty bourgeois class? In giving us the

picture of the rough return journey, does he mean that a very bleak, hard life yet awaits the people of Ethiopia? And more, making the setting of the novel the same (at least, concerning the place factor) at the beginning and in the end, does he mean that all those turmoils in the society do come to nothing, that a bright future is not to be expected from such hellish society, that all the theoretical bombasts of the intelligentsia are much ado about nothing and that the sacrificial sheep has yet to come?

I think Daniachew means all these and something else.

This 'something else' is an attempt to give Marxian over-tones to his theme of revolution. Through red colour symbolism and an allusion to the necessity of power to efface out the degenerate social system, Daniachew, in a way, attempts to show the trend the Ethiopian revolution will take. I say 'in a way' because I don't think he, like Goytom (no doubt they share the same point of view) has not a clear understanding and grasp of it.

The colour red is usually associated with socialism and hence communism. In fact, it is a symbol of this system. Realizing this fact - so it seems - the writer has time and again tried to bring out his theme of revolution - through this symbol. Besides recurrent references to blood, fire and the glowing horizon, it is possible to cite two important incidents that can unequivocally substantiate this point. The peasant after raping Woynitu asks her in this same moment to give him the 'netela' on which are some stains of blood. But before he takes the 'netela' to the river for washing the blood away, he muses over it: 'how beautiful that blood looks on your 'netela' - bright-red like the blood of a chicken I like looking at it...' (p. 101) Though this incident seems

* a light outer garment

implausible, the writer goes out of his way, this once, to emphasize his symbolic meaning. The other incident comes when Goytom encounters a woman by the lake.¹² This woman who has a father flogged for insulting a governor speaks of her excessive love for the colour red:

I like spilling blood - I like red - I like a big red fire - such as a hut burning and roof cracking in the middle and forming a huge brazier; I like also forest fire - a conflagration; I like red moon, red lamp, red soil, red pepper, red flower, red dress, red curtain - I like red very much. (p. 90)

Such a profuse play with the colour red cannot be taken literally. Its symbolic significance is very clear and strident, indeed.

Power-as a means to one's rights is another factor that the writer tackles to explain his concept of revolution. It is apt to mention here that socialists (and particularly Marxian socialists) believe in the indispensableness of power to bring about revolution and change. The writer, obviously cognizant of this fact, portrays the peasant as one who is very conscious of the importance of power in bringing some changes in the society. This is how he (ie the peasant) advises a beggar who humbly implores God to soften the hearts of the people and make them give him twenty cents to clear off a little debt:

... man, you don't know what to beg for - beg of God to strengthen in you the feelings of revenge, the feeling of hatred and disdain for these men... pray that God give you strength to avenge on your enemies - to wipe out the insult heaped upon you with your blood... (p. 81)

After a repeated persual of the novel, Daniachew's attempt to bring out the theme of revolution in a somewhat Marxian way appears to be a bit unconvincing. Among other things, the resolution of his symbolic plot contravenes it. Goytom, a representative of the intelligentsia upon whose hands the fate of Ethiopia is made to rest finally in the book is obviously not a Marxist.

Nevertheless, it is very wrong to belittle the importance of this book on this account. Even though the shape the class conflicts may finally assume do not come out clearly and strongly; this novel, however, has remarkably exposed the poverty-ridden, disease-stricken life the Ethiopian masses have led under the past system and regime. And perhaps this can be considered as the major factor in the appraisal of the importance of this book. Concluding this point with what Engles tells Minna Kautsky in a letter may be of some importance here:

The modern Russians and Norwegians, who produce excellent novels, all write with a purpose. I think however that the solution of the problem must become manifest from the situation and the action themselves without being expressly pointed out and that the author is not obliged to serve the reader on a platter the future historical resolution of the social conflicts which he describes.¹³

* * *

The first and foremost thing that comes to our mind when we investigate Daniachew's use of language is his superb ability to describe event, phenomena and things meticulously. Since the content of his novel consists mainly of dilapidated elements and sombre events, his language, the tone and atmosphere that are created thereby reflect this very depressing situation. His language is so descriptive and concrete that the reader is made to experience an event with all his five senses. What reader can escape from sensing the dreariness of the peasant's hovel after reading the following piece?

Outside, rain began to pour down upon the dry thatch of the hut shaking the soot on us in lumps. The crickets chirping sounded as if hell had gotten loose. A smell of leather, mouldy grain, and dampness began to issue from the encircling fence. And slowly, the grey, blurred hut drowned in blackness. Rats began their furtive nibbling and scurrying in the wicker granaries. Goats came in from outside and jumped on your clothing and frisked about you. And the incomputable army of bugs and fleas mobilizing under your clothes... (p. 23)

23
In this novel, the gloominess and dreariness of the atmosphere is, at times offsetted by the saving grace of nature. Nature is depicted with all the majesty of its grace and intensity of its beauty, in lucid, serene and beautiful language.

And then, slowly, the cold grey mist started shifting. The landscape became visible under the greyish white sky upon which the pale dim stars were hardly visible. The red glow of dawn began gleaming in the East. The horizon began to grow clearer and more blue. A fresh, penetrating breeze sprang from the Awash valley in the South, and a shimmering mist rose like stream over the earth and water. The leaves began to stir softly. A faint morning breeze passed wanderingly over the earth - from thicket to thicket, from copse to copse. On the bushes, heavy and bent with their loads of dew, and on the great bowl of water, shining out under its breaking mist, the dawning day threw up its purple rays and slowly poured forth floods of fresh and resplendent light. (p. 132)

Daniachew's use of short sentences (though not complete sentences at least from the view point of conventional English grammar) has helped him to control his thoughts succinctly. We do not find him going astray from his immediate thought engagement. Moreover, Daniachew usually uses such short sentences for descriptive purposes. He has a way of describing various elements in a scene not in their interrelatedness but as fragmentary, separate entities with only a slight link between them. In such cases the reader is made to view the whole panorama with objective detachment. It is as if one watches the whole element through the eye of a camera:

The winding mountain of Zekwala. There it lay.
Hills, hills and hills. Below those hills, more hills. And below them, more hills. And below them all, the flat grassy land full of grey mist. Mists which grew wider and wider as you went downwards - towards them. Mists which ascended towards you. Enormous blocks of stone on your way... (p. 170)

Daniachew's prose in its condensed form, symbolic overtones, evocation of intense atmosphere comes very near to a piece of poem.

In fact, one can regard him as a poetic novelist. His characters engaged with contemplations that have a touch of pathetic overtones bring his prose to a kind of poem which is lyrical in content and elegiac in tone. Take the following song of the mad girl, for example. Its external form, notwithstanding, does it not echo and resemble most of his prose?

It rains
very heavily
and the mud
on what a delight
it would be
to patch a wall
with this soft
wet earth.
It rains
very heavily,
and the donkey can't move.
The driver beats her,
the poor beast,
methodically, slowly and
slowly
piece by piece, she falls down -
To have seen it. (p. 119)

It is an obvious fact that it is ~~is~~ poetry, and not prose that usually engages the attention of readers with its form and language.

The Thirteenth Sun, it, being a poetic novel, does not the problem of transmitting the content and themes - revolutionary and significant at that - to readers easily and clearly arise? Doesn't the form become a hinderance, in a way, to the full realization of the themes? Doesn't the language attract attention to itself and in a way overcloud the content?

My answer is yes, to all of these questions.

Defiance

The second Ethio-Italian war of 1935 - 41 has provided Ethiopian writers with ample themes to write on. A number of important Amharic novels such as Gone, Never to Return, Age'azi (name of the hero) Are'aya (again name of the hero) have dealt with it. Abbie's Defiance is the last significant work in Ethiopian literature that derives its themes from this turbulent time of war.

The Italian colonialists in coming to Ethiopia for a second time (they were defeated and repelled at the Battle of Adwa in 1896) had a strong ambition to subjugate the people of Ethiopia and keep the country under their control for a long time. Moreover, as historian Angelo Del Boca, who tried to assess the war with some objectivity admits, they were suffering from what he called the 'Adwa complex'.¹⁴ Thus, embittered by their past humiliation, the colonialists intended to achieve their goals at any cost and with whatever means they had at their disposal. Pogroms, mass bombardments, intimidation and terror, divide and rule tactics and propaganda were some of these modi operandi. In the face of merciless and retributive measures by the colonialists, however, the Ethiopian warriors posed a very strong resistance against them. The conflicts at various stages of the wars were multi-faceted, intense and very dramatic. Abbie, however, has not given us in Defiance all those fierce struggles in all their intensity and histrionics. He has streamlined the open, action ridden struggles and concentrated upon person to person 'duels' between a few colonizers and some resistance fighters.

The very first chapter for instance, opens with the 'duel' or confrontation scene between an Italian fascist General Angelo and an old Ethiopian warrior, Fitawrari Abesha. Abesha is a feudal lord,

disgraced and disfavoured by court intriguers during the reign of Empress Zewditu; but who, nevertheless, raised arms to defend his country declaring, 'I was disgraced only by certain individuals; I am going to die for my country... One's greatest glory is the freedom of one's own country.' (p. 29) He is now brought before General Angelo, charged with bragging to kill fifty whites at the last battle of Maichew. Angelo, with characteristic flamboyance of a fascist officer, reels and thunders at Abesha with superfluous wrath and threat. He bullies and kicks his interpreter, shouts 'porco' at every turn, and flaunts arrogance and disdain. When the old man admits his pledge to kill fifty whites, he approaches him with inevitable impudency: 'filthy old man. What makes you so haughty, while you are certainly an ass?' (p. 14) Abesha is not haughty, however, but proud of the havoc that he and his fellow Ethiopians had wreaked upon Italian colonialists at the Battle of Adwa. Unafraid, he tells Angelo the truth about his role in the war. If he feigns submission when a second, sycophantic interpreter comes, it is with a calculated aim to save the first interpreter, Berhie, who has patriotically tried to save him from the cruel grips of Angelo. Otherwise, he carries with him to the end, his just pride and dignity with no taint of inferiority syndromes. To Angelo's wanton insults, he responds soberly and sagely: 'I am not an ass... you can't take away my dignity and spirit. Victory, on the other hand, is like immature wine. It goes directly to one's head; intoxicates all who use it.' (pp. 14 & 15)

When Abesha tries to flatter Angelo, for purposes pointed out above; it is ironically enough, at the expense of another white man - a certain Armenian who, disavowing his previous, peacetime friendship informs on him. Though here, Angelo's gullibility and thereby his hasty release of Abesha

lacks plausibility; it, nonetheless, throws light upon the fascist's extended arrogance even to one of his kind.

Not much later after his release, Abesha is picked again and imprisoned. Eyeing Aster-Abesha's daughter, as she leaves the court-room, Angelo is struck with her beauty and flares up with lust. Abesha's fight with the Armenian a short time after they have left the court-room provides Angelo with an apparent excuse to jail him and thereby impose his will upon Aster.

The fiery, beautiful and daring Aster who has lost a fiancée at the Battle of Maichew, is made to choose between her father's life and her honour. Berhie, who himself wallows in her love and admiration furtively, is made a go-between and he tries earnestly, though painfully to comply to the general's wishes. Together with Deggu - another patriot, under the cover of an Italian spy, he forsees the possibility of kidnapping the fascist general through Aster. Aster, unable to sacrifice her father for her honour, yields to the request of the general and to her mother's anxious and remorseful desire to see their man released.

But the fascist general's fulsome behaviour does not stop here. He becomes more dissolute and gradually attempts to lay his lusty hands on her sister, Sarah, and even on her mother, Wossenie. Before he actualizes his intentions, however, he makes an ignoble landing in their trap. Such a theme of miscegenation runs in many Amharic works that deal with the Italian occupation. Abbie in taking up this theme once again here, accentuates the immorality of the colonizers and the immense sacrifices thousands of Ethiopian families had to make during those dark times.

Abbie points out in Defiance that what hurts the Ethiopians equally, if not more, is the lack of unity that prevails among themselves. Various

conflicts and disparities within its own peoples disrupt the country and make her an easy prey to colonizers. Among these, the tribal problem is the predominant one; and the fascists have spared no effort to exploit it fully and thereby achieve their goals through divide and rule policy. This is not, infact, a case with Ethiopia only. As Frantz Fanon, the celebrated authority on colonialism tells us, 'colonialism does not simply state the existence of tribes; it also reinforces it and separates them.'¹⁵ The various tribes in feudal Ethiopia before and during the war were strangers to each other. They had only a hazy notion of 'Ethiopianism' and a scanty feeling of belongingness to each other. Moreover, the central government before the war which was constituted mainly of Amhara and Tigrean feudalists was looked upon by peoples from other tribes with fear and hatred. This was very natural as these peoples (and, in fact, the broad masses of Amharas and Tigreans as well) were tremendously exploited by that government of landlords and its henchmen. Though Abbie has not tackled this problem of tribalism in depth, as is warranted by its severity, he has, nevertheless, made sufficient references to it to signify its sinister threats to unified struggle, and the dire consequences that will accrue from it. Thus, when Berhie mentions it, in a matter - of - fact-way, Deggu cries out vehemently in self- criticism.

Stupid dog! We are licking the fascist vomit - divide and rule propaganda! Tigres, Amharas, Gallas, Keffans, and so on and so on; this tribe is haughty and war-like, that one subjugated, this one clever, that one silly - and this fascist vomit we dogs are licking! Dogs indeed! Woe be to the criminals who changed this great people into a pack of dogs. The white fascists to free Ethiopians from their oppressive brothers? My God! (p. 32).

Long before they occupied the other parts of Ethiopia, the Italian colonialists had colonialized the Eritrean province. In fact, they launched their assault on the rest of Ethiopia in 1935 from their Eritrean

bases. Moreover, the Italian fascists had a number of war corps constituted of Eritreans when they came to invade the rest of Ethiopia. Conversely, more conscious Eritreans had, all through the wars defected and fought against the colonialists to liberate their mother country. Be that as it may, there were (and still are) some snags that curtailed rapproachments between these two groups of people of one and same motherland. Even when some genuinely inspired Eritreans came to join the resistance fighters during the occupation they were not accepted easily with a spirit of camaraderie and fellow countrymen. Even those fiery, young men, Abrha Deboche and Moges Asgedom, who wounded Marshal Grazieni were denied acceptance to join a resistance army under a reputed Ethiopian general.¹⁶ Distrustfulness was so rampant that many Eritreans, despite their eagerness to serve their mother-country were taken for 'bandas*' and executed by their own country-men.

Abbie has made note of this fact repeatedly in this novel. He makes one background character, a genuine and indomitable fighter, exclaim about the deplorable situation thus:

Aren't you ashamed of boasting of killing your own brothers? Because they were on the border of our country, they became the first Ethiopian victims of foreign aggression. Because they were forced they are fighting against their own country. Why then do you boast of killing them instead of pitying them? I have heard that some of you are killing **your brothers** while they are trying to desert the fascists and join you. If, in the future, anyone of you kills a banda when he is trying to join you, I will bring the murderer to judgement in front of you all. If you want to boast, kill the white fascists, then I will praise and reward you" (pp. 35 & 36)

Abbie takes the case of the Eritreans with utmost sympathy and understanding. He writes as one who has felt deeply the wrongs they have suffered. In connection with this, it is apt to mention that the

* native soldiers under the fascists's employment.

reasons for Abbie's portraiture of such Eritreans as Berhie and Asmerom, who have proved to their countrymen their genuine love for their motherland to the extent of giving their lives to it, is to underline their worth and to give them a better, untainted corner in Ethiopian history. By granting thus an artistic testimony to their patriotism, he seems courageous and ambitious enough to convince the average Ethiopian out of his conventional belief that the Eritreans have always been behind the Italian aggression. Truly, it is a just vindictive gesture.

The theme of disunity is a wide one. Apart from the tribal issue, it includes other problems such as personal revenge and feudal exploitation. The coffee merchant, Kassie and the skin merchant, Molla inform on Abesha because of some grudge they had before the war. Peace time differences and conflicts are so accentuated during the occupation that they pose a problem to wage a united struggle against the colonizers. Such people like Molla and Kassie to effect retaliatory measures against their old enemies throw their lot with a bigger enemy, colonialism and wreak havoc and destruction upon their own countrymen. In the eyes of patriots like Abesha, these are despicable people who feel no pangs of conscience when they disclose to the enemy the weak side of their own country.

Abbie who in many of his Amharic works exposes the insufferable lives of the Ethiopian masses under the yoke of feudalism hints in this book at the danger this poses in time of foreign aggression. He makes Abesha, the feudalism, meditate remorsefully and self-censoriously when he realizes that one of the informers against him is his ex-tenant:

He had received nothing from my hand but exploitation, possibly insults too. He had not a plot of cabbage of his own in his country, and he therefore has a right to betray me, when he feels the time is favourable for him, ... (p. 11)

When Fitawrari Abesha is on his way to Tegulet (after killing Angelo) to join the resistance fighters, it is to the peasants that the colonial government, as is its wont, turns to for his apprehension: "We have come to know that even now he wants to exploit you as he did before the just fascist rule abolished your old burdens... we offer a large reward to anyone who apprehends this crank bandit and his lousy followers..." (p. 165) Thus it rehashes its old game of divide and rule tactics whenever an opportunity lends itself to it.

Even if individuals mainly from angry tribes and exploited classes enlist in the service of the colonizers, no particular tribe or class can claim the liberation of Ethiopia exclusively. Men and women alike, from various tribes, classes, religions have made considerable sacrifices to free their motherland. Abbie makes this fact clear nowhere as in the colonizer's dungeon in chapter four where he brings together people with various class, tribal and religious backgrounds. The Oromo tenants, Didu and his son Tura, the Eritrean Asmerom, the christian hermit and debtera*, the Sheikh, (a moslem) Abesha (a feudal Amhara) etc. are all assembled in the prison cell as victims of fascist aggression and reckless butchery. Nevertheless, the chilly, dark, suffocating and stinking prison fails to smother the love, understanding, hopes and united goals of the peoples contained in it.

Abbie's novel is a novel of 'even-if' themes. Careful to give us a balanced picture of the occupation, he writes more with toleration and understanding than wrath and retribution. He takes all the trouble, for instance, to make us discern the fact that the fascists and not the Italians or white people in general are the enemies of the Ethiopian

people. Even in the very prison scene where the fascist's severe cruelties are exposed, Abbie, ever unforgetful of his 'even if' theme devises a way out. When Abesha, in a tormenting moment contemplates whether white skin is the source of all evils, Asmerom, better informed and enlightened than the others is made to respond:

Not white skin, sir. Not even the skin of the Italians. But fascism. The Italians were, and still many of them are, among the most humane peoples in the world. But fascism made great monsters such as Graziani, Angelo and others out of that compassionate people. The fascists are torturing not only us. They have inflicted the same horror upon many innocent Italians too. (pp. 86 & 87)

Though well-intentioned, Abbie at times is a bit excessive in the execution of his 'even if' themes. Occasionally, he overreaches his goal and becomes unrealistic. Take, for instance, the incident in which an Italian 'soldato'* sheds tears for witnessing the misery of a woman with a dead child in her arms. A fascist soldato who steeps in blood and butchery in his everyday life cannot be moved or wallow in pity and sentimentality. This is really a very improbable incident.

Furthermore, Abbie superficially drags one character, a certain colonel who claims to be a member of the Social Democratic Party of Italy, for the sole purpose of accentuating his idea of innocent Italians who themselves are victims of fascism. This wasted character has not any other role and appears only once in the novel.

The domestic scenes at Abesha's household reveal the various aspects of Ethiopian tradition. The respects children show to their parents, table mannerisms, the kind of food and drink served, reception of visitors, etc. are depicted remarkably well. Moreover, the threat what fascists like Angelo pose to such traditions is not overlooked, either.

* Soldier

Contrary to the 'civilized' fascists, the Ethiopians are portrayed as more cultured. Abesha, for instance, has never entertained an idea of killing Angelo in cold blood. He has exclaimed from the very first, that once he kidnaps him, he will give him a fair trial. Very wary not to allow vengeance supersede justice, he tells Berhie at a time when he is sure that Angelo has already alighted in their trap: 'We are christians; although they consider us beasts, we must fulfil the duty of christians. As a human being we must pity him and as a great destroyer we must punish him.' (p. 148) When the impatient Aster passes the sentence on Angelo and takes the execution in her hand; he becomes sad and uneasy: 'I feel like a cold-blooded murderer', he says remorsefully.

Speaking of characters, it is good to note that some characters in this novel are paid too little attention to come out conspicuously. Though we see Sarah, not a few times in the novel, we know but very little of her. Of course, she is always there in the family, at court and in the battlefield, but still she is a shadowy figure with no significant role. She is eclipsed by Aster so much so that we, at times question, as to why Abbie created her at all. There was the opportunity, however, to show her in a better light and position. Since we are told that Deggu is in love with her, the manipulation of this theme to some length could have justified her creation better. Molla, Kassie and the Armeniar George are also such shadowy characters that are bypassed without due portraiture. It is only in the end and suddenly at that, that we see their opportunism turn sour. All three of them are put in jail (to signify a kind of poetic justice) by the fascists.

Conversely, Abbie has lavishly used his pen in portraying some other characters like Deggu. It is through Deggu that most of the background

history of Abesha comes to us. Deggu's admiration of Abesha is so great that he tries to overlook, though with some uneasiness, the fact that Abesha is a feudalist who, like other people of his class, has exploited his tenants: 'In fact he was a petty feudal lord, a great land owner. Hundreds of tenants he had. And no doubt his tenants were exploited, but not to swell his purse... he didn't hoard, but collected and distributed.' (p. 28) Deggu in his dual role as a banda and a patriot, has suffered a lot. He has been an unwelcome guest in many Ethiopian households, as the people regard him as a spy who is loyally serving the fascists. His apparently unflattering job, subrogates his genuine patriotic fervour. In spite of all his attempts to save Abesha, for instance, Aster views him as a banda who put her father in jail. Despite his entreaties to tell her the truth, she turns him away from her father's house as 'a dog of murderers'. In tears and self pity, he describes himself as 'an exile of two worlds.' (p. 43) His tormented soul becomes so sensitive that he discerns criticism even from an innocent utterance of a friend. When Abesha tells him that he refrained from giving his daughters' hands to Molla and Kassie because 'they are traitors', Deggu realizes his own poor state remorsefully: 'for they didn't fight...? Yes, just like most of us.' (p. 58)

Yet, a short time after, Deggu vindicates his name and image. Abesha's family takes him back as a friend; and ultimately, he lures the fascist army into ambush, doffs his banda outfits and becomes a full-time patriot. In his portraiture of Deggu, Abbie, once again tackles his over-all 'even if' theme. Though there are bandas who are no less cruel than the white fascists, there are also bandas like Deggu who, through feigned alignment with the colonizers, still serve the cause of their motherland.

Abbie's language lacks refinement and maturity. He seems to think in Amharic while writing in English. His Amharic imposes itself wantonly on his English. Sentences like 'Ass! I will show you,' 'What is wrong with me?' (to mean, what wrong have I done) 'Don't remind me, don't remind me,' 'when the old man heard these insults, he was outraged and he forgot where he was.' 'Leave it sister, leave it' 'her crime is mourning her husband,' smack of Amharic sentences. Furthermore, the novel is replete with such awkward statements as 'In 1936, when the Ethio-Italian war broke out, he cluldn't continue his neutrality and he began to worry.' 'That night too, Deggu had no inclination to enter the Fitawrari's house, rather to talk with the man outside,' 'although there are not as many as men, many great women have achieved great things.'

Moreover, the dialogues lack lucidity, brilliance and condensation. They ramble out of focus and tackle far-fetched issues. Even if Abbie, at times attempts to introduce humour into them, they still fail short of breaking the overall monotony and platitudinous. On the other hand, his descriptions which are meticulous and metaphorical are commendable.

Confession

Confession could be a story of a couple or millions of people in the same predicament. In a colour conscious society a black boy and a white girl fall in love with each other. Against odds and impediments they strive to keep their love intact and seem to fare well for a short time; but only to fail miserably in the end.

It is a pathetic story, an unusual one in Ethiopian literature. Ashenafi Kebede, who comes out with it in the 60's was once a music student at the University of Rochester in U.S.A. Gathering his experiences abroad, he has produced this novel that ~~them~~ them with racial prejudices and conflicts. This novel, in a way, is autobiographical. The main character, Ezra Desalegn, is also a music student. Moreover, the setting of the novel synchronizes with the specific time and place Ashenafi was studying in in U.S.A.

We Ethiopians are not colour conscious people; if we are, it is black Vs black and not black Vs white. Highlanders who are usually light skinned consider their dark skinned countrymen who live in the western border regions as racially inferior. In fact, this is what is better represented in Ethiopian literature than black-white relationship. Unlike most African countries that have gone through long periods of colonialism, Ethiopia has suffered very little from racial ignominy at the hands of white foreigners. Thus the issue has never been a burning one to arrest the attention of Ethiopian writers.

At least, at the beginning Ezra Desalegn's kind of reaction to the race issue seems to emanate from this same fact. Before he unwillingly delves deep into it because of his love for the rich, beautiful Caroline, he shows an indifference to colour problems in the U.S.A. The lot of

negroes in the South that extremely infuriates and torments his friend, Ashey Lule touches him only with mild sympathy and anger. Confronted by Ashey and being reminded of the intense cruelty with which the black are treated by the white racists, Ezra responds with detachment and self-centered airs: 'So what?... This is their country and let them fight for whatever reasons they have against each other. I came here to study and I want to do only that.' (p. 12) Furthermore, he attempts to justify his lack of conviction and commitment by some sophistries:

There are discriminations one kind or another, in every country. Some people don't like Italians... others like Italians but hate Jews of any nationality. Such is the world, and still others like the American majority, don't like colored people. We know it is absolutely wrong, but who is to change it? You? Me? No. Don't forget common sense admits change only gradually. (p. 13)

Then he considers self-sufficiency in economy, education and social matters as the solution to the racial problem. He is unaware of the fact that the racial problem itself is a phenomenal impediment to self dependency. Moreover, his theory of self-sufficiency (which, by the way comes very near to Mr. Fletcher's -Caroline's father, colonialist attitude) perplexes one, all the more, when viewed from an American context. How can the black be self-sufficient, living in the same community with the white? Or is he foreseeing separate development of races? - a recent modulation of apartheid? - very doubtful, indeed.

As a result of his frequent outings with Caroline amidst disapproving white supremacists, his pride dwindles away bit by bit. Her folks seem to say, 'she has no right to throw herself away like that',¹⁷ and surprisingly enough, Ezra appears to nod assent. Though his wounded self occasionally makes a desperate attempt to assert itself in pretentious 'discourtesy' (as in the incident with Ray) and theatricality

(as in the case with Callahan) he remains inert to fight for his love with some measure of spiritual stamina. Though he loves her, as he tells us, 'more than life itself' he is very undecided to have her wholeheartedly, ignoring and fighting the wrath of her tribe. We feel as if he assumes a fatherly figure, and intones 'beware!' when we hear him remind her 'the price she would have to pay by giving up the conventions of the society.' (p. 62) In a contemplative moment, he admits his predicament: 'Believe me Caroline, I wanted you all to myself but I couldn't reconcile myself with the idea of coming between you and your parents.' (p. 65) How can he then, **reconcile** within himself her love and the hatred of her tribe? How is he going to synthesize the antitheses of love in an alien, racial society? Well, here is his telltale response:

In spite of the pain afflicted upon me, I was ready to accept even all her kind as my brothers: I wanted to have a sense of belonging, a sense of being accepted by the whites whose hate I feared would break bit by bit the thread - the force - that was binding Caroline to me. (p. 61, the underlining is mine - D.S.)

This is an abated pleading to join the white tribe. A stifled desire for self-abnegation and transformation of identity which has a sad, shameful note of despair and humiliation.

Caroline's love for Ezra is a bit melodramatic. Considering her background, it seems somewhat unrealistic. Her attempt to commit suicide may foreshadow her end, but subrogates a possible scene of confrontation with her parents in Ezra's presence. This might have given us a better picture of the kind and magnitude of love she has to the black boy. Her fatalistic explanation of their love-encounter, 'Fate or Nature favoured and planned our actions and that is why we met from the two ends of the world. We had to meet, ...' (p. 61) is unconvincing. This dead - end

theory of 'fate' is a rather improbable but an expedient means the novelist concocts to answer the inevitable question: what are the real factors for a white girl in her circumstances to fall in love with a black boy?

When, despite his desires, the white tribe refuses to take him in as one of its kind, Ezra tries for a time to build a lone paradise in the middle of hell. Caging himself in his paradise with the beauty of spring and the love of Caroline, he seems to rail 'leave us alone!' to the whole world. But the problem riddled world is more real and strong than that makeshift of a paradise. It reaches its dark hands and claims him back. He finds himself 'fated' to participate in a demonstration against Southern segregationists wherein he will lose his love and paradise at one stroke. Yet, he has never been committed to the black cause. After all these slavish treatments he has received at the hands of the racists, his lingering passivity to fight them is stunning. His deplorable, but honest confession as to why he intends to join the demonstration is a manifesto of downright reaction and lethargic venture:

Frankly, I didn't want to take part in the demonstration but since Caroline was willing to go I was left without choice. I had only two reasons for participating: first, I didn't want Caroline, to think that I was indifferent and, secondly, I didn't want to remain in my room burning with the fire of a guilty conscious sending Caroline against the unpredicatably dangerous outburst of the Southern crowds. (pp.112 & 113)

Besides black-white love encounter, Ashenafi has also tried to portray some aspects of the African student's life in the U.S.A. In Ashe Lule we discern the black student's frustrations that issue from racial problems. We are made to feel his home-sickness and his acute loneliness that goads him to waste himself in the arms of white prostitutes. Armah, taking this issue of the African student's loneliness, ponders over it more penetratingly:

But what else could we the hated do in our loneliness? Go with our love aching inside our isolated bodies, go searching after contact with our people whose life of pain we have fled? Easier to let white females absorb the loving impulse, use the accumulated energy within our black selves to do work of importance to their white selves. Of what other use have Africa's tremendous energies been these many centuries but to serve the lusts of whites? Sucked-out men, should our bodies survive our murdered soul, we float between the blessed and the damned, attached to none but our specific murderers, caught in their deep-hating embrace. Ah, Africa.¹⁸

Confession lowers artistically as a result of its many discussions that have not any significant, direct bearing to the main line of the story. Consequently the plot is slackened and the book proliferates with passingly referred to characters such as Rubinstein and Sue. Notwithstanding these artistic flaws, however, Ashenafi's attempt is understandable. Through the discussions he wants to show the American view point of Africa and some other bits of shallow intellectualism. Many student returnees from the U.S.A. tell friends about the Americans' distorted image of Africa: a jungle where naked savages rub shoulders against roaming beasts. That is what Ashenafi does in his book. In fact it is worth quoting what one other returnee writes tongue-in-cheek, his eye witness account of such a misconception.

'Sorry we haven't taken you to see more of the city,' Cat joined in, 'Oh, I should love to see the zoo.' I jumped at their offer. 'I missed it in London coming out.'

The sandwich Marlene was eating stopped half-way to her luscious wide mouth, and her eyes, unusually bright in the dim light, bore straight into me.

'What do you want to go to the zoo for?' She asked in a sharp voice.

'Why, to see the inmates there,' I explained. 'I'm dying to see those lions, elephants, tigers and all my other wild cousins in there.'

'You miss them?' Marlene looked real scared.

'Haven't seen any of them before in all my life,' I disclosed.

'No, are you kidding? Don't those creatures crawl your village like automobiles here?'¹⁹

Ashenafi's language is easy and clear, only with some American colloquialisms, here and there. In this book, he shows an encouraging attempt in using a second language in writing fiction.

Yet, it has been 18 years since he wrote this novel. Apparently, he has stopped practising his art. This is deplorable, indeed.

Defend the Name

Wolde Haile wrote Defend the Name, at the close of the 60's while he was still a university student. The time was rife with political unrest and a number of demonstrations were staged by university students against the government of Emperor Haile Selassie. Presumably, it must be this turbulent milieu, that inspired Wolde to write this novel.

By passing through his ostensibly incoherent ramblings to various episodes it is possible to knock together some events into a plot structure. A destitute, old and presumably white man, Jonathan, embittered by a wretched existence, burns his hut and flies to a distant country called Babile, which is somewhere outside the precinct of this planet. Alighting from his flying machine, he encounters an old woman with the same name, her servant, Tolulu, her son, Nathnael and her dog, Sider. He introduces himself as 'The Honourable Reverend Jonathan... the rightful Messiah... the Abbassador and plenipotentiary of God' and initiates them to christian teachings and literacy. Not long after, he wins their love and admiration, even though they get impoverished and lean in feeding him to surfeit. After a while, he summons soldiers from the earth and somehow becomes the chief executive of the country. Henceforth, notwithstanding some of his achievements by way of modernization, he becomes a full fledged despot who in a self-aggrandizing attempt changes the name of the country to Jonathan. The black people, the Babiles become dissatisfied and revolt against him; only to be quelled to defeat. In an effort to get rid of him once and forever, they form an underground movement under the old figure of, Babile, which however proves to be a little success. Finally, Babile, accused of sedition is burnt at a stake, her dreams of regaining independence and restoring an old name

never coming true.

Viewed from the plot thus, the overall issue seems to be one of colonialism. Jonathan's initial claim to preach the word of God, followed by his call for arms from his previous land and instating himself as the ruler of the country do bear out this fact. Yet, some clumsiness in the handling of the whole issue is glaringly noticeable. At a time when there is no reason for insincerity and deceiving remarks, we find Jonathan speak against colonialism and imperialism.

We don't need foreign aid, because attached to it is the string of colonialism and neo-colonialism. We should stand on our feet lest we lose our security, lest we lose our prestige and lest we tarnish our reputation. (p. 31)

Moreover, despite some hints, the political and cultural ties he has with the earth, his motherland, are not strongly felt. In fact, the earth appears ineffectual either to unseat or promote him. By and large, he poses as an independent force who runs the country as he sees fit.

Such clumsiness and haziness in thematic manipulation might have issued out of an insufficient knowledge of colonial history. The colonizer individual is a mere tool in the hands of a colonizer nation; and as such his interests are inevitably dictated by its interests, his exploitation is unavoidably aimed at its enrichment. In a word, it is the colonizer nation that is more strongly felt through him and not his independent, idiosyncratic thoughts and tasks.

This flaw in historical understanding is only one kind of breach in the whole realistic conceptualization of events in the book. Even if the writer locates Babile to be outside the planet earth, it is in fact no different from any other country on earth. Its terrain is the same; its people are neither physically nor mentally different. Hence, it becomes clear from the outset that the kind of realism that we look

into this work is the everyday earthly realism and not solely an artistic, or logical realism of highly imaginative works like Alice in Wonderland or Gulliver's Travels. With this regard, the first and foremost question that confronts us is Jonathan's sudden ascendancy to power. Even if we are let to know that he has summoned a contingent of soldiers from the earth, we still have not witnessed, even once, these soldiers being engaged in a fight with an opposing force. His seizure of power without a strong resistance from the natives and/or presumably their government remains unrealistic. His kingship or presidency (for he claims to have both) cannot that easily be achieved without the due pressures of conflicts and struggles. Truly, it is no less miraculous and unrealistic as the flying vehicle which he pulls out of his yard to come to Babile.

In view of a realistic depiction, the significant role the writer tries to attribute to the old woman, Babile, leaves much to be desired. Still illiterate on the arrival of Jonathan, she makes a sudden meteoric rise (no one knows how!) in scholarship and politics to write the history of the nation; and preside over an underground national liberation movement. What is more surprising is that she censures her servant, Tolulu for not reading and assimilating books such as Materialism, Colonialism and Influence of Religion on Human Lives. This woman, whose background and day to day chores are not significantly touched upon is preposterously made to appear, at times, to constitute in her very limited personality all the people and the government of that country. It is apparent that her role is more than is warranted for by her personality.

Another shortcoming that comes along with the above flaw is Wolde's indifference to give us a life-like portraiture of the whole society of

Babile. He depends much upon narration which by itself lacks thematic coherence and smooth continuation. One can take, for instance, Chapter VI and see how many issues, have been raised and how many of them have been dealt with some depth. We find here, a certain professor Titero Toomy's arrival at Babile, a reading of a lengthy encomiastic poem he has brought with him, his introduction to Jonathan's cabinet (mentioned only once) a grand dinner party 'at the fabulous imperial palace which deserved to be reckoned with the seven wonders of the world' (yet we are told that when the professor came, he knocked on the gate and Jonathan, as there was no one, opened it for him. May this be an aspect of its realistic fabulousness?!), a visit to the comprehensive school of the Empire, a hunting expedition, the professor's flight to earth, his second come-back, a tour of the market, some briefings by the professor on son-parent relationships, the professor's employment in the service of Jonathan, a wedding ceremony of two young couples, a football match at Jonathan stadium. All these incidents are, as often as not, eclectically picked and assorted into one small chapter. Most of the time, they are rendered through narrations and with a minimized attempt to show them in a life-like setting. They are touched upon very slightly and are gloosed over without relaying their significant imports. (if they have one!)

In this shabbily constructed novel, no one character appears in flesh and blood. They are more expedients to pronounce some not-well-thought out ideas. Even Jonathan, who can be considered as the main character, from the point of view of the rickety plot structure, fails to enliven the scenes wherein he appears or is mentioned. He does not come within a reachable range of our ken to incite our imagination either by his benevolent gestures or malicious deeds.

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Wolde's conception of revolution lacks clarity and consistency. After giving us an overall impression that the Babilies want to effect a revolution, he fails to depict what a revolution or the preparation for it looks like. After he lets us know that the Babiles have formed an underground movement for national liberation, he does not make us observe the organization functioning. Even when its president, Babile, is imprisoned, no mention is made of its reactions. Moreover, the fact that Babile makes no mention of it, and entrusts her poem to her son to be duplicated and distributed furtively makes the assertion ~~that~~, "it was titanic enough to shake Jonathan government to its foundation" very dubious. In fact, we have not witnessed it perform one ounce of what it is said to have achieved.

If at all a revolution is waged, it is waged by a great number of people and not by a few individuals. But Wolde, by giving the people a very scanty, edgy role, confines it within the household of Babile and makes it a family affair. It is in the family of Babile that it is discussed and the way for its realization is somehow envisaged. The old woman, Babile, does not mix with people to impart her "revolutionary" ideas to them. It is to her family and particularly her son that she confides the necessity for waging a revolution and restoring the old name.

Furthermore, Wolde Asserts that all religious groups work hand in hand with political parties and the national liberation movement to free the country from the grips of Jonathan. But history has never witnessed such a situation in which all religious groups rally around the cause of a people. Surely, some people from some religious groups can sympathize with the struggle of the oppressed ones; but not all of them will be enlisted. The reactionary nature of religion is a recurrent, hackneyed theme that makes our harping on it here superfluous. Moreover, viewed

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from his theme of colonialism, this assertion is a very absurd one to make. It is an irrefutable historical fact that colonialism has ever been helped by various churches that unfailingly bless its supremacist attitudes and unrelenting exploitations. This idea of the church serving a ruling power is so prevalently acknowledged that Wolde being somehow aware of the indigestibility of his idea makes a kind of apologetic which is discernible in the last few lines of the following extract:

The religious parties were different in nature, varied in belief and large in number. However, they all shared one thing in common. And that was their being antagonistic to the existing regime... One might see them as a bunch of fanatics. No, one would be mistaken if one said so. One should consider their considerable achievement and political roles they played. (p. 64)

Furthermore, Wolde's idea of a revolutionary or anyone waging a struggle to liberate a nation, comes very short of convincing us. Babile, despite her numerous pronouncements to liberate her country and her scholarly claim to write the history of the nation, still lacks a definite, concrete theoretical asset of a revolutionary. In fact sometimes the propositions she makes for achieving victory, are deplorably astonishing and unbefitting to a fighter of any colour or brand.

One must find final remedies to its maladies. One must plunge it into bloodshed and thereby kill all the human race and finish the farce. After all we were born not with the instinct for our own degradation, but imbued with the desire for improvement to which there may be no limit short of perfection. (p. 27)

This idea of extermination and an obsession with death crop up again at a time when the racial confrontation is said to have reached its peak. During such a hectic time, we find Babile speak to her folks, neither of the ways they should plan and organize their fights nor of anyone of those acute problems of her people; but of death, the leveller.

We are all lovers of parity and foes of disparity, but when we, I am referring to the blacks, when we can die and all can be equal, we don't want it. It is here that we prove our being the advocates of inequality, our being the foes of parity and the lovers of disparity. It is here that we prove our being what we are, and not what we seem to be. (p. 71)

Still, what is more perplexing is the comment that follows her speech:

All listeners wanted their death when she finished speaking. All of them as though decided to live in the freedom of silence and under the soil, and to be all equal in the country of the dead went silently away. (p. 71)

What brand of a fighter or a revolutionary is she who, in a kind of battlefield, preaches the grace of death and not the blessings of life, of submission and not of victory, of one's allegiance to the dead and not of one's dedication to the living? The whole thing is very preposterous indeed.

Wolde's problem is clearly his incapacibilities to work out with some depth, insight, maturity and consistency the plethora of issues he raises in the novel. To add one final instance to the already mentioned ones which, in fact constitute only a small fraction of what can be found in the novel, it is good to take his portrayal of university students. Asserting at the outset, that they are 'progressive... the most agitators ... imbedded in Marxist aspirations,' he withholds, from them any significant issue worth discussing by way of highlighting their Marxist views.

Rather, he makes them while away their time discussing the sun, the moon, and the rain. Even when they come to Jonathan's case, they do not ponder over it with some breadth and depth. Their convictions, aspirations and tasks in bringing about change are bypassed without any significant reference to them. It is deplorable indeed that Wolde who wrote this

novel during a time when university students were in the fore vehemently decrying the then government, fails to give us so much as a fragmented, but realistic glimpse of those fiery youngmen whose unfailing zeal to discuss and plan changes have contributed a lot to the '74 revolution.

Wolde fails not only in working out his themes significantly and artistically; but also in his manipulation of the English language. A number of poorly constructed, awkward sentences abound in his work. Such statements as, 'therefore, the actual composer must be endowed with double-folded compliments, for he rightfully deserves them', "yes," answered Tommy, though it was impossible, with the intention of satisfying Jonathan,' 'they had completed theoretical courses while they had been outside; now the dealings were with the practical ones', 'she also thought of a people under no care'... are some of these. Furthermore, his attempt to effect originality of style in language use by paying undue attention to some words, as in the following paragraph results in ridiculous clumsiness.

Just then the house went out of order. Disorder had to be the order of the house: it was due to Nathnael's situation which at all needs no description. Imagine it. His mother tries to appease him. She lulled him but in vain. The rest was not at rest. It needs no description. Imagine it again. Babile was not as much disturbed by Jonathan's politics as by her own son's worry and disturbed conditions. (p. 93)

Defend the Name can only be taken as an experimental novel with all the faulty hallmarks of a beginner's attempt. Moreover, apart from one or two allusions to Emperor Haile Selassie through the character of Jonathan, this novel has not any apparent and significant relatedness to contemporary Ethiopian political and social problems. Yet, such was the state of censorship in the past regime of Emperor Haile Selassie that the writer was prohibited from selling or circulating it, even if it got published.

P O E T R Y

The Poetry of Tsegaye Gebre-Medhin

3 Africa has suffered much from colonialism and neo-colonialism, since 'a sea of white ants'²⁰ first reached its coast. Its political independence has been hamstrung, its economy ravaged, its culture nibbled at and pulverized. Through the white man's wily and sinister manipulations, its people have lost their cherished heritage, pride and identity. Meanwhile their colour, black, has become a synonym for ignorance, disease and poverty. For a time, no one seems to have come to its aid. Its very children, the chosen few, with some scrap of the colonizer's education seem to have stampeded in selfabnegation to out-white the white man, while the masses remain bewildered and uneasy. As one kind of protest and countermeasure against such fulsome situations, appear the establishment of a tradition that condones Africa's glorious past and sound ideals. This tradition which trickles down to this very time is reflected in the various arts, among which is the 20th century poetry of the black world.

5.2 Tsegaye Gebre-Medhin, through his English poems, has helped the ossification of this tradition. In a number of poems, he recurrently harps on and bemoans the loss of African identity, ravishment of black culture, estrangement of the educated ones from their African root. Tsegaye is particularly obsessed with the predicament the educated African is in, in locating his identity. Uprooted from and disdainful of his African background, he lands in the 'embrace' of the white man's culture, wherein, despite his zealous attempts and desires, he never feels at home. Suffused with cheap imitations of its ways, the African assumes what he is not and he is what he assumes not. Caught in such a deplorable state, he remains an exile of two worlds and develops a feeling of belongingness to neither of them. Tsegaye, in a string of powerful imageries

reverberates the self-searching and self-pitying cries of such an African.

Am I the lost child of your womb Black Mother
The abortive fetus of a false love
Being drowned in the depths of obscurity
Am I a fading page in the dead-eye of History
Is Anonymous now my name.²¹

Tsegaye contends that Africa's past history, though ravished and defiled by the colonizer's unholy hands, is still a sound prop for the disturbed African to lean on. His salvation lies in the due acknowledgment of 'even that historic past often torn and denied against him.'²² Surely, the African can only redeem his present deplorable state by looking back to his glorious past; restore his dignity when and after he secures his past name, retrieves his history and gains his lost identity.

But once I had a true name Black Mother
A name like the mighty spirit of Chaka
A name like the spirit of Herero, of Namaqua
Of Zululand, of Matabele ...
I was not the abortive fetus of your raped womb then
I was only one of the strong sons of your tribes, then
I was the home of the glory of your tribal dances, of your wars
Of the mystery of your witchcraft
The home of the glory of your free laughter that you are proud of
... Only yesterday I had a name, a true name.²³

Bitterly reminiscent of, and in strong contravention to the ignominy Africa has suffered under colonial rule, Tsegaye speaks of Africa with love and respect. In "Home Coming Son"²⁴ he intones his anxieties lest the black white-educated man infringes unwisely upon its black, sacred and beautiful face. The poem, significantly enough, has some overtones of God's words to Moses, 'Come not nigh hither. Put off the shoes from the feet: for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.' This exquisitely done poem, of which we hereunder quote the first two stanzas, emphasizes the poet's motif that it is only with an unwavering communion with his own land and culture that the African can feel free, happy and healthy.

Look where you walk unholy stranger
This is the land of the eighth harmony
In the rainbow: Black
It is the dark side of the moon
Brought to light
This is the canvas of God's master stroke

Out, of your foreign outfit unholy stranger
Feel part of the great work of art
Walk in peace, walk alone, walk tall,
Walk free, walk naked
Let the feelers of your motherland
Caress your bare feet
Let her breath kiss your naked body.²⁵

23
As can be witnessed from the first stanza in the above, Tsegaye is making a change in the conventional meanings of the word: black. Contrary to its former pejorative meanings that run throughout world literature, he gives us here 'black' to mean 'light' - 'the eighth harmony in the rainbow'; and presumably beautiful - 'canvas of God's master stroke.' Such an association of the colour black with light and beauty emerges forcefully and in glowing terms in a number of his poems.

you feel a glorious black
in the life of the land,
black are the skies
and the waters, and the people
a glorious black
in a paradise of colours
in the wedding of living museums
between an African past and present:
you feel the majesty
of white robed black giants
hitting their bare face
against a bare earth
of a shimmering eastern horizon
in a ritual supplication to God,
the feminine elegance
of queen-birds
the uninhibited black beauty...²⁶

Such mutations in connotative meanings and metaphorical references are very important as they can help to effect changes of attitude in the minds of readers. It is a kind of linguistic battle the conscientious

sons of Africa are waging against cultural deprivations and onslaught.

Ever untiring in his exclamations for the African to take deep roots in his own culture, and unfailing in his portraiture of Africa's glorious historic past and culture, Tsegaye poetically registers also what a phenomenal threat imperialism is in present day Africa. Indeed, though many African countries have maintained, in a way, their political independence, not a few of them are still under the sway of imperialist powers. The old colonialist attitude of Africa, shorn off its previous crude form, is still pumped into the otherwise nobler cultures of their peoples. Under the veneer of 'civilization' and 'modernization' their children are made to sing the master's songs and memorize the fables of Chaucer before they are ever told what a granary of superb tales they themselves have. In many an African country, the awakening of the people's conscience to self-awareness, self-reliance and self-esteem is still being mutilated by the fangs of imperialism. The old colonial masters, through their smarter children, are still messing African reality.

Into its head
The old dragon sun
Now breathes hot civilization
And the wise brains
Of the strong sons of the tribes
Pant
With an ever more strange suffocation
Its new self-awareness
(In spite of its tribal ills)
Wishes to patch
Its past and present masters
 (With their army of ghosts
 That remained to haunt the earth)
Hook its innermost soul
And tear it apart:
And the African conscience
Still moans molested
Still remains drifting uprooted.²⁷

22 When Tsegaye averts from his Pan-African concern, he comes back home and writes on Ethiopia, though these are usually interwoven with each other. His image of Ethiopia seems to be that of an old woman, lovely and strong, but with some unavoidable regrets in her past, some anxieties for her future. The two, her past and her future, converge in her motley present and make her proud, but remorseful, sick but undespairing. In her present state which is her transitional period, he observes his country labouring under uneasy circumstances. She is in a tug-of-war where traditional ideals and modern values are on the either ends of the rope. In such a hectic time, no one or nothing is assuredly triumphant or soundly at ease. The old defy the present and tenaciously and nostalgically hold to the past whereas the young disclaim the past and grab the present - often uncritically. The hand-made hoe and ploughs give way, reluctantly though, to the machine-made **giant** tractors and bulldozers. Those who are uprooted from their farms crowd the cities in search of non-existing jobs, and drag themselves through unwholesome, dark days. Yet, all these are sacrifices to be made in a period of transition - the poet seems to say:

Benumbed flesh
Benumbed breasts
A pair of dead bells
Exposed
To a frosty night

Aching thighs
Salty edges
Burning layers
Blazing interior

Forgotten tears
Patiently I told me:
"Cool" in silent acceptance
"Cool, ritual gift
"On the altar of transition
"Yes, you're the unknown soldier
"Yes, the heroine of sacrifice" 28

2-1
In a transitional period, the old and the new, the traditional and the modern, juxtapose, overlap and interfuse with each other at random and unmethodically. In his descriptive poem "Addis Ababa" Tsegaye portrays the many, contrastive faces of the city in such a motley time.

Addissaba, Hugged and sneezing
In Menelik's roaring eucalptus jungle
And learning to face
New challenge
With painful yet characteristic tenacity:
Addissaba, whose morning calls
Of church bells and cock's crow

Is being swallowed
By the terror-engine of zooming jets,
Whose evening lowing
Of home-coming cattle
Is replaced
By shrieking electric sirens and "sei-cento" honks,
Whose night patrolling songs
Of dog-jackal-hyena howling
Is tempered
By jazz vibrations and Elvis type curses
In the red light v.d. department stores
Where home forsaken wenching "babies"²⁹
Await love forsaken beatnik "johnnies"

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2-3
Tsegaye, in his poems, scathingly censures the intellegentsia for its uncritical consumption of western values. Unknowledgeable to and contemptuous of its history and culture, it is overcome by a 'wrong-upbringing of a false love with a false root.'³⁰ Occupied with rigmarole³¹ and rat-race 'for the fatted calf / for the lion's share,' it detaches itself from the people and becomes unheedful of 'the chill that pales the labourer's bare skin.'³² Yet, Tsegaye argues that it must needs dare see itself, know itself, realize its true state, somehow.

We, the wonder plants of cinema screens
Generation of car-hooters and time-hooted
Children of past ruins and present insecurities
We, of hollow-hearts and jazz-minds
Mockeries who seem to know what we don't care for
And giants who do not know where to step
We, the intellectual brain disease cases
The gogmagogs waiting to scratch

Each other's eyes out
We, who eat your days smothering other's systems
And our evenings smothering our own
We, who on hearing lamenting church chants
Experience a belly-ache right through our spinal systems
We, the smart smiling sons of smarter sad fathers
We, the odd misfits among your own folk
Who aimlessly drift from day to day
We, with heads as fat as ant soldiers
With pocketed hands that refuse
To touch the earth our mothers bent to till:
We are to know 33
Condemned to know

Why is it condemned to know? Because the intellegentsia can shed off its petty obsessions and uneasiness only through self-understanding and knowledge; because it can come to terms with its past, secure its lost identity, and build its future on solid rock only through self-realization. Otherwise, its lot will be to drift aimlessly in despair, shame and self-exile.

Tsegaye has a great attachment and, usually an uncritical reverence for whatever is in the past. Though this smacks of a nostalgic retreat from present-day reality, it is, nonetheless, understandable from the point of view of his overall intention, which is to signify the indispensability of the past in redeeming the present state of the perturbed generation. Moreover the hues and cries in the transitional period are relatively unknown in the far-off days. Hence a certain kind of glorification becomes natural and unavoidable. Be that as it may, when speaking of the ignoble life of the intellegentsia, Tsegaye contrasts it with the hardy and honourable life of proud fathers in those distant days.

Seeking asylum
In the bosom of an ailing world.
Ever remaining
Preys of our own shortcomings,
Focused by the narrow chapters
Of private ends,
Prostituting greater causes

For which the past heirs died to keep aflame,
Cashing principles
In favour of tin-gods
At the cost of blighted hopes,
Scared of total death
Unlike the hard old days
When many had faith,
Now, one prefers to move half-dead
In the shades of a doomed era.³⁴

2.3
35
In "Ours" too, Tsegaye gloats over Ethiopia's past. He recurrently harps on the words, 'ancient' and 'time-old' as if these tell all about her glory and beauty. Moreover, in this same poem, wherein, inter alia, he sings of Ethiopia's terrian, of her age-old freedom, of her proud culture; he makes some mild criticisms. His overstated panegyric is tempered with understated critique. The anthologist Huntsberger insinuatingly attributes Tsegaye's mild criticisms to problems of censorship. But this is improbable as Tsegaye has always been consistent and purposive in his glorification of his country which inevitably demands the minimization of its unflattering sides. Thus, this poem, its faint criticisms notwithstanding, remains to be an encomium, inspired with deep love, understanding and acceptance.

2.4
Huntsberger
Tsegaye

Highland of highlands
We, your children
Admire you
For your past,
Fear you
For your injustice.
Nag you
For what you could have been.
Serve you
For better ends.
A Respect you
For you are ours.
Love you
For what you are
Time old.³⁷

One class of people whose age-old enslavement comes recurrently in Tsegaye's poetry is the peasantry. The peasantry has ever constituted the

majority of the Ethiopian population. During peace time, it is the mainstay of the country's economy. During war-time, it is always in the fore to taste the brunt of war. Stolid in its exploitation and deprivations, indomitable in its forbearance, and persevering in its didacticism and patriotism, it has ever been the selfsame victim of indolent feudalists and corrupted officials. Tsegaye, nowhere as in the subsequent stanza has capably and penetratingly shown its age-old plaintive state.

Slow to smile
even in tears
(of which she is sucked dry),
slow to curse
even in forgiveness
(which ever overwhelms her),
mother-flickering-subsistence
in a lifetime will
of care and forbare,
mother-extinguishing shadow
in the giving of life unto others,
mother-pleasant-grumbles
in the face of cruel facts,
mother-senile-fingers
that caressed in love
and struck in vexation,
mother-decayed-teeth
a beauty in ugliness,
unresenting story teller
in her own epitaph
of memorable sunsets,
smiling shipwreck
in her own ebb of life,
mother-outlived-memories
long leached loveliness
backboned selflessness,
stooping
under the burden of ages,
benumbed
to the pains of tolerance,
mother-silence
in the chains of acceptance,
a vice-vanquished
a virtue-accomplished³⁸
is mother-peasant, is.

Unlike in his Amharic love poems, Tsegaye is a bit optimistic in his English ones. The haunting plaintive imageries and harrowing overtones

that abound in his Amharic poems yield to soft, soothing ones in the latter. When he meditates on forfeited love reminiscently, for instance, it is in consolatory terms and images that placate its old pangs and lashes. Even in dire circumstances, he writes, 'memories are still charming / and your love still flows.'³⁹ Furthermore, he discerns love's balmy hands that ward off heart-breaking feelings and brain raking thoughts. It is, he reiterates, a sunshine that breaks an overwhelming darkness.

It is now dark in darkness
The waterballs clatter on the tin roof
Lulling our tense nerves to sleep
The heart dribble against the chest
Recording each sore experience we had
The mind stands aloof
Being the cold sensed judge of self
From either distant ends of the bed
Our breathes draw in and draw out calls for peace
Beneath the cool space of darkness
Two scout fingers creep from either end
They touch
The wall of hostility is snapped⁴⁰ between them
Though dark, it is now sunshine.

In some other meditative poems that deal with themes other than love, Tsegaye is not so optimistic. He tells us that he dreams not ' of Michaelangelo's well fed baby angels' but 'of the thick white pus... / ejecting out of a leper's distorted eyes.'⁴¹ He is obsessed with fear of 'dying a death / where forever one records/ his secret will / on the sands of hope.'⁴² He bemoans his quietude and non-committal stance when 'the cause / of the earthlings cry' disturbs the horizons and together with another poet and countryman, he seems to raise the unrelenting self-question: 'Shall I some day be forgiven / my unrelating obsession/ with the tone of silence.'⁴³

Thus we see that the poetry of Tsegaye Gebre-Medhin is replete with various themes that are mostly topical and significant. His lines are

2.4
con
terse with beautiful cadences; His imageries concrete and powerful, his thoughts deep and penetrating. In view of this, it is hard to agree with what William Prouty asserts in the last two lines of his subsequent criticism:

3
In much of the work of Tsegaye Gebre Medhin the variety and steadiness of whose publications entitle him to be considered Ethiopia's foremost writer in English, we find the tendency to dwell upon the themes of poverty, modernization, being African, or being Ethiopian. In dealing with none of these does he startle the reader with any fine suitability of his form or his thoughts. On the contrary, many of the poems are over-long and inclined to entrap the reader into a labyrinth of involutions out of which he escapes not always the wiser.⁴⁴

The Poetry of Eyasu Gorfu

Poem

Gloomy
Like the dark cloud
Paining
In my loneliness
Cursing
The unfriendliness of life
I am⁴⁵

It is hard to imagine Eyasu Gorfu's definition of a poem to be different from what is given in the above poem by another poet. His two very slim collections of poems are replete with themes of unhappiness and dissatisfaction and thereby strike a note of pessimism. He seems to be bored with this life which he describes as 'a concert of monotone.'⁴⁶ His very first poem in his first collection rings this motif of dissatisfaction and unhappiness.

Whispering branches that softly sway
Tell me to bend my head and stay
Alive. But how can I?
When all the truth I see
Is that there is no truth
At all; and must
I grasp the bubble
To see it burst
Without even a chuckle?⁴⁷...

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In this poem in which Eyasu, among other things, attributes his sorrow to the absence of truth, (what sort of truth, he has not divulged though) we also find him distancing nature. In some unquoted lines here, he entreats a cluster of lilies to send him their fragrance only from a distance, as he will crush them if they are close enough. Tormented by life (though we are not told by what aspect of it) he seems to have developed a kind of dread to whatever is contained in it, 24 including nature. Furthermore, he discerns beauty in nature; yet in nature that is abstracted and distanced. But this is not any different

from idealization of both nature and beauty, very characteristic of an ascetic who, living in a jungle of colours, stretches his hands to realize nature and beauty in the garden of Eden.⁴⁸

Bemoaning the absence of truth in life and fearful to take nature and hence beauty by the hand, Eyasu comes to doubt the munificence of love. In renouncing love, he recoils into himself and shrinks in loneliness. In a poem aptly entitled "We Live Alone", he presents the following lines:

Friendship and love never go hand in hand;
This is a fact we fail to understand;
Even when we break the loaf and pour the wine
Dearest, I am not yours, nor are you mine.
 You belong to yourself and I belong to I,
 Why should this break your heart, why do you sigh?
 Even though our fingers are entwined
 Each walks alone and with a different mind.⁴⁹

In such simple exclamation, the poet's skeptic and individualistic mind heaves towards philosophic realizations. The magnitude of his problem and its ostensible reasons become clear. He is dispossessed somehow of the essentials of happiness and sane life: truth, love and beauty. In taking friendship and love to be antithetical, he disavows both and keeps seemingly cool and unshaken by such a state of things. In a feigned nonchalance, he censures his lover for her broken heart and sighs. "nonchalance" because we find him, time and again, giving vent to his anguish and despondency, which inevitably arise from his solitary existence.

"How long," I ask myself
 "How long shall I bear it?"
A war goes within me,
I am a battle field,
 No one understands me,
 All around me half-wits
I, a wretched creature
 Who shall save me from this?⁵⁰

This is a cry of a tormented soul wherein a faint suicidal note is discernable.. It is a care-worn (rather, a life-worn) man's pleading for love and understanding.

Yet, apart from a general feeling of dissatisfaction and life weariness, it is hard to grasp clearly and concretely what actually is paining him. In fact, since in many of his poems Eyasu deals too much with abstract notions such as truth, beauty, love, good and evil, it becomes impossible to grasp his ideas with some clarity and certainty. For instance, we have seen how he deplores the lack of truth in life; but what sort of truth is lacking? - we may ask, though we are left to probe into our own imaginations for a possible answer. Truth is a notion that has various meanings and significances to different people at different times.. So are beauty, love, good and evil, etc. The poet's purpose, among other things, must be to concretize abstract notions through imageries. Otherwise, a general haziness and uncertainty in decodifying the abstract ideas arbitrarily will surely be the readers' lot.

Consequent upon his wanton indulgence in abstract ideas, Eyasu lacks Concreteness and specificity in his poetry. He tackles general subjects such as love, truth, and so on and treats them in a contemplative and philosophical vein. It is hardly possible to locate specific settings and give exact references to his poems.. For instance, apart from general references that incidentally endorse Ethiopian cases as well, we do not find the burning or whatever issues of his country during the time of his writing.. In dealing with all-encompassing, abstract subjects, he seems to be committed to everything, but this, in fact, is paradoxically equivalent to being committed to nothing.. Nevertheless, some lines in his poem about a decadent society may as well hold true for Ethiopia.

Lisping with liquor
A trembling, shuddering dance
To a week of hangover
Empty bottles in a box
A dozen dirty glasses
The creakings of a broken bed
Tired tongues covered by lily lips
Belching dull drums man is wed
Sleepy singers rest your throat
And drummers slow the beat
The bull is the man of the night
Keep the husk and throw the wheat.⁵¹

2-1/

These lines may throw light on the Addis Ababan's life in the late sixties and early seventies, when the city of Addis Ababa proliferated with drinking places, night clubs and red-light districts. In passing, it is good to make note of the last four lines. They are simple but beautiful. The metaphors 'bull' 'husk' and 'wheat' are superbly drawn.

Eyasu has some poems in his collections that deal with biblical themes. Among these is his longest poem, "Ear's Eternal Error"⁵² which is based upon the first few chapters of the Book of Genesis. He has inevitably made some alterations which are within the domain of a poetic license. He starts this ambitious poem with a lofty theme, by relating the existence of beautiful, perfect silence, unsurpassed exquisite nothingness in the beginning. Since silence, must needs have someone to listen to its grandeur and beauty, Eyasu assumes, 'there was a soul with its ear listening to silence.'⁵³ One uncanny moment, Ear, excited by the beauty of silence, moves to listen better and thus creates motion and thereby disturbs silence's perfect existence. Once shaken, however, the past beauty of silence remains irretrievable. Ear, feeling a guilty conscience and in an attempt to restore the lost beauty of silence comes unwisely to imitate itself, by creating an angel in its own image. The poet's irony intrudes here. Ear, a rebel (though an unconscious one initially) against silence now demands from his creature total quiet and submission.

And wanting not to be disturbed
By the image it created
It made it passive, quiet and obedient;
Ear had a supreme control
Over the image
And called the image an Angel
And introduced itself to the image, 54
" I am thy God, thy Maker, and thy Breaker."

Soon after, Ear gets bored with Angel and smites it dead. In its place, it creates a host of angels that sing Hosannas and Haleluyas under the choir leader, Lucifer. But still, the past perfection of silence cannot be attained. This displeases Ear tremendously and it creates Adam and Eve who possess mutual sexual attraction to each other. For some time, Ear is relieved from his uneasiness. But one day in a momentary feat, it strikes Lucifer and throws it down to the garden of Eden where Adam and Eve live. In very lucid and very imaginative lines, Eyasu hereunder pictures the downfall of Lucifer.

And Ear took Lucifer and threw
Him down through the spheres of heaven
And Lucy-fur glowing like a meteor
Descended in the garden of Eden
And on the way all the fur
Was burnt away and a lovely Lucy
Was seen walking around the garden,
And with an evil intent of revenge
Lucy entered into the body
Of the innocent eve
Making her more desirable
And ten-fold more attractive than before,
But Eve in her nudity could not know
The outward appearances that took place - there were no mirrors then;
Only from within she felt restless in an undefined way
And filled with uncontrollable desire
For man.⁵⁵

Adam's and Ear's love and desire are frustrated as Ear has forbidden them to have sexual relationship as such an act, they are told, will be tantamount to inviting death upon themselves. But after Lucy enters her body, Eve becomes so beautiful as explained in the verses above, that

Adam being tempted sleeps with her. Here, the poet follows the biblical story with only some fictionalization of the dialogue, which is contrived humourously.

Ear: "Adam, Adam where are thou
"Hast thou committed the sin?
" - Come out under the bough; -
"Why else is Eve bleeding?"

Adam: "Lord, Oh Lord, yes, I did it
"But Eve was the cause thereof
"Even when I refused it
"She offered it like a loaf."

Ear: "Eve, what is this that I hear?
"How could one do this and live?
"Are you not my daughter dear?
"Confess! and I will forgive."

Eve: "Yes Lord, but it was the snake
"The snake that can stretch and coil
"Serpent that Thou didst make
"The snake that can freeze and boil."

Ear: "What snake is this my daughter?
"Do be clear of which you mean;
"There is no such snake in nature
"Nor has there ever been."

Eve: "The cruellest creature, Oh the imp,
"The pleasure he gave me, the pangs,
"That is Thy snake now how limp⁵⁶
"Between Adam's legs he hangs."

The story culminates when Ear sleeps after cursing Eve and Adam for their transgression of his word. In the subsequent lines, Eyasu tries to define a trinity formula embodied in Ear which is apparently God and what it means to different peoples in different professions. He discerns this formula in the work of the biologist as the outer, middle and inner ear, in the chemist's as electrons, protons and neutrons, in the artist's as the brush, canvass and paint, and so on. Here, one wonders if he is claiming that all notions of God arise from this broad, concrete reality. If so, most of his lines that explicitly follow the overall story line

of the Book of Genesis do not warrant such a materialistic, poetic peroration. If his attempt is to give us some kind of a pantheistic theory, this too is very improbable as the presence of a personalized, metaphysical being is very much felt in his poem. Be that as it may, his conceptualization of God, misty and not well thought out as it is, fails to break loose from its idealistic integument as when he tells us that, in the beginning there was a soul that listens to the beauty of silence. Nevertheless, what is clearly and better graspable from his poem is his condemnation of churchmen and God. He argues that whereas the trinity formula is easily apprehensible by other professionals, it is mystified and rendered incomprehensible by churchmen. Thus, he castigates them, in a very prosaic language, unbefitting to his lofty theme though, to stop preaching what they themselves are not clear about:

Now listen all preachers, parsons, pastors, and priests,
And all you proud, praying pards of the pope;
Here is a piece of advice for you;
Why don't you stop it?
Why babble what you yourselves don't understand?⁵⁷
His censorious remarks against God are also worth our quoting.

For such is the sinister pleasure of Ear:
That painters go blind,
And musicians go deaf,
And great orators turn mute,
And great athletes are paralyzed,
And love turns to hatred,
And beauty withers and dies,
For the motto of Ear is, "In your weakness is my strength perfected."⁵⁸

In another poem, he strengthens his censure by remonstrating God's disinterestedness in human affairs:

"There is a God, there needs and must be one,"
They said. "Sure", I replied. Being but man,
I rent my heart in humbleness by every means;
At night, in bed, I shed my tears for all my sins
But who cared what did or why - /sic/
For when I lifted up my voice to heaven to cry,
"Shout hoarse for all I hear!" was the reply.⁵⁹

In the following lines, he estranges himself from God and comes to see (this, very uncharacteristic of the majority of his poems) that man is a redeemer of man; and human warmth and love the be-all and end-all of life.

These, and all these, and a lot more after,
Came from heaven a mocking laughter;
Then something like a voice said from within,
"Worm! your brief and precious time you are wasting
"When you are dead there won't be left a trace;
"Worm, go warm yourself in a worm's embrace
"Life has no better meaning, no greater grace!"⁶⁰

Note his metaphor, 'worm'. It still discloses his pessimistic frame of mind that is unusually obsessed with the futility of life. Even when he envisages this once the indispensableness of man to man; there is a colouration of despair lurking in it.

In his collections, Eyasu has some single stanzas and light limericks. These are mostly about sex and love, and are contrived humourously. Nevertheless, they are too ineffective to offset the overall darkness in his works. If the gloomy atmosphere his poetry evokes not catchy and powerful to incite and haunt us; it is because of his platitudinous language that fails to reach the water of our emotions.

In conclusion, it is unequivocally clear that Eyasu has a long way to go in refining his language and reassessing the content of his art. He must needs steady his falterings in the use of language. Moreover, his works flagrantly show his dissociation from and / or indifference to the day-to-day lives of his people which could have provided him with a plethora of interesting subjects to write on. If he is benefitted (as he tells us in a preface) from some of the poets that he mentions in his collections, such as Walt Whitman; it must have been their zealous attempt to portray above all the lives of their peoples.

P L A Y S

Tewodros

Tsegaye Gebre-Medhin, Ethiopia's only significant playwright in English, wrote and staged his first play, Tewodros, at the inauguration of the Creative Arts's Centre of the Addis Ababa University in 1963.

This is a chronological play that traces the life of Tewodros or Kassa - as he was called before he became king, from the age of 18 to his death.

In a series of scenes that run into each other, Tsegaye telescopes the 30 years' life of Kassa. These scenes are, at times, punctuated by a messenger, a kind of choral substitute, who relates and comments upon events between the scenes and in the scenes as well. The messenger acts, most of the time, as a mere plot mechanism that bridges the historical lacuna in between the scenes; and occasionally appears as a character in his own right. Such a situation must have created some problems to the playwright, for the handling of the messenger thus, expedient as it is in knitting together the various scenes into one whole; still challenges the down-to-earth realism the nature of such a play demands. Furthermore, Tsegaye proceeds with his play on two levels. The first constitutes scenes, usually domestic ones, that are easily presentable on stage. On another level, through light and sound effects he brings to the attention of the audience some easily unrepresentable events such as wars and such-like incidents. It is apparent that the playwright conceives this aspect of the play as more than a background reference to the presentable part, and as a necessary and significant complement to it. In addition to these, there are a few pantomimic scenes that portray some pages in the life of the hero. All such multifaceted presentations, however, concur with the writer's presumable intention which is to capture the milestones in this uncommon, yet significant period of Ethiopian history, in a few hours of theatrical time.

When an individual ascribes a messianic role to himself, it is very likely that he receives a torrent of criticisms from friends and foes alike; since in his visions is ingrained a new world that demands blood and tears for its realization. Accustomed to age old persecutions and sufferings that are appeased and dulled by the imperceptible hands of time, even the exploited ones on whose behalf the messiah arises and speaks shirk or become hesitant to accept him wholeheartedly. Such was the fate of Moses and a number of less fortunate anonimities whose redemptory ventures have been choked without reaching a significant end. Tsegaye rightly considers Tewodros as one among such people whose messianic visions and tasks are deplorably pitted against a frustrating and an undiscerning world. Beginning from his peasant mother's humble 'tukul', we watch Kassa prodding through a number of check points where his vision of one, powerful Ethiopia is rummaged and questioned by close relatives and foes alike. His own mother who has learnt of his obsessive vision for a dozen of years takes it as a mere nightmare and is stunned when she realizes that he is to leave her to answer its call.

Leave me? He speaks of leaving me, listen to him, St. Michael! If the worms in your belly have gone into your head, take some "kosso", my son! He speaks of oppression and threatens to leave his helpless mother at the same time... You are always running away to that uncle of yours, who is teaching you the ways of war like the rest of the deserting young boys in the countryside today. War-war that is all you men know! Maybe not to your uncle this time, now that you have learned the ABC of blood spilling, but to Ras Ali-the master warmonger. Oh, don't look at me that way, I've heard of it... Leave me to what, son?
(p. 212)

As his mother envisages blood in his vision and frowns upon it thereof, his devoted and loving wife, Princess Tewabetch does likewise. Cognizant of the havoc and bloodshed some upstarts and petty chiefs create, claiming at the same time to have God-inspired visions, she

*A thatched-roof hut

hesitates to endorse her husband's visions with glowing, encouraging terms. Among his enemies, Empress Menen is the most vehement in her denunciation: 'a foolish daydreamer destined to be drowned in his own delusions... Could not his so-called prophecy be a deceptive hallucination inspired by the devil and multiplying in the false tongues of opportunists like himself?' (p. 214) Nevertheless, all such censorious remarks fail to jostle Kassa off the way that is paved for him by his vision. Since his illimitable zeal to reunite the dismembered provinces of Ethiopia simmers in his heart, he blatantly defies anything said or done against his messianic vision. Being deeply ingrained in his blood and flesh, it at times, upsurges in a sort of poetic rhapsody:

Often in my dreams, Gabriye, often in my visions, Gelmo, I stretch my arms as wide as I can; I dive deep, deep into a sea of stars, searching, searching, and swimming, searching for a lost something, something like a rope of lightening to tie all the glittering stars together. Yet, just as often as I dream and stretch out my arms for a binding rope, I wake up without having grasped it. But I have a secret vow with the voices that bid me search for it. One of these days, Gabriye, one of these days, Gelmo, I shall wake up with that rope in my arms, and with it I shall link my sea of stars together. (p. 216)

In spite of his visionary eloquence, however, Kassa is realistic and perspicuous enough to realize the tremendous sacrifices his vision demands. He well knows from the start, that much bloodshed is inevitable to wipe out the stains from the face of Ethiopia. He contends, time and again, that 'ending the shedding of peasant blood by the use of blood itself' is a worthwhile sacred task, more true and more strong than love itself. Even so, Kassa has never been what some historians consider him to be: a fanatic tyrant with no scruples whatsoever to shed the blood of his people. As much as he realizes the necessity of blood in materializing his vision, he is at the same time wary not to overplay it without the due demands of circumstances. Tsegaye has paid due attention to this

point which has ever been twisted and distorted by many a foreign writer. In a rejoinder Kassa makes to young Menelik (future Emperor of Ethiopia) who accuses him of shedding too much blood, he says: 'they make me, my son; they make me do it! The petty, selfish, lustful chiefs make me do it. They force me to shed the blood of the very people I would be more than willing to give my life for! ...' (p. 221) Thus, the playwright condones Kassa's alleged blood thirstiness and boundless act of butchery.

Kassa's early background is lost even to his biographers in the misty precinct of time. Whereas some trace his descent to feudal chiefs and ruling royalists, others claim his origin, particularly on his mother's side, to be from the peasantry. Be that as it may, Tsegaye must have found it befitting to contemporary Ethiopians' conscience to make his extraction from that of the peasantry. Starting from the first scene, his humble origin is depicted and referred to, for a number of times. Kassa himself is made to exult in it and discern a conformity to his overall ambition of wrenching Ethiopia from the grip of feudalists and make it safer and more comfortable to the ordinary peasants. What underscores such ambition all the more is his incessant attempt to identify himself with the peasantry. Empress Menen's army chief, Wond-Yirad's taunts for his being a purgative dealer's son do not prick him to rise and remonstrate. Rather, subduing his anger, he entwines his fate with that of the cobbler-peasant: 'Never mind, humble cobbler ... you and I are not ashamed of what others think of us. Cobbling or purgative selling is a respectable profession, and what is more, it is in the service of the people. Christ was a carpenter's son.' (p. 216) Kassa's love and dedication to the cause of the peasantry have ever been great. After he becomes king, he envisages and dreams his predecessor to be 'the most compassionate Ethiopian...who knows his people, feels

their hunger, their loves, their hopes.' (p. 221) When Menelik queries whether or nor he attributes such qualities to himself, he replies plaintively, his desires and his achievements conflicting in his mind:

I... I try to be... try to be him as much as it is humanly possible to be! That is my passion! That's all I have tried to be since I committed myself to carrying this burden. Somebody had to do it, but everybody seemed to sit back and wish for it. And I committed myself. I... I have already tried to be him ever since. I ... I am still trying to be him. (p. 221)

Furthermore, he is so jealous of his love for his people that he flares up in anger when others, particularly those age-old exploiters like Empress Menen speak in their name. In a vehement remonstrance he opposes to such an act.

Your people! Why don't you say your race of slaves? What do you know about them anyway? Have you ever had the heart to touch a single one of them? No? You would have felt the thorny hair they have grown; the defensive claws and the beastly teeth behind which they exist. (p. 219)

On the other hand, in as much as he tries to bar the royalists from their claim to the love and loyalty of the people, they, in turn, persistently nullify his rights to the throne. Empress Menen, once too often, reminds him of his low birth which she thinks is more than a sufficient reason to disqualify him from kingship.

... Oh, no! Not you! Of all blasphemous common upstarts, of all conquerors without conqueror's noses, not you, rebel! How about the ocean-deep history of Ethiopia's ruling blood? Through centuries the people's eyes were accustomed to looking up and following those who did not materialize from among themselves, but those shepherds elect of God since David and Solomon! You need to have that blood running through your miserable veins before you talk big and all-knowing. Give it up, Kassa, before you are too late to repent. It isn't for you, fortune-hunting boy... (p. 219)

But Kassa does not yield. He rather perseveres in his aims and crowns himself as Tewodros II.

Nevertheless, Tewodros is not as fortunate as Kassa. His problems with feudal chiefs and the priesthood become aggravated. A host of

die hard reactionaries who have been bruised but not killed by his lashes gradually show up as claimants to the throne and legitimate chiefs of their provinces. Rallying around themselves contingents of peasants who, hoodwinked by tribal affiliations and feudal deceptions come against the very man who has toiled, sweated for their welfare and liberation. They pose a tremendous obstacle to the full realization of his visions. The priests, whom he describes as 'eye piercing, cheap candle lights' turn their faces against him and ally with his enemies. Some of the provinces that have been united for some time begin to break away and Kassa's dream of one Ethiopia gradually comes loose from his grip. Yet, ever perseverant in the realization of his vision, he gropes in darkness, time and again, for that rope of lightening by which to tie together those stars of provinces. He incessantly wages wars after wars upon all those who are 'destined to make progress impossible, both for the people and themselves,' (p. 221). This period of Kassa's life, as it is rife with stupendous conflicts and unrests, is more than the playwright can capture in a brief theatrical time and limited stage. Hence, Tsegaye through the cobbler-messenger's narration and children's traditional game of 'hide and seek' briefs his audience about this tumultuous, blood ridden period.

Kassa's internal problems are aggravated by external problems, like the threatening Turks and Dervishes, and more particularly by the British. The indifference of the British to react to his demands irritates him deeply. Hence he becomes very impatient and imprisons Consul Cameron and his other countrymen. Nevertheless, it is very clear that his domestic problems and frustrations have contributed much to augment and aggravate his external problems. In fact, when he relates to Captain Cameron his

misgivings about not getting a reply from Queen Victoria, these two faces of his problems come simultaneously in his mind:

All this time she had and still has more than enough to threaten her from within and without, and it is very unlikely that she would hasten to expect additional threats from beyond the seas in place of the help she has desperately called for. She has had and still has enough problems of her own as you yourself have borne witness to, Captain Cameron... But what she must, she will also try. She must, for instance, expect a reply to a letter asking for help entrusted in the hands of the councillor of an 'extremely powerful empire.' (p. 222)

Tsegaye; not to idealize and glorify Kassa unduly, has touched upon some of his weaknesses. One such weakness in his character lies in the quotation marks above. He lacks diplomatic suavity and patience to win foreign powers like Britain to his side. He could have, at least, tried to neutralize the British from joining his domestic enemies, which they, in fact, did after a time. Furthermore, Tsegaye, in as much as he realizes the redemptory nature of his vision, he at the same time, shows his weaknesses being exposed thereof. Whenever the worth of his all-consuming vision is questioned, Kassa rebuffs one and all with contempt, petulance and arrogance. Even when his loving wife, Princess Tewabetch attempts to assess his vision, she is disdainfully answered thus: 'yes, I forget that tricky logic and women's wailings are nothing compared to the fire in me. I am not one made to quibble with women.' (p. 215) His haughty, male chauvinist attitudes and a bit of his unkindness and contempt thus surface as some undesirable elements in his character.

The last chapters of Kassa's life are depicted with pathos and a harrowing, pointed language. We observe him hightailing from the height of his success. Feudal chiefs have strengthened their powers and have dismembered the country once again. To rescue the prisoners, the British army, under General Napier, has reached the fort of Magdela where Kassa

has made his last refuge. Embittered by his failure to consolidate what he in bits and pieces has achieved, and saddened by the death of his loving wife, Tewabetch; Kassa is caught between chilly loneliness and blinking hope.

Still, he clings to his fast, fading vision of a strong Ethiopia, a noble nation, as when he ponders over the abusive remarks the British made against him: 'They aim at one's spirit, that is their dirty game! ... But they forget that mine is not the spirit of a man but that of a noble nation.' (p. 222) Furthermore, when Tru-Worq, his second wife, upbraids him for his failure to measure up to his dreams, he furiously shouts her down: 'it is coming true! It has come true, woman of folly!' (p. 223)

Yet, his despair is more than he can hide. To ameliorate the bitterness of his final days, he has taken to alcohol. Now that his world of hope, peace and progress has shrunk, he comes to confide his sorrows to his own shadows. In his intense loneliness, he, now and then, recoils to the recesses of his mind and is taken in by self-searching contemplations.

St. Michael! Strength and courage to turn the beam of my eyes into my own self in order to contemplate my own blinking soul! My soul - confused by doubts cast by philistine priests - shadows cast between me and my people, between my sincerity and their hearts, between my sincerity and their hope, between my soul and your existence, St Michael! (p. 224)

In spite of Tru-Worq's pleadings to make peace with the British, Kassa chooses a showdown. It is only later when his ever loyal compatriots like Gabriye die in the ensuing battle that he is persuaded to write a letter to General Napier asking for peace. However, General Napier, lacking knowledge of Kassa, not only wants the prisoners free, but requests him to give his arms to him. With a characteristic pride,

Kassa rebuffs his demand and sends the messenger back with his unequivocal, loud and clear missive:

Tell General Napier from me humble-cobbler Aleme, that if I surrender to him it will be humanly impossible for him to catch, or even touch my arms. Tell him, it is fire! It'll burn him! He, Kassa who has made a habit of handling powers, like babes, in his arms, cannot now have others handling his arms for him. (p. 225)

Moreover, Kassa, realizing his end has come, makes one more address to the messenger himself:

Now, fight in self-defence; do not too easily part from that same earth you were deposited upon with that cry of bitterness; from that same land you've felt under your feet, that land which bears witness to your existence; from that same portion of mud and dust you rolled on, bled on, sweated on, loved and killed on; that same portion of land which belongs to you by right of birth and toil... that same Mother Ethiopia. Farewell, and fight, brother. (p. 225)

This, in fact, is tantamount to a will made through the cobbler-messenger, to millions of Ethiopian peasants, the masses. That the land is their's by right of birth and toil and not that of age-old leeches of feudalists and their entourage is a notable statement to make by way of signifying the progressive nature of Kassa's mission.

The versatile but at the same time elusive personality of Kassa or Tewodros, as he is better known, often pose a challenge to a number of writers. Some, in wanton sympathy and self-identification draw him in glowing colours whitewashing the due flaws and foibles in his character. Others, apathetic to his renovating spirit and commendable achievements, show him only or more often, being swamped in pools and pools of blood. But Tsegaye comes among the rather conscientious writers who see in Tewodros the ideals of a 20th century ordinary Ethiopian, but the weaknesses and limitations of a 19th century extraordinary individual.

Azmari

'Azmari' is an Amharic term for 'singer', with a slight pejorative connotation, though. Tsegaye Gebre-Medhin's rather short play under this title deals with the conflicting views people have on the artist or craftsman in a backward society. Making his setting a rural village that is proximate to Addis Ababa, he delineates the story of a family whose members have grouped themselves into two, according to their viewpoint on artists and craftsmen. The family patriarch, Abiye, and his granddaughter, Shashitu, who is a singer herself, side together because of their deep love for the life of the artist. On the other hand, Shashitu's mother and brother, Zinash and Lulu, who, like the rest of the society, look down upon the professions of the artist and craftsman (these are taken as one and the same in the play), join hands and try to frustrate Shashitu from practising her art. One day, Lulu, enraged by Shashitu's penniless obsession breaks her 'kirrari' - one kind of string instrument, upon which she plays. Consequently, Abiye curses him and as a counter-measure Lulu refuses to come home and bring money for the upkeep of the family which constitutes also, two of his illegitimate children. Not to lose her son and his money as well, Zinash intercedes to secure for him the old man's forgiveness. Nevertheless, Abiye stubbornly refuses to revoke his curse and after a short while, he dies. The humdrum life of the family presumably continues as before, with no one group being successful to win the other to his side.

In bye-gone days and even now in societies that are backward, artists and craftsmen are looked down upon contemptuously. They are stigmatized with dissolute life and eccentric behaviour, and are usually relegated to the last rung of the social ladder. Yet, society needs its artists and craftsmen, as much as, if not more, it needs its monarchs and popes. It

depends on them for its entertainment, enlightenment, comfort and sane mental upkeep. It has ever been true that no other professional is more close than they to the heartstrings of any man, be he a king or a lowly man. Even so, however, society refrains from acknowledging its indebtedness to them. Rather, it holds them in contumely, penury and disgrace. This truism comes out clearly in Azmari when Abiye, in defence of Shashitu, speaks to Zinash, who is ever anxious of her daughter's occupation.

See, Zinaye? As I always say, we come from an old family of proud peasant craftsmen. Out of our tenacious will-power and our love of nature, society chose to fabricate hatred against us. Out of our toil and sweat, it made dirty jokes. Out of our beautiful "kurbet" design upon which they slept comfortably at night and made love, they manufactured a false artful scorn for us. Though humanity is outraged within them, they manage to suffocate it with the pressure of their outward hypocrisy... Let her sing, Zinash, let my favourite one sing. You see, we come from an old family of proud peasant craftsmen. (p. 232)

Zinash understands this too well and resents seeing her daughter being a singer, just like her father who 'sang his throat to consumption' and died. She thus winces at the tremendous sacrifices her daughter is making. The ambivalent reaction of the society, that of applause and rejection pains her extremely as she clearly knows that the latter is the stronger and the more fearfully realistic of the two.

Society is eager to applaud her, applaud her but not accept her, applaud her to confusion, applaud her to her doom. And I watch her waste away under my very eyes. My own daughter is dead in my own heart. She is a stranger, an unknown, a ghost to her own mother. I couldn't save her from her dream anymore than I could save myself from my confusion. (p. 235)

A very down-to-earth and ordinary woman that she is, her daughter's tenacious love for an occupation, or 'a dream' as she calls it, which is unremunerative either in money or name and respect, becomes incomprehensible to her: She rather prefers, but fails, to engage her in daily chores than to while away her time in 'no decent folk's way

*cow hide

of life.' (p. 229) She wants her to earn her livelihood and not to sing like birds and peck on others' table for a morsel. She demands of her to follow the example of Lulu who, first as a shoe-shine boy and subsequently as a house-broker employs himself to cover the family's expenses. Naturally enough, apart from Zinash, it is Lulu who is very vehement in his remonstrations against his sister's penniless task.

Why don't you take a look at mother and me, sister? Yes, me. I work for this family. First as a shoe-shine boy and now as a house-broker. I speculate and speculate till my sweat pours down my face. I bargain till my nerves shake, for and against the landlords, for and against the 'ferenj' for and against the 'awko ferenj,'[†] modern white-collars. And I make them pay! And you, what do you do? I do not question what you dream about, sister, but what do you do to help this family? (p. 231)

Lulu and his mother, however, are not distressed about Shashitu's failure to bring money to the family only. Nor would they have been very censorious of her, had her disreputed name and profession been confined to her solely. But such is the society they live in, that they cannot escape reproof and rejection as well, because of her occupation. Zinash explicitly states this when she plaintively says, 'I ... won't accept my daughter, because of society, and society won't accept me because of her.' (p. 235) In another moment, she discerns the predicament of her son who unsuccessfully tries to eschew the stained name of his sister, '... my son, disenchanted, suffocated by his own efforts to be different, jeered at by his friends and burning with shame as he lingers about them like a shadow.' (p. 236)

But singing, story telling, 'kurbet' dressing, or any other craft is the family occupation. Abiye harps on this fact, time and again,

* white-men

[†] a pejorative reference to Ethiopians who slavishly ape the white man.

and together with the loving acceptance of it; he seems to realize that the family as a whole is fated to be disdainfully looked upon by the society. With such an understanding, he takes it approvingly when some of his grandchildren and great grandchildren take upon this occupation and perpetuate it. Conversely, when some others like Lulu are ashamed of it and attempt to defile which he considers as blessed and sacred, he becomes deeply hurt. That is why, when Lulu destroys Shashitu's 'kirrar', he becomes furious and curses him for the sacrilege he has committed upon the tradition of his lineage. Lulu, who thinks '... the Almighty Dollar is the centre of the universe, the life-blood of all ways and means...' and who is deeply offended and disgusted by his sister's persistent attachment to the family tradition which invites all disgrace and no honour, all destitution and no money, fails to measure up to his expectations. Later, when Zinash intercedes to secure forgiveness for her son, the family patriarch ponders over his grandson's irrevocable guilt.

The holy blessing is for those who are ready to carry their cross, Zinaye. Lulu is mine as much as he is yours and when he is lost, he is lost to both of us. He has refused to suffer the burden of his cross and instead he taught himself to be ashamed of the holy blessing. To be ashamed of the gift that nature bestowed on him, and to learn to abuse it by making himself an opportunist, betraying his gift like a Pharisee, trading in lip service like a Judas... It's, it's, It 's profanity. And, Zinash... 'Man does not live by bread alone...' (p. 238)

Tsegaye, through Abiye and Shashitu has tried to show the strong relationship between art and nature. These two individuals recurrently expound art or craft in association with nature. Their occupation with art is at the same time an obsession with nature. For them, nature is an inspirer and bestower of art on man. They contend that, in as much as man's proximity to nature, is his nearness to art and art provides man with felicity in simple life, peace and tranquility in the face of

ignominy and despair. Thus, according to them, to eschew art is to alienate oneself from nature or vice versa; and hence to bury oneself in fear and darkness. These and such-like ideas are contained in Shashitu's rejoinder to Lulu who likens her to 'the early rising tramp who sheepishly smiles at this naked, barren sun with a naked starving belly.' (p. 235)

Yes, Brother, yes! Like the tramp, yes!... Would you know what the young daybreak hanging its bright shadow over the horizon means to the early-rising tramp who washes his damp face with the morning dew and the timid ray of the budding sun? To the tramp who knows not the boredom of time, the tearing claws of the age of knowing, and the sting of tension which you and I have taught ourselves to be dominated by, brother? To the tramp who marks the black soil with his wandering bare feet as he tirelessly walks the dusty or the green fields, walks the village streets, and walks the vast earth? It means music to him, Brother. Music which your ears are taught to forget, taught to misunderstand, taught to be ashamed of by your kind. Music to which you and your kind choose to be deaf, Brother! Unlike your father who lived for it! Bathed in it! And breathed it to death, coward!!' (p. 235)

The power of art and the intensity of its love are dealt upon as well. Shashitu, prompted by her unrelenting passion for playing her 'kirrar' goes to a wedding ceremony of her former fiancée who left her for good because of her profession. Such an act shocks her mother and her brother whereas she and her grandfather are exultantly captivated by the reactions her singing has brought upon the feelings of her former would-be father in law. In a subsequent attempt to rebuff her mother's taunts, moreover, Shashitu traces her love for her art to the time when she was in her (ie her mother's) womb. In these and such-like incidents and statements, however, it is evident that Tsegaye has 'metaphorized' or to be specific hyperbolized his themes.

On the other hand, we watch Lulu's son, the youngest member of the family gradually develop love for Shashitu's art. A faint note of music from a distance fascinates him and he starts whistling in front of his

grandmother who inevitably upbraids him for being "contaminated" with the family vice. Later on, he makes a toy "kirrar" and presents it to Shashitu as a replacement for her broken one. In such a realistic portrayal of the little boy, Tsegaye reveals how love for art or any other trade, can be picked up from the surroundings one lives in. What an implausible, exclamation will it be, if, after some years, this boy, claims to have developed love for his art while he was still in his mother's womb? !

Finally, it is important to make note of the general defects of this play: its verbosity and superfluous and arbitrary use of folk art. Some of the characters like Zinash and Shashitu, now and then, lose themselves in lengthy harangues which have the same melancholic tone and recurrent themes. Tsegaye's verbiage is glaringly discernable in many of his plays including this one. Moreover, Tsegaye usually makes use of folk art in both his Amharic and English writings. This is a commendable attempt as it will resuscitate Ethiopian folk art. In the last play, Tewodros, we have mentioned how he used a traditional children's game (an aspect of folk art) to overcome some dramatic problems. But in Azmari, however, we detect some arbitrariness and superfluousness in his selection of nursery rhymes. They have no thematic relationship or oneness with the rest of the play. Moreover, they are a bit too many and lengthy. It may be said, among other things, that the folk pieces have helped in depicting the intense love Abiye and Shashitu have for art, as these are the ones, who, together with the children indulge in them. Still, their arbitrariness and lengthiness weigh down one's judgement in their favour.

Furthermore, since the nursery rhymes and the apparent verbosity will surely bog down the tempo of the play, a bit of boredom is inevitable.

The Oda-Oak Oracle

Though this play has not been produced so far in our home theatres, European and American audiences have had the opportunity of seeing the productions of this compact, beautiful play.

The playwright has told me that he got the story for this short play, from an old legend of the Wolayita people^{*} with whom he lived for sometime. It tells of one, Shanka, the strong son of the tribe who had a bride, Ukutee, chosen for him by the Oda-Oak Oracle. The Oracle, told them through its interpreter, the Oda-man, that their first-born son shall be sacrificed as a propitiation of the ancestral gods. But Shanka, who has been somewhat enlightened by his friend Goaa, who has presumably been kidnapped and stayed for sometime with white Christians, shirks from having sexual intercourse with his bride, lest she will conceive a doomed child. Despairingly, he calls upon the help of Goaa, the inhibited by the strangers ways, to approach the Oracle on his behalf and ask for a remission of its words. But Goaa fearful of his own suspected stand in the eyes of the Oracle fails to bring this case to it. Meanwhile, Ukutee, who is offended by her betrothed's cold sentimentality tempts Goaa to sleep with her, and after nine months comes with him to the Oracle to repent. Suffering from a child birth pangs, she asks Goaa to call upon the interpreter of the Oracle and entreat him for sympathy. When the Oda-man comes out from his abode, he attributes the pestilential atmosphere in the valley to a breach of the word of the Oracle, and pronounces curses upon them and the child who is to be "undelivered and unbifitting" to the sacrifice of the gods. Later, when he understands that Shanka is the first one to transgress the word of the Oracle by refusing to consummate the marriage, he orders him to engage in a death-combat with Goaa. The

^{*}See appendix

two friends fight, and Goaa falls mortally wounded. When Ukutee is asked to flog Shanka as he shoulders the dead body of Goaa out of the valley to the land of the strangers, she faints and a little later dies after giving birth to a female-child. At last, we watch the newly born baby and Shanka given to the angry people of the valley who clamour for blood sacrifice to soothe the wrathful gestures of the ancestral gods.

Taking this story line, Tsegaye presents intense conflicts between stringent ritualistic traditional views and the rather humane, supposedly Christian values. For it must be clear at the outset, that the strong son of the tribe refrains from committing the dictates of the Oracle and thus deviates from the due expectation of the traditional society because of Goaa's alien Christian influence upon him. Otherwise, considering the fact that he is born and lives exclusively among his folks and has been brought up in and lives with the traditional way of life, his aversion to the demands of the ancestral gods would have been groundless and implausible. In fact, in a moment of anxiety and self-pity, he, Shanka himself alludes to his friend's significant influence and role in the whole gamut of tragic happenings. By way of declining to accept Goaa's advice to take his bride in his arm, he exclaims:

No,
I cannot Goaa.
If I yield,
Nine moons is not so distant:
Let then
My unquenched desire
Shrink, if it may,
In my bitter gall,
That of my bride
Eat into her veins
Like a worm
In a newly rotting fruit,
And let
The pride of our dead
Shriek with venom.
I cannot, Goaa.

I wish, though,
You had never taught me about the Word.
The beginning Word.
Of the strangers' wisdom.
The beginning Word who you said
Becomes all:
Becomes even I.
I cannot, friend.
Nine moons is not so distant. (p. 8)

Ironically enough though, once taken in by the new ideals, it is Shanka and not Goaa who appears to be inhibited by the strangers' ways. Despite his intense sufferings and painful existence he adamantly refuses to comply with the words of the Oracle and the strong desires of his bride. Conversely, Goaa, who is said to know the strangers' ways, the strangers' wisdom, concedes to the traditional ways and urges him to come to terms first with his bride and then with the gods of his forefathers. In fact, Goaa seems not to have developed any love for the strangers' ways. Time and again, we find him criticizing bitterly what he has learnt, away from his homeland. In a rejoinder to Ukutee who asks him tauntingly whether or not it is shame and fear the strangers have taught him, he says:

Yes, They are dehumanized
To teach but
The wisdom of fear.
And how to feel ashamed of oneself,
How to grow wild
Under the cold wings of hatred. (p. 21)

Goa seems to be disillusioned with the whole teaching of the strangers. When Shanka because of him comes enthusiastically to embrace it, he vehemently disparages and tries to detach himself from it. Their reactions to it are glaringly contrasted in an incident when they are about to engage themselves in the death-combat. Here, despite Goaa's provocation and challenges, Shanka admits his unpreparedness and unwillingness to fight with him because:

You're more than a brother to me,
Goaa. You imparted your knowledge
of the wisdom of the strangers
to me. You did. You let me share the secret
Of your happy obsession by the Word
Which you said, is all loving. (p. 38)

To this, Goaa flatly answers: 'silence, Shanka / I said nothing
of the kind.'

Though Goaa's blunt refutation may partly be prompted by the presence
of the Oda-man and the elders of the valley who naturally frown upon such
declamations as Shanka's; his consistent, negative attitudes against it
throughout the play however, attest to his strong disillusionment. More-
over, Goaa, on top of his disillusionment by the strangers' ways,
fears to offend his people, lest they will augment his bitterness and
possibly destroy him for being possessed by evil spirits. With regards to
this, consider what he tells Shanka who entreats him to face the Oracle
with his new wisdom:

Face him and what, Shanka?
To face him
With my strange wisdom
Shall be my darkest sin.
Did I run from the strangers
Merely to be felled
By my own people
As one possessed by evil spirits?
Whatever spirit
I happen to be possessed of
I am not ready
To die for
Nor to die of, Shanka. (p. 5)

What seals off his strong abomination to the strangers and their
ways, however, is his last pronouncement on the brink of death:

Shanka, don't shoulder my dead body
To the city of dark woods
Where white ants were waiting.
Also, Shanka,
Never run,
To the land of the strangers. (p. 43)

Yet, Shanka, unable to unlearn what he has learnt, clings to the strangers' ways to the last. In the face of formidable danger from the tribal elders, he sings of the Word. Apparently, by way of lullabying the new born baby, he exclaims his newly acquired ideals:

Cry, peace,
Child of innocence.
Cry, peace,
Babe who took life
To become life.
Cry that they all
Become the Word. (p. 50)

Being emboldened by his uncommon conviction, he daringly questions the blood thirstiness of the tribal elders. Watching them regret the birth of the female child which they deem unfit for sacrifice and yet still clamour for blood sacrifices, he asks them:

Isn't this sign enough
That the dead refuse
To feed on the babe,
Elders?
Who rages for sacrifice?
Our dead?
Or our living? (p. 49)

But such daring attempts provoke the wrath of the elders, all the more, and commuting their former pronouncement to banish him, they let him and the child be sacrificed by the angry people of the valley. Here one may pause and ask what Tsegaye is driving at by making each one of those people who are attached to Goaa, one way or another; Shanka, Ukutee, the child, die? Is he trying to show that traditional ways of life cannot easily be uprooted and all those who somehow attempt to exterminate or defile them would ultimately encounter defeat? Is he extolling traditional values and does he consider every means to this end worth applying? I say yes to both of these questions as the triumph of the old over the new is unequivocally set and recurrently stressed.

Oda-Oak Oracle is written in a terse, beautiful language. Its lines flow with ease and grace. Its powerfully animated imageries ever engage us with wonder and alterness, despite some sluggishness in the tempo of the play. Consider, for instance, the scene wherein Goaa and Ukutee employ themselves in a dialogue of love, loneliness and the ancestral gods. Even if its lengthiness and repetitiveness are apparent, we still sense the concrete, apt imageries playing plaintively and exquisitely on our feelings as in the here-under where Goaa defines what loneliness is:

It is not easy, Ukutee,
To speak
Of the gloomy path
Of a lone walker.
Loneliness is
When the ripe fruit fails,
To make the bird
Aware of its existence.
Loneliness is
When the avoided heart,
Growing stale every night,
Wears a mask of bitterness,
While the tense veins
Growing frantic and mad
Scratch at the mask
Of a stricken heart.
Loneliness is
When the aged mule
Rubs its flank
Against the deserted trunk
Of a dead bush.
Loneliness is
When the moon is left cold
Among a glowing
Jungle of stars. (p. 14)

This play which captures intense dramatic moments, through a very succinct language and frantic, harrowing movements (as when Goaa and Shanka engage in a death-combat) will surely add one more score to Tsegaye's commendable artistic aptitude in dramaturgy.

Collision of Altars

Like many a country, Ethiopia has passed through glorious moments and dark hours in its history. Its Axumite Empire of the 3rd and 6th cen. A.D. reached a dazzling peak that shamed the subsequent times of darkness and impotency. Particularly in the 6th cen. A.D. Ethiopia, from its centre at Axum and under its strong monarch, Kaleb, became one of the triple world powers that appeared before the rise of Islam.

In the first quarter of the 6th century, the Christian King, Kaleb, led a big contingent of soldiers to South Arabia, with the apparent reason of safeguarding the well-being and interest of the Christians there, who were being massacred by the Judaic King, Dhu Nuwas. In defeating Dhu Nuwas, Kaleb made some parts of South Arabia a virtual colony of Ethiopia. Later on, his viceroy, a certain Abraham made an attempt to capture Mecca; but failed as small-pox or, in Tsegaye's play, a plague, broke out and destroyed his soldiers. This was 'Am Al Fil,' - 'the year of the elephant,' the year in which the prophet Mohammed was born, to which a number of references are made in the play. Henceforth, the power of Axumite Empire began to ebb and its slow, dark, descent commenced.

In Collision of Altars, postdating some incidents, to meet theatrical expediences, Tsegaye deals with a historic confluence, where Axum's fast waning glorious hours and its equally fast upcoming dark hours merge. In a stylistic presentation that comes very near to that of the epic theatre, he unfurls the various dark episodes in a powerful language, intricate but graceful dramatic gestures, mimes and dances, musical incantations and intonations.

In bringing to our attention the four important religions that used to dominate the Ethiopian scene in those times; the worship of the Noble

Serpent, Judaism, Christianity and Islam at the outset, Tsegaye seems to discern all forms of political and social conflicts, as being manifested in religious struggles, in the collision of altars. When the representatives of these religions appear they come by way of highlighting their plights and privileges. Hence, when the other representatives of the other religions do voice their conditions as safe and tolerable, Chief Watto, exclaims regrettfully about the plight of his religion, the Worship of the Noble Serpent. This ancient religion of the indigeneous Kushites that antecedes all the others has come to lose its significance and lustre. Whereas Judaism that has taken deep roots in Ethiopia before the coming of Christianity, and Christianity that enjoys the privilege of being a state religion and Islam, a recent and not a very powerful religion with its Jihad Sword fully unsheathed as yet and which the Axumite Emperors view with some indulgence, accept their lot in the Axumites' empire, the Noble Serpent has its misgivings and begrudgings.

I, Watto, speaker of their will,
And of your dreams, command,
Listen my children,
Children of our life-giving lake,
Children of our red water gate
We have caused
Our Noble Serpent to starve.
From the bosom of our bright waters
We have caused it, the Mother of Ham
To lick at the muddy sand.

Our eyes have strayed long
Away from your pharoahinic roots
Across the dirt of the salt water, and
Towards the distant Kabah Stone of the Quarryash.

Our ears have taken in
The many strange gods of Sabea
Of our Axumite brother-masters,
The war-gods, long married
To our land and daughters.
We have trained our hearts to refuse
The seasonal offerings expected of us
We have dared to deny our Noble Serpent Ra

Mother of Kushite Meroe
That which is its ancestral right.
But listen my children,
The spirits of our dead Ham still demand
The spirits of our living must obey. (p. 2)

The plight of the Noble Serpent and more, of its worshippers, the Kushites, comes recurrently in the play. In such an undertaking the playwright has an axe to grind to which we will come later.

After the Axumite's defeat in South Arabia, Kaleb resigns from active life. He bestows his crown upon his younger Christian son, Nezana, and abdicates to pass the rest of his days in a hermitage. In an abdication scene which is punctuated by a mothers' chorus, a beggars' chorus and a childrens' chorus, Tsegaye portrays Kaleb as a very proud King in the history of his empire, a very staunch believer in Orthodox Christianity, and a very considerate man to his people. Yet, the defeat on 'Am Al Fil' hangs over the entire scene like a lowering sky and forebodes the forthcoming dark days of Axum. This becomes all the more, grave and more gloomy by the lamentations of mothers who have lost their children through the fated war: 'Our Wombs cry for our sons, /Our feet fret for their sight./ Where are the flowers of our lives, Kaleb?' (p. 9)

After Kaleb's abdication and death, things begin to change for worse under the reign of Nezana. Kaleb's Christian views have been quite tolerant to people who profess other religion. On the other hand, Nezana shows an undue zeal to establish Christianity as the sole religion of his empire. 'The revenge of the Cross' becomes his favourite theme and attempts to enlist all his people, notwithstanding their various tribal backgrounds and religious denominations, for its realization. Despite the people's resentment and anger to prostrate their gods in favour of his, he stubbornly insists to make his dream come true. Moreover, he becomes unsympathetic to his people who are still suffering from

lingering hangers of the last, devastating war. In a threatening tone he advises them to yield to his desires and dreams.

Beloved Axumites
By our natural authority
Endowed on us by the will of God
And the rightful heritage
Of this throne of our fathers
We warn that you rid yourselves
Of your resigned attitudes.
For, were you beloved
To lead is to rule
And to be king is to kill.
But to any who dreams
To go against this will
We warn, now,
That he sneak out with the evening dusk
Before the last sun sets on him. (p. 27)

Nezana, as is his wont, executes what he thinks and speaks. He divulges his fulsome behaviour in a series of undertakings. He becomes very oppressive upon all those who question the worth of his bulldozer approach to flatten out all religions apart from Christianity. Fear and death come to claim the lives of a great many Axumites. In a relentless, unbridled obsession to restore the previous glory of Axum through the Christian religion; the king, indiscriminately cracks his scourge upon all those who dare contravene him. He allows his own son, Crown Prince Armah to be flogged before the people, for his refusal to lead an expedition against the Noble Serpent, which is incidentally, a religion of his own mother's and her people of Kushites. In punishing his own son thus mercilessly, however, he intends the people to know how serious he is in the whole business of the Cross.

We drip the blood of our son
Into this Royal Tomb of Axum
Bearing the dust of our forebears.
A symbolic offering
Of our own embodiment
To our heritage and our past,
A living example
To you, my beloved.
That you look more to the Holy Cross

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To you, my beloved.
That you look more to the Holy Cross

And less to your private impulses.
 We have for long
 Tolerated, with much pain
 Your playing the clients
 Of **strange** gods and demons
 Within our holy Empire.
 You have also stayed long
 Inside your mist of idolatry
 In which you enclose our reign.
 You haunt our throne
 And wallow in idle demonism.
 We shall not tolerate it any longer, beloved.
 Behold the thrust of the scourge
 Ripping the tender flesh
 Of our only son
 And let the thick crust of your ill sloth
 Vanish with his pains.
 Rid yourselves, beloved
 Of the dark cry in your brains. (p. 32)

From what we understand gradually, the king wants his son, not only to fight the dragon, the Noble Serpent; but also Judaism and the emerging power of Islam. Yet Armah, even if he does not make a vehement, articulate opposition to his father's entreaties, nonetheless, refuses to make the expeditions. Despondent and melancholic that he is, however, he incites our pity rather than our admiration for him. In the face of fanaticism and decadence, he recoils within himself and wallows nostalgically in the glorious past of Axum. He is inert and impractical with a pensive bent of mind and an innocent heart. When he observes his mother, Noba, fornicate with his uncle, Rabbi Yona and gets pregnant, he implores her to tell his father the whole tragic incident. He feels uneasy and a kind of guilty conscience, notwithstanding the cruel treatments he received from his hand. He hates to see his father being deceived. Against his mother's admonitions, who is more discerning of her husband's nature, he relieves himself of the affair, only to invite another round of lashes upon himself. In a bit of naivete, he overlooks the fact that the corrupted court and person of his father allow sins and weaknesses, but not the pronouncement of them.

Through his innocence, he is unable to rip off the corrupted masks of his parents. Hooked in, by a vice-ridden, stifling, despotic atmosphere, he becomes dreamy of his early days and regretfully reminiscent of the gleaming days of Axum.

You, on whose fragile hands
My fairy dreams bent mountains,
Whose sweet eyes of care
Like opals in a clear spring
Spread open in my innocent face,
You, whose vital guide of my footsteps
Against the scar of goring nights
Protected my moments of innocence,
O, How you must die, my twilight.

But now my Axum
My soul is wedded to hating
Everything that surrounds you,
And I strain to crawl
From one dark day to another long night
On the soothing pains of your memory, alone.
I have long forgotten how to laugh,
I only search for your night cloak
Where you last left it hang
For it is my only cradle, Axum,
I listen to your silence
For it is my only music
The vital life you once gave me free
Is lost somewhere along the way
In the service of your mordant custom.
I have long forgotten how to laugh
And, it is now my habit
To worship your grave, my Axum. (p. 55)

Nezana's outrageous fanaticism is curbed, however, by formidable powers that gradually and threateningly encircle his empire. Islam has emerged ever stronger and brandishing its sword of the Jihad has over-run a number of neighbouring countries and has reached the very threshold of Axum. The Zarathustran Persia has augmented its power and supplanted the strongholds of the christian Byzantian Empire in the middle east and clamours to exterminate the already fragile Empire of the Axumites. At home, the oppressed tribes have shown reluctance to pay tributes, and Rabbi Yona has installed himself as a king upon one of the domestic tribes,

the Agau.. Internal, religious and tribal dissensions abound and war-devastated Axum sinks in destitution, unrest and hunger. Still, however, Nezana perseveres in his policy of bringing the salvation of Axum through the Christian church. In order to rally them for the cause of the Cross, hunger-stricken children are brought to the baptismal pit. They are made to sing 'that they are the new men of Axum' and that they 'are the will of its vengeance' (p. 53) Yet, amid threatening and bruising lashes, a cry of protest is heard from a group of mothers who incite the children to refuse slavishly obeying the dictates of the oppressors.

Awake, leftovers of Axum.
The cunning master god-makers
Who sow the plague of words
Have made cowering dogs
Out of your noble nature.
You have fallen a sacrifice
To their bestial outlet.
Awake, out, wretched of Axum, Awake. (p. 58)

The internal problems without being abated, a Moslem chief, Jaffar, comes with a missive from the prophet Mohammad that, ineffect, demands of Nezana and his people to either be converted to Islam or be perished with Jihad's sword. Dumbfounded and greatly disturbed by the content of the message, Nezana falls into a 'noble shiver^{*}' and dies.

The bleak, harrowing scenes in the play finally culminate in a kind of epilogue wherein Araaya, Armah's son, discloses the pitiable state Axum is to find itself in, even after all those dark times of Nezana's reign.

And so, not everything of Axum
Got lost to time, as fast.
Yes, things broke apart,
But they lingered on too.
Things tidied over in time,
And the sound of the hammer and chisel
Whiled away through thick and thin.
The word they cut on wood and stone,
Carved in and around the caves of Axum,

* apoplexy

In her now remote island lakes
In the rocks of her gorges
In the up-turned depth
Of her insurmountable mountains
Survived, lingered, and still linger on.
Some Axumites took to Islam
Of their own will,
Some stayed in their own' right
With the old star of David
And with what they believed, and hoped
Would always be theirs.
But there were many, many more of those
Who held tight on to their earliest ways
And with what they knew with confidence
To be for ever theirs: Hamite.
Others still, ran far, far out of Axum
Towards the woodlands of sunset
And far, far to the south
To discover new peoples.
To live among other's ways.
And for others to discover theirs.
My father, Armah spent his life-time
Breaking down his uncle, Bet Israel
To come down to harsh, revengful terms.
Like my slave mother
The Queen Noba died of labour too,
And not without the child
Which also died inside her.
Some say, I poisoned her,
And there's the chink
In the human love story.
Particularly in our Axum's evasive
Eternal, folk-tale of passion, heritage
That ever tasted painfully bitter sweet,
That notch born of power
Flowing wider as you stretch out
To reach for its fangs.
After me, my sons ruled
And after my sons
Other kings of the cross stayed on.
Usinas, Ebana, Alal Mez, Gersem
And others, and others, had their turn.
Until much, much later
Another self-made Jewess queen
The terrible Yodit of Agau half-breed
Ransacked her remains to the ground.
Yes: it took longer for Axum to die.
She lingered, but never the same.
With the Serpent Mother womb
The true Ham man is dead in her.
Our beggars' folk - song says
That once the huge oak tree is felled
It is the termites alone
That creep in its roots. (p. 75)

Tsegaye's Collision of Altars tackles retrospectively the least touched upon theme in Ethiopian history; the culture of the indigeneous people of the land, the Kushites. When historians and ethnologists speak of Ethiopian culture, they usually lay much emphasis on that aspect of culture which has been very much influenced by the culture of Saba - one of the four states of South Arabia. It is indeed true that the Sabaeans first as merchants and seafarers and later as settlers have contributed to the development of Ethiopian culture since the early part of the first millenium B.C. However, taking this culture as the whole of Ethiopian culture or giving undue stress to it have resulted in the prevalent attitude of looking down upon the contributions of the indigeneous culture of the Kushites to the overall Ethiopian culture. Such a debasing outlook leaves much to be desired in historical authenticity and is more, a blasphemy upon the Ethiopians' true identity. The northern people of Ethiopia, light skinned and with a strong linguistic and cultural resemblance to the Arab people, are, more often than not, contemptuous of the rest of the Ethiopians with strong Kushitic blood and ways of life. This is all the more aggravated by the ruling houses who for a very long time used to disavow any descent or cultural ties with the aborigines.

Be that as it may, Tsegaye, apart from bemoaning the insignificant place the Kushites' culture is relegated to, glorifyingly speaks through Noba, Kaleb's wife, (envisaging such marital relationship is by itself significant) about its advancement over that of the Sabaeans. In a rejoinder to her son's, Armah's accusation of wanton sexual indulgence, she says:

I am a Kush, and of this land of Ra
On whose roots the first sun rose,

My body living
As my head is true.
Mine is unlike your hybrid
Devious, little Sabaeen mind
Where the quibbles of your Geez tongue
Outlive the living body by far.
With us, the body has a language
The mind cannot speak.
Both live. Without the one
The other is dead: and
The one cannot live
The other's complete life.
First, try and win yourself back
Then go win for Axum, my son. (p. 63)

Tsegaye in Collision of Altars, thus capably portrays the early days of the ebbing Axum. Through a few, important characters he has shown the prevalent fanaticism and decadence in those dark, bitter days. Even though this play has not the simplicity and unexcelled beauty of Oda-Oak Oracle, it is nonetheless, one more testimony to Tsegaye's praiseworthy knack in dramaturgy. In fact, in capturing an array of events in succinct dramatic form, he has done what a noted critic claims to be the true ability of the dramatic genius: 'The true dramatic genius is revealed "only" by his ability to select from the vast, complex tangle of empirical forms those in which the inner dramatic content of the period may be adequately reflected, in keeping with the demands of dramatic form.'⁶²

* * * * *

In all his English plays, Tsegaye shows a considerable skill in using a foreign medium to tackle indigeneous material; and particularly in the last two of his plays he has overcome some language clumsiness that can be found in the first two.

In addition, as a man of the theatre, he makes use of the concomittant arts, such as music and choreography. Folk art has a significant place in his writings and productions. Moreover, his attempt to bring out the important aspects of the culture and history of his people is strongly felt in all his works.

The Savage Girl

The Savage Girl, is Abbie Gubegna's only play in English. Though this verse play was written and published sixteen years ago, it has never been produced as yet. In three acts and twelve scenes, it contains a number of imaginative settings and a multiplicity of realistic themes.

The curtain opens on a young girl, the heroine of the play, as she stands in the middle of a jungle, surrounded by tamed wild animals. While she sings plaintively of her dead father and the wood that provides her with food and shelter, she hears a crack in the air and sees at the same time one of her leopards fall fatally wounded. She takes the head of the bruised leopard in her arms and bemoans its fate:

"What sins did you commit Oh! poor creature,
For which you are punished by this untimely thunder?
Perhaps, you had had murdered birds for food
Before I taught you how to eat fruit, berry and root." (p. 9)

After such a mawkish, even improbable event appear five men, presumably hunters, with some characteristic names: Freeman, Billman, Dianasi~~us~~, Fisher and Humane. The girl runs and hides herself in the nearby woods. The hunters follow her except Billman who remains behind to skin the leopard. After a short while, they succeed to chase the girl out of her hiding place. Fisher, being captivated by her beauty cannot help but admire her, yet his friends admonish him not to consider her as one of those city girls who are:

The victims of praise and illusive words
That easily can be snared, civilized birds,
Were left behind in the crowded city:
Hence, you have to stop begging for a false pity:
From this immaculate, girl, wild and pretty. (p. 14)

After they have made such unflattering remarks upon city girls, the girl leads them into a cave that is gaudily decorated with exotic paintings. There, she brings to their attention a bible with a letter in

it that her father had left behind on his death. The long letter which bespeaks of the vanity of the world and man's unkindness and misdeeds is read by Dianasius with some interruptions from Billman who is apparently dissatisfied with the whole pessimistic harangue. It is worth quoting some lines that characterize the whole missive, the deceased left to his daughter:

People may call me a fool I think
But still I believe all things are nothing.
Let anyone call me a feeble minded,
Because of my beliefs, naked and dried:
Because I abandoned human society,
And died in this wood leaving their city. (p. 21)

Making a pause to such an obsessive pessimism the playwright goes to depict more improbable incidents. A tamed dragon appears which the girl mounts like a horse and frolics with before the poor bewildered earthy men. Moreover, before she leaves the cave with the other men, she bids farewell to the unseeable hermit who is also presumably capable of bewitching the fangs of tigers and dragons! Be that as it may, on their way to Marillo, the capital city of Jiovah, dusk falls and they pitch their tent on the peak of a hillock. There the girl becomes very reminiscent of her father and loses herself in poetic anguish. Humane, humane that he is, he tries to comfort her thus, really pathetically: 'I know father's memory though/ My father was dead in my early childhood/ In as much as his love was thorough/' (p. 28)

But the girl is inconsolable: 'I think you are not the fittest
'to feel well the matter/ Of how a child loves in solitude the father/'
(p. 28)

She finally goes to sleep leaving the men trace her probable destiny in city life. They try, though unsuccessfully to find her a husband from among themselves. Dianasius declines, as he is already a married man.

To Fisher, it is something unthinkable: 'Well she can one of hundreds of my lovers: That is the only chance which I can donate to her.' Billman regrets her poverty and moreover 'she is a descendant of a mixed race and her blood is not pure.' Thus, at the close of the first act the playwright touches upon some marital problems in the society.

The second act which depicts the girl's life in Mirallo opens on a church yard. The 'savage' girl is christened as Mary with Mrs. Humane as her god-mother. After the Bishop makes a long speech referring to the parable of the lost sheep, a certain Mr. Joshua continues wryly, 'but our happiness must not be based on the hope that this sheep will be roasted as food, but on the understanding that she entrusts upon us a serious responsibility to be her good shepherds.' (p. 38) Money is contributed for the girl's upkeep and Mr. Humane triumphs over Billman for the guardianship. A reporter approaches Mary and asks what she feels. She says she is happy but still apologizes for her 'suspicious soul' for she remembers what her father told her.

Oh my daughter in all your life time be wise;
And let all your wisdom based upon the belief
Of the reality of the law of fall and rise,
Which contradict each other on man's life,
The word fall is not a threatening matter,
To those who are already fallen;
But to those who are arisen; so dear daughter;
When you are rising be solemn;
And when you are falling be strong,
Remembering that our broad world,
Is a place of right and wrong;
And taking all things normally in action, and word.
Hence sir although now I am too happy.
I can't give so quickly my conclusion,
Because I don't know what tomorrow will be
In this vague world of much disillusion. (p. 42)

Her father proves right and the playwright proves consistent. In a subsequent scene Mrs. Humane, piqued by jealousy, frowns upon her and begrudges her innocence, 'my snake in the grass, you had better not

ridicule me! You know what you have done.' (p. 47) And Mr. Humane has to have his blessings: 'You can do what you like with your beautiful lady. I know, I am grown older from hard work in taking care of you like mad. I can leave you with her and you live in peace.' (p. 48)

Driven out of Mr. Humane's humble salon, Mary zooms in her own fabulous villa. Here, a series of phone calls clink-clank carrying lusty proposals. Amazed, Mary jibes, 'I can't understand the matter! Everybody is sunk in an Ocean of lust' (p. 50) The calls break when Mr. Billman who has now seen her beauty and purity of blood in her affluence comes to propose. He expounds the intensity of his love and threatens to commit suicide if she declines his proposal. But no sooner has she discerningly revealed that she has donated all her property to welfare associations, he exclaims, 'really you are crazy! If you are that crazy, I don't want you even if you want me. I thought you were impudent.' (p. 53) A short while after his departure, the Tartuffian bishop appears who astonishingly claims that he is a human being, who needs what others need. To drive his point home, he comes up with a new version of the christian doctrine and tries to convince Mary out of her 'fanaticism', 'you have to get over your fanaticism. You see sin and repentance are the most important things in Christianity!' (p. 57) His words on leaving her, 'although I am sure of that you can't consider me a good bishop, you can't deny that I am a good christian', are very ironic, pointed criticisms the playwright levies against the bishopric. Her last visitor is Paul whom she loves and urges to marry her. But he is despondent, with that recurrent theme of life's futility weighing heavily upon him.

The last scene in this same act brings us to Mary's bed chamber. Here, Mary in her bed listens to news from various radio stations.

A harrowing image of a dark world, where various conflicts abound, comes through the wireless. Unrealistic, as the contrivance of this scene is, however, it once more, unmasks the playwright's untoward obsessions with life's gloominess. Be that as it may, the radio programmes are twice interrupted by her servant's appearance to announce the coming of Mullah Umer Shafie and Rabbi Haroni to convert her to Islam and Judaism.

The third act brings Mary's disillusionment with city life and civilization to a full circle. In the first scene, she bemoans the fate of her fiancé, Paul, who is killed by unknown hands. Paul's mother, Gudit, hysterically ascribes the death of her son to Mary. She thinks that 'everybody, attracted by her satanic smile became his severe enemy'. (p. 68) Moreover, she resents her presence at the funeral ceremony and departs with other people to bury her son. Mary lonely and inconsolable, remains weeping when her servant comes with the nation's morning paper which states, that Paul has committed suicide. Mary flings the paper away, disgusted with the falsity of the report and 'the corruption! The cruelty and disorder of this world, called "civilized."' (p. 70) The second scene opens on a high court in Mirallo. Mary is charged with an involvement in the murder of Paul. Yet, she fearlessly rebuffs the charge and questions the worth of laws and justice in such a corrupted society. When the judge enquires whether or not she pleads guilty, she despairingly responds:

I am guilty, not because I murdered my dear Paul, but because
I joined your corrupted society.
Not because I committed any sin, but because I defended
myself from your sins. Not because I hurt your society, but because
your society works against goodness. (p. 71)

Finally, though the prosecutor piqued by her censorious harangue exclaims, 'Madam! our patience is exhausting' and orders the policeman to take her to jail, she is somehow released on bail.

Some six years elapse before the subsequent third scene opens on Mr. Humane's salon. All those hunters and other people as well have gathered here to celebrate Mr. Humane's fifty fifth birthday. Mary comes in, a little later, and after some greetings they ask her about the pending court case. She says that it has gone from bad to worse and upon some statements by Mr. Billman upon her old friends, the wild beasts, and the blessings of civilization she discloses her own unflattering views on mankind:

Excuse me sir! I prefer the non-imposter beasts, with all their vices, to men, with their false kind acts: what I want from men is not only material but the addition of good spirit too. (Mary gets up suddenly). You see, I do not feel ashamed when I say animals are more kind than human beings. When a beast becomes a friend to someone he is a loyal friend: and when he is enemy he is a known enemy. The proverb, "fear your enemies once, but your friends hundred times" does not apply to the world of straight-forward beasts. I have seen thousands of people, who show their smiles to those whom they want to destroy. But beasts, whenever they come in enmity, do not do so with waggings of tails, but they do show their rage. (p. 78)

The final scene in the play brings the wheel of destiny to a full view. Mary comes back to where she starts: the jungle. The futility of civilization, the vanity of man, sink in in her whole being. She beseeches nature to reclaim her. Conversely, her father appears in her dream and tells her that her 'fugitive soul is about to rest.' (p. 84)

And indeed, the dragon she used to mount like a horse recants his erstwhile friendship and kills her.

What a cruel creature,
But you are not crueller than man and it does not matter.
Kill me and eat me at once without prolonged pain,
Which I suffered when I lived with men,
You are killing me, Oh! you murderous monster,
And still I cannot blame you more than man the imposter. (p. 85)

In delineating the plot meticulously thus, the numerous themes in the play become apparent and self-explaining. Abbie has picked up the

ills of the society and subjected them to criticism. Furthermore, his overall theme, that, misdirected civilization erodes man's basic goodness and innocence is conspicuously felt. But, above all, he has attempted to 'faithfully translate the dark, fatalistic, pessimistic world view so typical of coptic Amhara culture.'

63

The two most eye catching flaws in this play are that of language and dramaturgy. Almost all the quotations in this piece have some kind of language errors that defy and make /sic/ superfluous to point them out all. Apart from the awkward structuring of English sentences and lines in Amharic syntactic forms and meters (which usually sound ridiculous), punctuation and spelling errors, wrong choice and mistaken use of words, abound in this play. It is indeed an exercise in bad writing and a deplorable bold attempt with a very limited knowledge of the English language.

As is mentioned earlier, this play has not been produced so far. In fact, it is not an easily presentable piece. The twelve scenes are virtually twelve acts that almost demand twelve different settings: a jungle, a clearing in the wood, a cave, a tent on a hillock, a churchyard, Mr. Humane's salon, Mary's salon, Mary's bed chamber, Mary's salon, court-room, Humane's salon, the jungle. It will be a very exacting, if not an impossible task to have all these settings on stage in a short theatrical time of 2 - 3 hrs. Furthermore, the very improbable scenes wherein wild beasts rub shoulders against the heroine, cannot easily be produced on a limited stage of our domestic theatres. If Shakespeare or Bernard Shaw at times, juxtapose such wild scenes with realistic ones and are able to convince their audience of the significant of their plays, it is by the dint of their verbal eloquence which goes congruently with

their lofty themes. But deplorable as Abbie's language is, his highly imaginative scenes appear not only unmeaning, but also grotesquely absurd.

CONCLUSION

Conclusion

Some of the writers in English are also reputed writers in Amharic. In fact, their Amharic works, exceedingly outweigh their English works in many respects. Abbie Gubegna, for instance, who has produced not less than twenty Amharic works, has only two books in English. Daniachew Worku who has written plays, poems and a novel in Amharic has produced, so far, only one novel in English. Tsegaye Gebre-Medhin wrote his last English play, Collision of Altars a decade ago and most of his English poems some fifteen years back. Yet, during these years, he has written not less than seven plays and a great number of poems in Amharic. On the other hand, some of these writers have produced creative works solely in English. Ashenafi Kebede and Wolde Haile have each written a novel. But then, Ashenafi's novel came out eighteen years ago whereas Woldu's first reached us some ten years back. Both of them seem to quit writing altogether. Thus, creative writing in English obviously trickles into Ethiopian literature thinly and unevenly. In fact, the only writer who perseveres in producing works in English is Sahle Selassie Birhane Mariam. After making some start in the vernaculars, he has totally shifted to writing in English. His last novel, Firebrands, came out only a year ago and there is certainly room for hope and optimism that he will continue the tradition for many more years.

In using the English medium, the writers seem to be very selective of their subjects. As one can easily witness from their works, most of them tackle historical, cultural and political issues. Sahle Selassie's Warrior King and Tsegaye's Tewodros are artistic rejoinders to the prejudiced portrayures of king Tewodros by some Ethiopian and foreign writers. Collision of Altars is about the fall of Axum with conscious,

recurrent references to the past glory of Ethiopia. Defiance is partly a historical novel that gives a sober portraiture of the second Ethiopian war of 1935 - 41 and makes due emphasis to the lofty and noble Ethiopian culture. The Afersata and the Oda-Oak-Oracle bring out the cultures of the oppressed nationalities of the Gurage and the Wolayita respectively. Had these two books been written in Amharic, they would have achieved little success to pass the censors' desk as the past feudal-bourgeois regime used to frown upon any attempt that would divulge positively and approvingly the cultures of the oppressed peoples. In Confession, Defend the Name and in the poetry of Tsegaye Gebre-Medhin, we see the plight of the black people and as such these works implicitly and/or explicitly make a call for African brotherhood and negro solidarity. Furthermore, these works are replete with anti-imperialist overtones and subdued and sometimes blatant denunciations. Such works as The Thirteenth Sun, The Savage Girl and Firebrands contain strong criticisms of domestic state of affairs and governments. In fact, The Thirteenth Sun was barred from being circulated in Ethiopia by the past regime whereas Firebrands was denied permission to being sold here, at the end of last year. Thus, we discern, among other things, in their choice of subjects, strong, solid reasons as to why Ethiopian writers, at times, resort to the English language. Surely, the innocuous kind of work Eyasu Gorfu writes is a rarity in Ethiopian literature in English.

In using this foreign language, English, the writers show various degrees of aptitudes. Daniachew Worku, Tsegaye Gebre-Medhin and Sahle Selassie Birhane Mariam handle the language with commendable efficiency and ease. Daniachew's powerful, meticulous and concrete descriptive language, Tsegaye's beautiful imageries and terse, forceful poetic diction, Sahle Selassie's simple, apt and unaffected prose are testimonies to the

writers' praise-worthy ability in utilizing a second or a third language. Conversely, some other writers like Abbie Gubegna and Wolde Haile prove failures when it comes to using the language correctly, fittingly and beautifully. Notwithstanding some improvements in Defiance, it is still ostensibly clear that Abbie handles the language with difficulty and duress.

As these authors write to large audiences who by and large have rich literary backgrounds, it is expected of them to achieve a certain degree of artistic perfection. Daniachew with a firm training in literature, Tsegaye, with a long experience in dramaturgy and possibly Sahle Selassie in his later works overcome technical and related problems in the artistic craft. It is in the works of these writers that we find subtle characterization, well depicted characters, exquisitely worked out themes, coherent and matured thought-content. On the other hand, it is not difficult to detect in most of the works of the other writers faulty characterization, flat and slightly-touched-upon characters, indigestible multiplicity of themes and immature, inconsistent flow of thought-content.

Nevertheless, we must consider these writings only as experimental works that may pave the way to better writings in the future. In fact, when a tradition is built, it is built just like an edifice. It does not depend solely on hefty boulders and steel frames; but also on bits and pieces of fragile pebbles and brittle splinters.

APPENDIX

/Interviews with Sahle Selassie Birhane Mariam, Tsegaye Gebre-Medhin and Daniachew Worku/

Question 1. Why do you write in English?

Sahle Selassie: English is my third language. It is easier for me to express myself in Gurage, which is my mother's tongue, and Amharic, which is my second language. Yet, there are concepts that cannot easily be expressed in either of these languages. On the other hand, the English language is very rich and handy to deal with diverse concepts and subjects. Thus, this is the first reason why I write in English. Secondly, I feel that my home readers are the same whether I write in Amharic or English. Most of our people are illiterate. The few that are educated can read both Amharic and English. Moreover, I see one more advantage in writing in English than in Amharic. In writing in English I have not only the home readers, but foreigners as well, and I strongly feel that the outside world must know about our culture, our history, our society, in general, our country. Last but not least, you don't encounter censorship problems if you write in English and publish abroad.

Tsegaye: I wish I could also write in Oromo. In fact, I tried to write something in it, though unsuccessfully. I can express myself best in Amharic. It has simmered much into my personality. But writing in English is altogether a different matter. While I was a student

in elementary school, I participated in a play called King Dionysius and had my first intimate acquaintance with the English language. Later on, when I went to England I did some scribblings. Yet, writing in a language which the people do not understand is ceasing to communicate with the people, because language is one of the most sensitive instruments in a given culture. As such one should express himself in the language in which he dreams in, that is in his own vernacular tongue. But we have difficulties, and we had more difficulties in the past when we try to write in Amharic, because of the state of affairs which were then predominant. Most of the time these problems come in the form of censorship. It would not have permitted me to produce, my plays like the Oda-Oak-Oracle which is based on pagan background, on a legend of the Wolayita people; had I written it in Amharic. The plight in which the cultures of the oppressed people was in, was not allowed to be expressed. Thus, it is sometimes a rebellion to the domination of one culture over the others. The culture of the people is handled by little people who impose on you stringent censorship; so, at times, I feel to write in English and express myself freely. In fact, English comes in my writing when I have no way out and when I feel the situation is completely blocked. Furthermore, it brings you international rekknown easily than the Amharic would.

Daniachew:

By writing in English, you can find a larger audience both at home and abroad. To whom do I write in Amharic? Is it not for the same people that read in English and French? Moreover, I am not in fact optimistic enough, to say that the educated ones do ever think that something worth reading can come in Amharic.

Question 2. What are your problems while writing in English?

Tsegaye:

I am not good in English as I am in Amharic. Moreover, when things get bitter as I told you before, I intend to write in English, but still I feel uneasiness because truth stares at me and the people expect me to write for them about them. They ask:

"What are you waiting for? Why are you not writing about our culture, about our conditions?"

Daniachew:

Naturally enough; it is in my mother's tongue that I can best express myself. While writing in English, all those fine sensibilities of language and all those fine sheds of meanings in forming imageries do not easily come.

Question 3. Do you intend to continue writing in English?

Daniachew:

I do. In fact, at present, I have a novel, Doormat that is being published abroad.

Tsegaye:

I think our history, culture and revolution will have to be brought out on an international platform. I cannot perform in Lagos, London or New York in Amharic. Whether we like it or not, English and French become international languages. So I intend to translate some

of my works into English and produce them on international platforms. Moreover, the fate of Africa, colonialism and neo-colonialism and such-like things must be explained to the people of Africa, even if it is in the English language.

Sahle Selassie: Yes. English is the only medium I intend to use for many more days to come. When the need arises, I may translate some of my English works into Amharic.

TEXTS

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FOOTNOTES

- ¹Albert S. Gerard, Four African Literatures: Xhosa, Sotho, Zulu, Amharic (Berkley: University of California Press, 1971), P. 287.
- ²Ibid., P. 322.
- ³Mengistu Lemma, "Modern Amharic Literature: The Task Ahead," Voice of Ethiopia (May 19, 1965), P. 2.
- ⁴Paul E. Huntsberger, Highland Mosaic: A Critical Anthology of Ethiopian Literature In English (Ohio: Center for International Studies, 1973), P. 31.
- ⁵Thomas L. Kane, Ethiopian Literature In Amharic (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1975), P. 131.
- ⁶Mengistu, Op. Cit., P. 4.
- ⁷Solomon Deressa, "Letter from Addis Ababa," African Arts, II (winter 1969), P. 44
- ⁸Ibid.
- ⁹To cite one minor error, Sahle Selassie makes Hailu (Kassa's father) and Maru quarrel over a woman. But this lacks historical authenticity. See, Sven Rubenson; King of Kings: Theodros of Ethiopia (Addis Ababa - Nairobi: Haile Selassie I Univ. Press & Oxford Univ. Press, 1966), PP. 27 & 28.
- ¹⁰Alan Moorhead, The Blue Nile (London: Hamish Hamilton Ltd., 1962), P. 211.
- ¹¹Georg Lukacs, The Historical Novel (London: Merlin Press, 1962), P. 341.
- ¹²This girl is Woynitu's double and as such a symbol of Ethiopia. Remember that Woynitu is referred by Goytom and the peasant as having gold teeth. This girl too has gold teeth. Moreover, their temperaments are very much the same.
- ¹³Karl Marx and Frederik Engels, On Literature and Art (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976), P. 88.
- ¹⁴Angelo Del Boca, The Ethiopian War, 1935 - 41, trans. P.D. Cummins (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), P. 6.
- ¹⁵Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of The Earth, trans. Farrington (Suffolk: The Chaucer Press Ltd., 1967), P. 74.
- ¹⁶Boca, Op. Cit., P. 226.

- ¹⁷ Ayi Kwei Armah, Why Are We So Blest (London: Heinmann Education Books Ltd., 1974), P. 66.
- ¹⁸ Ibid., PP. 208 - 209.
- ¹⁹ J.P. Clark, America, Their America (Malta: St Paul's Press Ltd., 1968), P. 138.
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- ²¹ Tsegaye Gebre-Medhin, "Hold My Hands," Ethiopian Observer, IX (february 1965), P. 52.
- ²² Tsegaye Gebre-Medhin, Preface to Collision of Altars (London: Rex Collings, 1977)
- ²³ Tsegaye Gebre-Medhin "Hold My Hands," Ethiopian Observer, IX (february 1965), P. 54.
- ²⁴ Tsegaye Gebre-Medhin, "Home-Coming Son," Ethiopian Observer, IX (february 1965) P. 54.
- ²⁵ Ibid.
- ²⁶ Tsegaye Gebre-Medhin, "Senegal = Scene Egale," Presence Africaine, (1966) P. 333.
- ²⁷ Tsegaye Gebre-Medhin, "Prologue to African Conscience," Ethiopian Observer, IX (february 1965), P. 50.
- ²⁸ Tsegaye Gebre-Medhin, "She-Tramp," Ethiopian Observer, IX (february 1965), P. 53.
- ²⁹ Tsegaye Gebre-Medhin, "Addissaba", Ethiopian Observer", IX (february 1965), P. 58.
- ³⁰ Tsegaye Gebre-Medhin, "Hold My Hand," Ethiopian Observer, IX (february 1965), P. 52
- ³¹ Tsegaye Gebre-Medhin, "We Pause to Ask", Ethiopian Observer, IX (february 1965), P. 55.
- ³² Tsegaye Gebre-Medhin, "Also of Ethiopics," Ethiopian Observer, IX (february 1965), P. 56.
- ³³ Ibid.
- ³⁴ Tsegaye Gebre-Medhin, "Self-Exile", Ethiopian Observer, IX (february 1965), P. 55.
- ³⁵ Tsegaye Gebre-Medhin, "Ours", Ethiopian Observer, IX (february 1965), PP 57 & 58.

- ³⁶Huntsberger, Op.Cit., P. 46.
- ³⁷Tsegaye Gebre-Medhin, "Ours", Ethiopian Observer, IX (february 1965), P. 58.
- ³⁸Tsegaye Gebre-Medhin, "Mother Care-Worn", Ethiopian Observer, IX (february 1965), P. 60.
- ³⁹Tsegaye Gebre-Medhin, "Gladiator's Love", Ethiopian Observer, IX (february 1965), P. 51.
- ⁴⁰Tsegaye Gebre-Medhin, "Cold Shoulders", Ethiopian Observer, IX (february 1965)
- ⁴¹Tsegaye Gebre-Medhin, "I Remember", Ethiopian Observer, IX (february 1965), P. 51.
- ⁴²Tsegaye Gebre-Medhin, "Tomorrow's Sit - In - ers", Ethiopian Observer, IX (february 1965), P. 59.
- ⁴³Solomon Deressa, "Ode to Myself", African Arts, II (Spring 1969), P. 60.
- ⁴⁴William Prouty, "Look In, Look Out", Something, I (May 1967), P. 17.
- ⁴⁵Eshetu Chole, "Poem", Something, I (n.d.), P. 24.
- ⁴⁶Eyasu Gorfu, "Aimless I", Wild Oats (Addis Ababa: Artistic Printers Ltd., n.d.), P. 6.
- ⁴⁷Eyasu Gorfu, "Thoughts and Solitude", Poems of Thought and Solitude (Addis Ababa: Artistic Printers Ltd., n.d.) P. 18.
- ⁴⁸See also Eyasu Gorfu, "Oh Roses", Poems of Thought and Solitude (Addis Ababa: Artistic Printers Ltd., n.d.), P. 13.
- ⁴⁹Eyasu Gorfu, "We Live Alone", Wild Oats (Addis Ababa: Artistic Printers Ltd., n.d.), P. 11
- ⁵⁰Eyasu Gorfu, "Aimless I", Wild Oats (Addis Ababa: Artistic Printers Ltd., n.d.), P. 7.
- ⁵¹Eyasu Gorfu, "These Ages and Times", Poems of Thought and Solitude (Addis Ababa: Artistic Printers Ltd., n.d.), P. 9.
- ⁵²Eyasu Gorfu, "Ear's Eternal Error", Wild Oats (Addis Ababa: Artistic Printers Ltd., n.d.), P. 14.
- ⁵³Ibid., P. 15.
- ⁵⁴Ibid., PP. 178 - 180.

- ⁵⁵Ibid., P. 25.
- ⁵⁶Ibid., PP. 30 & 31
- ⁵⁷Ibid., P. 36.
- ⁵⁸Ibid., P. 26.
- ⁵⁹Eyasu Gorfu, "The Turn of Mind", Wild Oats (Addis Ababa: Artistic Printers Ltd., n.d.), P. 42.
- ⁶⁰Ibid., P. 43.
- ⁶¹Eyasu Gorfu, Wild Oats (Addis Ababa: Artistic Printers Ltd., n.d.)
- ⁶²Lukacs, Op. Cit., P. 115.
- ⁶³Gerard, Op. Cit., P. 363.

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DECLARATION

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

Name: DEBEBE SEIFU

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Place: Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa

Date of Submission: June 2, 1980
