

Haddis Alemayehu as a Social Critic

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A P P R O V A L

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A B S T R A C T

An understanding of a writer's socio-political milieu is essential for the overall appreciation of his work. The socio-political milieu that surrounds a writer is the source of the content matter he uses. It also explains why a given author reacts as he does to his environment.

The reactions to a given socio-political milieu can be expressed in the form of satire. Haddis Alemayehu also used satire to criticize his society. Social, political, religious and moral criticisms are some of the major themes that recur in his work.

Authors in general appear to take a positive and progressive stand. But a close analysis of their works reveals some of them as being half-hearted in their dedication for the welfare of the oppressed masses. Some, like Haddis Alemayehu, want a gradual change without uprooting the established system.

The seemingly clear desire for change can be seen in the works of many authors. However, the way they go about that change and what they want to replace in the changed systems become vague and hazy as one looks closely into their works. They tend to forget the objective realities and become utopians. Haddis Alemayehu is one of them.

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

This thesis, based on Ato Haddis Alemayehu's two novels, a fable and two non-fictional works, is of three-fold purpose. In the first place, studies about Haddis Alemayehu as an author and his works have barely come out as a coherent whole. Some master's theses, a number of senior essays and a few mimeographed papers have tried to deal with different aspects of his works. Narration techniques, figures of speech used, characterization, conflict and comparative analyses with other Ethiopian novelists are some of the topics for these studies. They are not all-encompassing and tend to be fragmentary. Other local "critics", few in number have put forward contradictory opinions about this author and his works. On the other hand scholars from abroad, like Thomas Kane and Reidulf Molvaer have tried to do Haddis Alemayehu and his works some justice. This study, then, is a modest attempt to give a deeper insight into the mind of the author and the essence of his works in a more comprehensive manner.

Secondly, in view of the fact that Haddis Alemayehu is still alive, no one has, so far, taken the trouble to interview and get the personal opinion of the author about his world outlook in general and his own works in particular. To this end, an interview has been conducted with Haddis Alemayehu to elicit his general outlook. The text of this extensive interview is herewith appended with a brief autobiography in the author's own hand writing.

Lastly, it has remained a "miracle" that Haddis Alemavehu was tolerated by the oppressive regime of the time and allowed to remain a member of the very ruling class which he apparently ridiculed and despised. So, the "secret" of his survival, in the face of apparent "disloyalty" to his class, will be examined briefly.

Of his five books to date, three are creative works of literary merit. Teret Teret Yemeseret (101 P.), /ተረተ ተረተ /, published in 1948 E.C., is a book of fables. In this collection of animal stories — a relatively new genre in written Amharic literature — Haddis Alemavehu has skillfully managed to subtly criticize the feudal society in which he lived and the human race in general. His two novels, Fiker Esque Mekabir (552 pp.), /ፍቅር እስከ ጭቆና /, (love unto death) and Wonjelegnaw Dagna (536 pp.), /ወንጅለገናው ዳና /, (the criminal judge), were published in 1958 and 1974 E.C., respectively. The former of the two novels centers around a love story of two young people of different social status. In this widely acclaimed and "the longest novel in the history of Amharic literature",¹ the artist lays bare the grim realities of the past feudal Ethiopia. Hence, "the first realistic novel"². Wonjelegnaw Dagna revolves around the life of a young couple of different classes, and mostly

¹Mengistu Lemma, "Introduction to Modern Ethiopian Literature" (Stockholm African-Scandinavian Writers' Conference, 1967), P.4.

²Fikire Tolossa, Realism and Amharic Literature (Bremen:Bremen University. 1983), P.183.

deals with the corruption of government officials at all levels. In the same work, the author criticizes those educated Ethiopians who have noble ideals while at school and who swell the rank of the exploiters the moment they hold government posts.

The two non-fictional works by the author are:

Yetimihirtina Yetemaribet Tirgum (125pp.) / የተምህርትና የትምህርት

ቤት ትርጉም/, (the meaning of education and school), published in 1948 E.C. and Ethiopia Min Ayinet Astedader Yesfe-

ligatal?(82 pp.), ኢትዮጵያ ምን አይነት አስተዳደር ያስፈልጋታል?/

(what type of government does Ethiopia need?/, published

in 1966 E.C. The first of these deals with the role of education and school in modern society in general and goes on to discuss the type of schools and education

Ethiopia needs. In the second book, something of a potential political pamphlet, Haddis Alemayehu puts forward his opinion on the type of government modern

Ethiopia needs for its rapid development.

The main body of the study is divided into three chapters and a conclusion. In chapter one the socio- political milieu of Haddis Alemayehu is scrutinized so as to provide the reader with the background of the author as a person and as an artist. It is hoped that this chapter will enable the reader to see into the circumstances under which Haddis Alemayehu wrote. Further more, this chapter is the place to see why Haddis Alemayehu expressed himself as he did and not otherwise.

In the second chapter, endeavours are made to bring to light how Haddis Alemayehu reacted to the socio-political milieu that engulfed him. His attempts to criticize society—the feudal one in particular—in the social, political, religious and moral spheres are examined.

Chapter three is where the author-critic Haddis Alemayehu is judged for what he really is. The depth of his criticisms, the type of change he aspires after for his country and the solutions he suggests to rectify the ills of society are discussed. And in the concluding part, the salient points raised in the previous chapters are summarized with a brief analytical supplement from the researcher.

Much has been written on Haddis Alemayeh and his works, though in bits and pieces. The writer of this study has tried to scan through all the literature he could lay his hands on concerning Haddis Alemayeh's works to form a fair opinion about this author and to reach a valid conclusion.

Quotations found in the study are mostly from Amharic sources for Haddis Alemayehu writes in Amharic. The researcher has done his best to make translations as close to the original as possible. Furthermore, to let the Amharic/English reader see and appreciate the author's work in the original, the Amharic versions of the quoted materials are included in the research. But the interview with the author is presented in English though the actual interview was in Amharic.

Besides being suggestive to future generations of authors as how to react to their surroundings, this humble study, the researcher feels, might be a kind of rudimentary foundation upon which future critics could build better research methods on Ethiopian literature. It is also the sincere feeling of this researcher that in the process, prospective writers will gain valuable insights from the works of Haddis Alemayehu which are drawn on his wide and rich experiencee

CHAPTER I

HADDIS ALEMAYEHU AND HIS SOCIO-POLITICAL MILIEU

Literature is the reflection, and at the same time the product, of a given society's economic, cultural and socio-political level of development. That is why the artist and his socio-political milieu need to be understood for a fair analysis of particular works and the general appreciation of literature. A glimpse into the norms of the divided and highly stratified feudal Ethiopian society and the back-ground of Haddis Alemayehu will provide a deep insight into his works and his beliefs concerning this society.

Haddis Alemayehu was born in 1906 E.C. and brought up in Gojjam, where he received his traditional church education. After mastering his Zema (religious music), he went to such places as Debre Work, Debre Elias and Dimma Giorghis for his Qene (traditional poetry). As a result of all this training, Haddis achieved a high degree of mastery in the Amharic language. Consequently, the language used in all his works is simple, clear and rhythmic; understood and relished by the old as well as the young. This deep knowledge of the Amharic language, which resulted from his traditional education background, has been acclaimed by fellow Ethiopian classical church students. One of these, a fellow artist and classical church student Mengistu Lemma, has commented:

He owes his great mastery of Amharic language and in refinement in it to³the good classical background he has of Qene poetry.

Upon graduating from Qene school (at the age of twelve), he came to Addis Ababa to pursue his modern education. He first joined the Swedish Mission School, which he attended for two years. He then went to the then Teferi Mekonnen School (now Entoto comprehensive High School) where he stayed for four years.

Until the 1928E.C Italian war of invasion, Haddis had been a teacher, a customs inspector and a school director. When war broke out, he left his post of teaching at Debre Markos and joined the liberation army, of Ras Imiru, Governor General of Gojjam at the time and moved to Shire front in Tigre.

In 1929 E.C. he was captured by the Italians along with Ras Imiru and many other patriots. He was a prisoner of war in Italy for more than seven years. Returning to his country, he worked in the Ministries of Information and Foreign Affairs for a short while. From 1937 E.C. to 1959 E.C. he served his country in different capacities in the foreign service. These included councillor to the Ethiopian embassies in Jerusalem and London, leader of the Ethiopian delegation to the World Telecommunications conference held

³Mengistu Lemma, Loc. Cit.

in Atlantic City (U.S.A) in 1939 E.C., First Secretary to the Ethiopian Embassy in Washington and Ethiopian Ambassador and UN Representative in New York. The year 1958 E.C terminated his long services abroad.

Back at home he was, till 1961 E.C., Minister of National Planning and Development. He was then appointed member of the Senate of Parliament, where he remained till the outbreak of the Revolution. In 1966 E.C., on the request of the people of Gojjam, the Provisional Military Government appointed Haddis Alemayehu to the newly formed Advisory Council. He worked there until 1968 E.C., Ever since, he has been living as a pensioner.

Haddis Alemayehu is a man of two worlds: the traditional and the modern. This advantage enabled him to be an all-round individual, capable of commenting on both worlds. His knowledge is based on first hand information acquired through long and varied experience. The way he goes about imparting his knowledge and experiences makes him "a master at telling a good story in very beautiful Amharic."⁴

The bare knowledge of Haddis alone will not suffice for a critical appreciation of his works. This knowledge by itself will not be enough to throw light on the nature of his criticism. A glimpse, though a brief one, into

⁴Reidulf K. Molvaer, Tradition and Change in Ethiopia (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1980), p.14.

his socio-political milieu will be in Keeping with the work at hand.

Haddis Alemayehu's Ethiopia as reflected in Fikir Esque Mekaber was a highly stratified society, comprising an aristocracy, landed gentry, clergy, soldiers, craftsmen, peasants and slaves. Though we categorically talk of feudal Ethiopia, there are ample proofs to show that there was also domestic slavery during the early rule of Haile Selassie. Besides the author's admission of seeing a slave market in Gojjam in the years immediately before the Italian invasion, Christine Sandford asserts that "there has never been any concealment of the facts of domestic slavery in Ethiopia."⁵

Uncountable brutalities, received by slaves of different countries in different ages, have filled volumes of history books. The fate of slaves in Ethiopia-though the system persisted into the early years of the twentieth century-was not well known to the outside world. Even in the country, only those who are old enough to have witnessed the reality know the details. Haddis Alemayehu is one of these individuals, and as such he has portrayed the lives of the Ethiopian slaves at great length in Fikir Esque Mekaber. Only one who, like Haddis Alemayehu, has lived in a slave-owning society could portray the bitter anguish,

⁵Christine Sandford, Ethiopia Under Haile Selassie (London: J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1946), p.56.

the sordid reality of a system that negates the laws of social nature to the very core. Following is one among the many vivid portrayals by Haddis:

The joy of a slave couple is only during love-making, not after giving birth to a child! A slave couple cannot count on their children when they are tired, sick or old! The motherhood of a slave woman is till she gets pregnant, till she gives birth to her child, till she nurses him with her milk and till the child is able to eat food. After that, she is no more the mother of her child. After that, both mother and child are the property of their owner!⁶

The feudal system which prevailed in Ethiopia upto the second half of this century—right upto the outbreak of the Revolution of 1974— was the worst of its kind. The system was headed by absolute monarchy, surrounded by ignorant feudal lords. This class was a parasitic one, backward and inept in its leadership. Nepotism rather than merit was the basis of self-advancement. Therefore, intrigue—in the palace as well as at the other centers of local power— was a way of economic and political life. The masses who were the sole source of labour were viciously exploited, oppressed and kept in utter ignorance and fear of the ruling class. The church, in as much as it was the ally of the ruling class, saw to it that the masses accepted this state of things as a universal law of nature set by the heavenly powers. The masses had nowhere to turn to, but remained exposed to continuous poverty, disease and untold afflictions.

⁶Haddis Alemayehu as quoted by Fikire Tolossa, p. 195.

This system which was stagnant and dull, deprived the masses of a meaningful life on earth and forced them (with the help of the church) only to long for a better life after death. Coupled with this, the low economic level resulted in a very low culture. The culture of the Ethiopian feudal society was over-burdened by superstitious and awkward religious beliefs detrimental to material as well as spiritual growth of the people at large. Haddis Alemayehu is a product of that society, in as much as he was born and brought up in it. Most of his life was engulfed by that society. As a result, he was able to thoroughly analyse, it, which would have been a difficult task for a person with a shallow knowledge of the land tenure and the relationships it entailed.

What Haddis has striven to bring out in a satirical and humorous way—the plight, abject oppression and exploitation of the peasants—has been succinctly observed by people like George Lipsky and John Markakis, who have thoroughly analysed the land tenure of feudal Ethiopia in their books.

The atrocities of the feudal lords in both Fikir Esque Mekaber and Wo. j. legnaw Dagna are unique expositions. The cruel and inhuman ways in which Fitawrari Meshesha treats his servants, his peasants and his less fortunate fellow men in general is appalling. Fitawarari Dagnachew Farris' greed for land and property, his disrespect for law, his

total independence and arrogance comes out vividly via the artistic pen of Haddis. Nowhere else in the history of Ethiopian literature was this achieved. In these two novels, Haddis has masterfully woven together an artistic narration with a highly documented description of the feudal social structure. In Haddis Alemayehu's works, especially in Fikir Esque Mekaber, "special emphasis is laid on the suppression, exploitation and evils of feudal order."⁷

In the womb of this same feudal system, the germs of capitalism were sprouting. The offspring of the same notorious feudal lords of the old order were starting to turn the feudal system to capitalism by mechanizing the agricultural sector and indulging in commerce and industry. The country began to see exploitation of different caliber. The sharp rise of the price of cash crops on the world market lured these semi-feudal and semi-capitalist exploiters to uproot the peasants and utilize their land for commercial agriculture. This forced multitudes of jobless peasants to swell the ranks of the unemployed.

The city bourgeoisie, who were striving to establish themselves as industrialists, took advantage of the dirt-cheap labour at their disposal to amass huge fortunes. As a result, the gap between the agricultural capitalist

⁷Zerihun Asfaw, "The Literary Styles of Haddis Alemayehu and Baalu Girma" (Unpublished Master's Thesis, Addis Ababa University, June, 1983), p. 11.

and the city industrialist on the one hand, and the poor peasants and factory workers on the other, was so wide that, in reality, the propertied classes and the labouring masses were citizens of the same country in name only. This new and hitherto unseen type of materialistic drive, this limitless greed to amass wealth, which Haddis witnessed in the years immediately before the Revolution, forced him to criticize it vehemently via a diary of one of his characters in Wonjelegnaw Dagna:

ደህነትና ከመጠን ያለፈ ሀብታምነትን የሚያሰራፍ ነገር ደደዳችሁ ስለሆኑ ማህበረ ሰላም አንዲሆኑ ሁለቱም መጥፋት አለባቸው። ደህነትን የሚወሰደው ከመጠን ያለፈ ሀብታምነት ስለሆነ ደህነትን ለማጥፋት አንዲያ ያለውን ሀብታምነት ማጥፋት ያስፈልጋል።

As poverty and excessive wealth are social diseases, both should be avoided for the welfare of society. Since excessive wealth begets poverty, such wealth should be done away with so as to get rid of poverty.⁸

(Wonjelegnaw Dagna, p. 179)

Haddis has never been far from the Imperial court. He knew the court people in and out. He knew about their little feuds, jealousies and unscrupulousness to grasp as much land as possible. As a cabinet minister, he observed the day to day life of government officials. He has come to see how unjust and corrupt they were. Hence, such comments in the mouths of his characters:

⁸Haddis Alemayehu, Wonjelegnaw Dagna (Addis Ababa: Kuraz Publishing Agency, 1974 E.C.), p. 179.

... በዚያ ላይ ... የሾመት አገራቸን ነጭ። ሀ! ሰጭ
መቸሰ... በተሾመበት አገር ሰጭን ባይል አንካ መባሉ
አይቀርም! በየተም ቢሆን ሾም አስቀምጦ የሚበላ የለም!

... On top of that ... it is our land to govern.
Eh! A person ... in a place where he is to govern
though he doesn't ask for, is given all the same!
Nowhere does one eat while an official sits by!⁹

The inhuman treatment doled out to the masses, were
not only by the feudal lords and the government officials.
The position of the Ethiopian kings and their attitudes to-
wards their subjects have been keenly observed by Haddis
Alemayehu:

2/52
P. 275
or P. 265

... የገገሥ ገብር... ሀዘብ ከሰጩት ወይ አንሰሳት ደረጃ
ራሱን ዘቅ አደርጎ ተገፍቶ ተተቶ የሰጩት መብቶችን ብብረን
ሁሉ ተቶ የሚበላ ነገር በልቶ ተገቶ ተደቅዶቶ ለገገሥ የሚገዛ
መሆኑን የሚያሳይበትና ገገሥም ያን አያዩ ደስ የሚሰጥበት ዘዴ
ነጭ!...

... A king's feast... is a means by which subjects
go down to the level of animals, get beaten, for-
feit their human dignity and rights, eat what is
inedible, despised and abused to show their obed-
ience to the king and there by the king in turn
see these and gets satisfaction!...¹⁰

Coupled with the exalted positions Haddis enjoyed,
his western education and diplomatic service put their
unmistakable mark on his outlook in general and his
critical works in particular. As a result, he has been
able to comment on the pros and cons of modern education.

⁹Ibid., p. 189.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 454.

The political satires in his fables are the outcome of a deep political analysis. One of the remarks in his small book, Ethiopia Min Ayinet Astedader Yesfeligatal?, may suffice to show the depth of his political maturity:

ለኢትዮጵያና በጠቅላላም ላለም ሕዝብም ይጠቅማል ተብሎ የሞይ ታ
መንበት፡ አንዱን መንግሥት ገደቶ ሌላውን የሚጠቅም ጠይም በሌላ
አካገገር የሌሎች መሣሪያ አድርጎ የሚያሳይ አቀዋም ከመከተል
መራቅ ሊሆን ይገባል፡፡

Ethiopia should avoid a policy that is not believed to enhance its peace and that of the peoples of the world at large — should not take a side that will benefit one government and hurt another. In other words, it should not take a stand that will show it as a tool of others.

The significance of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, its social, political and economic influence was far-reaching for centuries. What De Lacy O' Leary says about the Ethiopian church is very much true, but it is not the whole truth. According to him:

The history of Abyssinia is mainly that of its church, as the church has steadily held together what has otherwise been a collection of independent nobles, each with his own following and often at war with his neighbours.¹²

Haddis Alemayehu knows better. From his upbringing, traditional church education and social encounters with religion, he knows that the church was what O'Leary says

¹¹Haddis Alemayehu, Ethiopia Min Ayinet Astedader Yasfeligatal? (Addis Ababa: Brehane Selam pp., 1966. E.C.), p. 65.

¹²De Lacy O'Leary, The Ethiopian Church (New Haven: HRHE Press, 1982), P. 7.

and much more. The church has stood by the side of the nobility, landed gentry—the oppressors at large. The church decided the social norms and moral behaviour of its flock. There were no walks of life where the influence of the church was not felt. Literature was no exception.

The weight of centuries of pietistic literature designed to save the erring soul by praising the Good censuring the Bad impose on the author, even the most modern, the obligation to include at least something in his work that will show he is still mindful of tradition.¹³

As Haddis Alemayehu's work is the net result of the social-political milieu of his time, the church's footprint is visible in his works too.

This wide sea__ the socio-political milieu of his time__ that engulfed him and in which he tried to swim to the best of his ability without sinking, was the raw material for his works. Today, an understanding of that milieu should be the basis for any critical appreciation of Haddis Alemayehu's works; the lack of which would result in biased and erroneous conclusions.

¹³Thomas L.Kane, Ethiopian Literature in Amharic (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1975), p. 29.

CHAPTER II

HADDIS ALEMAYEHU'S REACTION TO HIS SOCIO-POLITICAL MILIEU

Different people react to a given situation in different ways; authors are no exceptions. Some authors seem to side with whoever is in power, no matter what his ideology is. They do not pause to consider the fate of the ordinary citizen under the regimes they praise; they let their pens serve the causes that are expedient, not necessarily the right. Others see the reality but strive to hide from it by taking to alcohol or even stopping writing completely.

Haddis Alemayehu does not fall into either camp. He did not turn his back on the light of his people; nor did he try to openly make the feudal-bourgeoisie regime the cause of all the faults. In as far as Haddis is a product of the socio-political milieu of his time, he has reacted to that milieu. His reactions were manifested in the form of criticisms. In order to criticize the society and the regime which was the cause for all the evil practices prevailing in pre-revolutionary Ethiopia, he turned to literature as the medium of his criticism.

Like all regimes of its kind, feudal Ethiopia, was overflowing with innumerable injustices. It was full of ridiculous social norms and mores. The masses were exploited, degraded and treated like beasts of burden. They could not marry above their station. Up to the Italian invasion, the feudal lords of central and Northern Ethiopia, would not tolerate their peasants and slaves dressing in the same type of clothing. We have few living elders who have witnessed ordinary citizens being punished

for brewing "tej", a quality beverage reserved for the sole enjoyment of the ruling class. Until the turn of the century, no self-respecting lord or any member of the upper class let an ordinary citizen go unpunished for not behaving in the "proper manner" while in his presence. So, whom to marry, what to wear, what to drink and how to behave in different situations were dictated to the misery-ridden peasants. Still, there was no time when this absurd state of affairs was placidly accepted by the masses.

The railway workers' strike of 1945, the 1961 palace guards' coup, the rebellion of Gojjam peasants in protest against heavy taxation in 1969 and the movements of progressive forces since 1968 are but a few examples of the relentless ways in which the masses reacted. In short, workers, peasants, soldiers and students have been a thorn in the flesh of the ruling class. With the passage of time, these forces became more than a thorn in the flesh for the exploiters; for it was this sporadic unrest and open rebellions erupting at different times and places that culminated in the popular Revolution of 1974.

Progressive writers who were on the side of the oppressed masses had joined forces in exposing the injustices of the feudal regime. Among these who were indignant at what they witnessed and who resorted to some sort of protest literature is the novelist Haddis Alemayehu. In Debebe Seifu's words:

Haddis Alemayehu thus takes a positive, optimistic and progressive stand and affirms the undying vitality, defiance, ingenuity and militancy of the peasants in their desire to restore the rights they have lost to a ruthless feudal establishment.¹⁴

¹⁴Debebe Seifu, "Profile of the Peasantry in Ethiopian Novels", Proceedings of the 7th International Conference of Ethiopia Studies, Ewen Rubenson, ed. (Addis Ababa: Institute of Ethiopian Studies, 1984), p. 105.

Class struggles are triggered by contradictions and these same contradictions are fertile grounds for the rise of art. The contradictions Haddis witnessed around him gave rise to his artistic creations. Nevertheless, class struggle did not appeal to Haddis Alemayehu. In all his works he seems to favour the Western system of government as opposed to socialist democracy. At times, he even becomes utopian. His opinions contained in his booklet, Ethiopia Min Ayinet Astedader Yasfeligatal?, are evidences to the fact. In the light of the fact that he was pro-Western and utopian, he seems to have turned a critic; but obviously not revolutionary. His criticisms were directed towards the social, political, religious and moral shortcomings he saw around him. We shall now focus on these criticisms,

2.1. SOCIAL CRITICISMS

Haddis Alemayehu reminisces about traditional Ethiopia. At the same time he cannot deny the fact that the culture of the past has been abused by conservative traditional elements. The following daring comment he makes in his novel, Fiker Esque Mekaber, shows what he thinks of the structure of the feudal society in general:

The structure of our society, its order, customs, traditions and laws were not made like a living social system. They were rather made like a lifeless stone wall whose pieces lie upon each other, the ones on top weighing heavily on the ones underneath. And if this continues for a long time, the ones underneath will surely slip out and the whole structure will crumble unless and until¹⁵ a living and humane social order is formed...

¹⁵Haddis Alemayehu as quoted by Fikire Tolossa, pp.191-192

This critical commentary of Haddis Alemayehu, was a warning to the regime of Haile Selassie, but it was not needed at the time. The result was the crumbling of the whole social structure as he predicted. Haddis clearly points out and accepts the inevitability of social changes. The irony of it is, that such an enlightened author attributes the quality of changes - their goodness or badness - to the actions of the members of society during their short stay in that society. So according to Haddis Alemayehu, individuals can determine the destiny of nations. He expresses feelings to this effect time and again, especially in Ethiopia Min Ayinet Astedader Yasfeligatal?. He links the unity and glory of Ethiopia with the existence of the former Emperor.

In his general criticism of society, he does not criticize only those in the upper class. He pinches those in the lower stratum as well. The lavish marriage feasts, the backward custom of consuming everything that belongs to a dead man and leaving his family destitute, were normal phenomena in the feudal society and still are to a certain extent. Haddis ridicules such social norms by bringing them to light thus:

ፋሪ ከዎ ተበት አለት? ጭለትዎ ... ከትናንት ሆኖ
 ጭሰትዎ ሆነች ልዩቼ በንብረት ጭዘዬ አይቸሉም ::
 ያለቸው ወብት የፋሪ ሀብት ከያለበት አየተረለገ አየ
 ወጣ አስኪያልቀው ድረስ አንዲህ አንደዎቻችን ሲበሉ ሲጠጡ
 ጣ ከሌሎች ሁሉ ጋር አየበሉና አየጠጡ ጭልቀሰ ብቻ ነጭ/

As of the day of Farri's death that is... since yesterday, his wife and children have no say on his property. Their right is to eat, drink and cry with all the others as Farri's property is brought along from everywhere and consumed as you see!16

¹⁶ Wonjelegnaw Dagna, p. 267

The social norm prevents the family from doing anything except crying, while their livelihood is consumed by loiterers.

The society that Haddis strives to criticize was divided into two distinct groups. On the one hand there were the propertied class, the "haves" and on the other hand the "have-nots". Though the greater part of his social criticism is devoted to the feudal society, some of it is, however, hurled at capitalism which was in the making towards the final days of Haile Selassie's rule. The sum of these criticisms shows the contempt those with "pure blood" had for the working class. The feudal arrogance that had dominated our society for centuries is exhibited by the conversation between a feudal lord and his wife concerning the marriage of their daughter;

'It's incredible! The ear doesn't refuse to hear!' says Fitawrari Meshesha as he comes from outside.

'What else have you heard today my lord?' asks his wife, Wyzero Teruaynet.

'Kegnazmatch so-and-so asked me for the hand of Seble Wongel for his son.'

'Whose son is Kegnazmatch so-and-so himself?'

'He himself doesn't know his father let alone I!'

'This is an insult!' says Wyzero Teruaynet.'

'Teru, Grazmatch so-and-so asked me to marry him with my daughter!'

'Whose son is he, my lord?'

'His father is not a human being. His father is a farmer!'¹⁷

¹⁷Haddis Alemayehu as quoted by Fikire Tolossa, p.185.

Haddis does not stop at showing the erroneous beliefs these feudal lords had. He wants us to see how narrow their vision and shallow their knowledge was through Gudu Kassa, "the wise fool". Gudu Kassa, who is the spokesman of the oppressed in Haddis Alemayehu's novel, Fikir Esque Mekaber, and the mouthpiece of Haddis himself, unleashes his criticisms on the feudal society in the following manner:

... የኖንተ አጥንትና ደም ከሌሎች ልዩ የሆነበት ስሞን ነፃ? የኖንተ ደም ስትቆይ አይቆም? አያልቅ? አይቀር? የኖንተ ስጋ አይፈረስ? አይበሰብስ? አይተላ? አይገጣም? የኖንተ አጥንት አይነቀዝ? አይሰበር? አፈር አይሆን?

... What makes your bone and blood different from other people's? Doesn't your blood stop when you die? Won't it be finished? Won't you leave it behind? Doesn't it rot? Doesn't it stink? Doesn't your bone decay? Doesn't it break? Doesn't it burn to soil?¹⁸

In spite of such rhetorical questions, their blind arrogance did not let aristocrats accept their less fortunate brothers and sisters as human beings and equals. People like Fitawrari Meshesha tend to forget that peasants, too, have the faculty of hate, love and even thought. They went to the extent of denouncing the manliness of peasants.

ባለገር አይቆም ግንን አሸንፎ ያውቃል? ባለገር ደካማ አይጠቅም
ባለገር ብርቱ ይጠቃል :: በባለገር ላይ አጭህን ግጥም ስጥ
ነፃ ያለበህ :: አጭህ ከጠነከረ ባለገር ታላቅ አያፈጅም ንጉህ
አስከፊ ልታሰቡ ተቸላላህ / ... ባለገር የጭበጨቤ ስያሜ
ይከፍለጭ አቶ አያቆም ይባላል አስከ ተረቱ /

¹⁸Fikir Esque Mekaber, p.119.

Have you seen peasants rebelling and defeating anybody? Peasants like the strong. All you have to do is tighten your hold on them. If you tighten your hold on them, peasants can be milked until your pitcher is full!... The saying goes that peasants might not have anything to eat, but they have never lacked something to pay!¹⁹

The way marriage matches were made in the feudal society was despicable. For these feudal lords, it was a materialistic endeavour, a means of exchanging property. in Fikir Esque Mekaber, Haddis has vividly exposed the shameful bartering Fitawrari Meshesha and Wyzero Teruaynet planned for Seble Wengel. In the feudo-bourgeois Ethiopia, parents aspired for partners who were of "noble birth" and from a well-to-do family for their children.

David Talbot asserts that traditional marriage in Ethiopia is a phenomenon where the social norm dictates that the immediate family decide the fate of the young couple. Haddis Alemayehu, though he does not voice it outright, opposes the vote and veto exercised by the immediate family to close the marital door where and when they find it necessary.²⁰ If and when the match-making was turned down by one of the spouses, it resulted in bitter complaints as is manifested by Sofia's father in Wonjelegnaw Dagana:

...ይህ ባሉን ወይ ወታደራዊን ባንሄይ ያን ጥገረሽ? ተከባ
ረዕ. የሚያስከብረኝ ብዙ የወኮየንንት ልጆች ይህ አ የወኮሽ አይላ
ሽን ለምን ዘቅዷቸው ወይቻ ተገደዋለሽ?

...Why don't you let us go to our graves after seeing you married to your equals? why do you pour your opportunities down the drain, when the sons of officers beg for yourhand?²¹

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 217-218.

²⁰ David A. Talbot, Contemporary Ethiopia (New York: Philosophical Library, 1952), pp.41-42.

²¹ Wonjelagnaw Dagna, p.22.

Haddis did not close his eyes to the abject conditions of prostitution, the slum dwellers and the children of this section of society. In Wonjelegnaw Dagna, he lets us see these revolting conditions through the eyes of Tilahun Feyissa, as the latter saw them while wandering through the streets of Addis Ababa.

The accumulation of wealth, rights and liberty in the hands of the few, Haddis feels, is the cause for the social injustices heaped upon the masses.

ሀብት ተሰብስቦ ባንድ፤ ወይም በጥቂት ቦታ በተከፈለበት ዙሪያ
ደህነት አንጂ ሀብት አይኖርም ። ወብት ተሰብስቦ ባንድ፤ ወይም
በጥቂት ቦታ በተከፈለበት ዙሪያ ገዳታ አንጂ ወብት አይኖርም ።
ነፃነት ተሰብስቦ ባንድ፤ ወይም በጥቂት ቦታ በተከፈለበት ዙሪያ
ባርነት አንጂ ነፃነት አይኖርም / አንዲህ ባለ ባለተስተካከለ፤
ገርበጥባባ ወሰኒት ላይ የቁመ ማህበር ፀንቶ ሊኖር አይችልም ።

There would not be wealth, but poverty where wealth is amassed in the hand of the few; there could not be rights but only obligations around where rights are held by the few; there would not be liberty, but slavery where liberty is enjoyed in plenty by the few! A society built on such an uneven base could not stand firm.²²

Corruption, bribery in particular, is the target of Haddis Alemayehu's criticism time and again. Taking the property of the poor and offering bribes to higher government officials was customary with lower officials and feudal lords like Fitawrari Dagnachew and Fitawrari Meshesha. The masses too, took to giving bribes in cash as well as in kind as a normal order of things. Haddis says of Fitawrari Dagnachew:

... አባቶ የሚያበሉትና የሚያጠፉት ሲሆንም ይገኙ
አባቶ አላነበሩም ። ይገኙ አገር ነበር፤ የኪ ነበር ፤
... አየታረደ ሲበላ ከሰነተው ተርፍ... ለባለፍ
ለታያቸው አንድ የሚሰጡት የላኩላቸው ሰንገራት
ወብቶቻቸው የላላና የባን ወሰናት በዙ ነበሩ ።

²²Ibid., P.179.

... Though he gave the feast, he wasn't the one to provide it. The provider was the whole country; it was Yeki!... The oxen, wethers, sheep and cows that he sent to his benefactors according to their ranks were plenty...²³

This corruption which begets injustices, has been satirized in the fables of Haddis. Through his animal characters, he complains of a world where one toils and the fruits are eaten by someone else.²⁴ The injustices that Haddis saw around him were such that he lets a donkey talk of a confused and confusing world:

እንዳት ያለ ተሰባቢ የሚያሰብት አለም ነው አባባቸው?
በቀንነት የሚያገለገለውን በፍላ መምታት ለመፀፍፀ
ገብስ በጤጤ መስጠት አባባ አንዲህ ያለው ፍርድ ይባላል?

What a confused and confusing world?... beating the one who serves diligently, giving barley with salt to the disobedient; do you call this justice:²⁵

He did not overlook the abuse of power. He shows how petty officials could imprison and torture citizens in private houses. Police stations were torture chambers. We see courts of law in the land as inefficient and utterly corrupt.

Haddis Alemayehu's critical comments on the nature and the type of schools__modern schools __ are very deep and analytical. He claims that the motive behind the composition of Wonjelegnaw Dagna was to portray with words the social system of the time and the problems that the youth that come out of the modern schools face. In Yetimhirtina Yetemaribet Tirgum, a non-fiction work, Haddis Succinctly Asserts his educational philosophy:

²³Ibid., P.305.

²⁴Haddis Alemayehu, Teret Teret Yemeseret (Addis Ababa Brehane Selam P.P., 1948 E.C.) P.9.

²⁵Ibid., P.21.

... በጭራሽና የሚኖርበትን ማኅበር የሚጠቀም ወይም የማይጠቀም የሚሆነው መዘመን ስለሆነ ከቤተሰቡ ቀጥሎ ከተማሪ ቤት በኋላም ከማኅበሩ አንደኛው ያገኘው ትምህርት መልካም ነት ወይም መቸኖ ነት መጠን መሆኑን በምሳሌ ጭምር ለማሰራት ያስፈልጋል ::

...I have tried to show with examples that whether an individual is going to be useful or not to himself and the society in which he lives, is determined by the type of education he gets, first from his family, next from school and finally from the society.²⁶

In relation to the type of schools the country needs he has this to say:

... እነዚህ ዘመናዊ ያን ትምህርት ቤቶች በጭነት የሊት ዋጋ ያላቸው ትምህርት ቤቶች ለመባል የሚችሉት የሚሰጡትን ትምህርት ከሊት የዳያ ማኅበር ታሪክ ከስተዳደሩ ከሥርዓት ከልማታ ከግንኙነት ከሌሎችም ለሊት የዳያ ማኅበር መለዳዊ ከሆኑ ነገሮች ጋር አስማምተው በማኅበሩ ቋንቋ ለመሰጠት ሲችሉ ይመስለኛል ::

I think these modern schools could truly be called Ethiopian schools only if they could teach the history of the Ethiopian society, its administration, its system, its custom, its culture and assimilate these with the other things which are the signs of the Ethiopian society and give them in the language of that society.²⁷

Haddis is of the opinion that an individual's happiness is the happiness of the whole society. Hence, he emphasises the setting of the school programme with the satisfaction of all the members of society in mind.²⁸

2.2. Political Criticisms

The political criticisms of Haddis are subtle as compared to his social criticisms. He does not dare attack the regime and the status-quo outright. He raises issues that cannot be overlooked by any self-respecting critic worthy of the name. For example, the demand for free press or the question of

²⁶ Yetimihirtina Yetemaribet Tirgum (Addis Ababa: Haddis Alemayehu, Artistic Press, 1948 E.C.), P.8.

²⁷ Ibid., P.111.

²⁸ Ibid., P.92.

ages. Haddis Alemayehu emphasises the need for banning censorship had been the demand of all writers throughout the censorship thus:

በዘመናዊ ዓለት የሕግ ጥበቃ የሌለበት አገር ሕዝብና መንግሥት በሌላ ሌላ ጉዳይ ስለሚገኙ ሌሎችም ጉዳዮች ላይ ሊተባበሩ አይችሉም።

In a modern world where there is no free press, the people and the government cannot understand each other and cooperate with each other.²⁹

Lack of free press has been the curse of the peoples of the Third World. For most, it still is. As a result, the people were not aware of the duties and obligations of a government and citizens.

Haddis says that the knowledge that government is the obedient servant of the people will help in knowing the limit of the obligations of both government and people. It will also help in clearly understanding the rights of both parties.

The overriding opinion of Haddis in relation to people and government is that the latter should be in the hands of the former. This, he says, must be the case in any form of government.

... መንግሥት ምንም ዓይነት ጥቅም ላይ ሳይውል በሕግ ስር ይጠራ። ሌሎች ጉዳዮች ላይ ስለሚገኙ ጉዳዮች ላይ ሊተባበሩ አይችሉም።

...What so ever form a government might have, or in whatever name it might be called, power should always be based on the consent of the whole people.³⁰

Haddis opposes the notion that states, "except carrying out the orders of officials, the people don't say it is their right to question the authenticity of the order."³¹

²⁹Ethiopia Min Ayinet Astedader Yasfeligatal? P.49-50.

³⁰Ibid., P.9.

³¹Wonjelegnaw Dagna, P.336.

His long years in the diplomatic service gave Haddis an insight into the danger of taking sides as far as great powers are concerned. He goes on to the extent of proclaiming that Ethiopia should not fall into any ideological block, According to him, this is a luxury in which countries like Ethiopia cannot afford to indulge. In his pamphlet-like book, Ethiopia Min Aynet Astedader Yesfeligatal?, he says:

... የምሥራቅ ገዢ ወይም የምዕራብ የመንግሥት ሥሪ ተጥ ምሳሌ አደርገው መከተል የሚፈልጉ ኢትዮጵያውያን ከሰባ ጥር ጋር ስለሚደሰጡ ይነቅሩት ይሆናል ::

... Those Ethiopians who want to embrace the Eastern or the Western systems of government might criticize it (the author's opinion) because it does not agree with their wishes.³²

The end of the second World War saw Haddis in New York, the site of the newly formed United Nations. He had witnessed the birth of independence of some nations and at the same time the coming into being of a new type of colonialism__ neo-colonialism. He satirizes this fact beautifully in his fable about the friendship of cats and mice. Besides the economic drain they inflict on the mice, the cats strive to control the minds of the mice youth.

በዲሞክራሲያዊ ግንባታው ያለው ሕግና የደግሞ አገር ሲገነባ ላይ የተሰጠው የደግሞ ሕዝብ ተራክና የዘረገ ጥሪት በየጊዜው የተነሳት ገናና ምጥ የደግሞ ነገሥታት የተገኙበት ገን የሞረ ሜዳ ምጥና ያገኘባቸውን ደሴት ይጠሩ ሆኖ ::

The children of mice who enrolled into the new schools started to study the geography of the cats' country, the history of the great people of cats and the purity of its race. They learn about the mighty kings of the cats, the battle fields where they fought and the victories they scored.³³

³²Ethiopia Min Aynet Astedader Yesfeligatal?, P.3.

³³Teret Teret Yemeseret, P.39.

Haddis is of the opinion that what is called economic colonialism, social colonialism or cultural colonialism is a social system that is imported from abroad and forced on the people of a given country.³⁴ He has also touched upon how the disagreement between the big powers benefits the weaker ones. In a fable where two wolves quarrel over the sharing of the booty, Haddis drives his point home. The fortunate prey whose life is spared as a result of the disagreement escapes with these final words:

... ዛሬ እርስበርሳችሁ የተረረዳችሁት ቀሰላችሁ እስኪ
ዳን እኔን ጠክላክያ ቀንድ እበቅላለሁ ::

... Until the wounds that you have inflicted on each other today heal, I, too, might grow a horn to defend myself with!³⁵

That was Ethiopia in 1941.

2.3. Religious Criticisms

Haddis Alemayehu is a religious man who is a follower of the Orthodox Church. But he is disillusioned by what he sees. He lets Gudu Kassa voice his grievances in Fikir Esque

Mekaber:

እየጸልህ / ቤተ እገዛአብሔርን እንደነዚህ ላሉት ሸፍ ቸፍ
እንደነዚህ ላሉት ዘራፊያት የሽ ሀነቸ / ... ታዲያ ከነዚህ
ጋር ጠላብር ተኛ ሆኖ በንድ ስጦ እገዛአብሔርን ጠየሩት በተቀደ
ሰጡ ስጦ ጭፊዝ አይደለም? እየጸልህ / ይህ ነጭ ከጸጸላት ቤተ
እገዛአብሔር ደራ ቀኘ / ...

You see! Our church has become a shelter for such outlaws and robbers! ... Isn't it a mockery on God to collaborate with such people and call His sacred name? There you are! This is what has separated me from the church I love!³⁶

³⁴ Wonielegnaw Dagna, P.3.

³⁵ Teret Teret Yemeseret, P.12.

³⁶ Fikir Esque Mekabir, P.428.

The contempt Haddis has for the clergy-Ethiopians as well as foreigners- is manifested in his works time and again. He portrays them as money-lovers who could be manipulated and used as tools for crooked ends.³⁷ The manner in which Haddis describes the actions of Aba Tekle Haimanot is proof enough for the utter disgust he has for our clergy:

ሀብተሽ ሮጣ ራት አስከታዎባ ድረስ አባ ተክለ ሃይዳኖት ሁለት ብርሌ ጠጅ ጠጥተው ሶስተኛውን ይዞቱ ነበር :: ራት በላተው አስከታዎች ስድስት ብርሌ ጠጅና በተለቀ ወለኪያ ሶስት አረቆ ጠጥተው ሰከረኛ ተነስተው ደቡባዊውን አገደለበት ይዞቱ ኑ ሆይ ::

Until Habtish runs out and brings supper, Aba Tekle Haimanot has drunk two "brilles" of "tej" and was holding the third in his hand. By the time he has finished supper he has drunk six "brilles" of "tej" and three glasses of "arake" and was so drunk that he got up and started singing with his goat-skin on.³⁸

Haddis Alemayehu portrays Aba Mogesse in such a way that the latter becomes a representative of the whole clergy. Aba Mogesse has been endowed with all the repulsive traits that should be abhorred. He is led in any direction by whoever fills his stomach.³⁹ Aba Mogesse denies respect to those who deserve it by virtue of their old age. He claims that those whom God has respected and created differently are respected beginning at conception.⁴⁰ The sum of Aba Mogesse's philosophy, which Haddis implies is the philosophy of the church, is put thus:

ጌቶች ያሉት ሁሉ አንድ አንኮዮ ስተት የለውም ሁሉም አጭነት ነው :: አገዛዥነቱ ጌታን ከደሀ ገዢን ከተገዢ ለይቶ ሲሰራ ጌታው ገዢው ፍርድ ቢያገድል ደሀ ቢበደል ጠያቂው ወንገሥት ከዚያም በላይ አገዛዥነቱ ነው አንጂ ደሀ አባት ከጭለት አለፍ የጭተዳደርበትን ሕግ አገገኛ ረረጁ ሆኖ አያጭቅድ :: . . .

³⁷ Wonjelegnaw Dagna, P.26.
³⁸ Fiker Esque Mekabir, P.483.
³⁹ Ibid., P.220.
⁴⁰ Ibid., P.194.

Every word that my lord said is true. In the order of things, when God created the rich and the poor, the ruler and the ruled, it was on the tacit understanding that the wronged poor has to appeal to the government and above that to God. Beyond appeal, the poor has never set rules and regulations and has never been called on for decisions....⁴¹

The laws of social nature and the word of God have been tampered with by the clergy to serve the wishes of the well-to-do. Haddis Alemayehu's religious criticisms are intended to point out the role the Ethiopian church played in preparing the minds of the masses to accept their fate without qualm. This condition has been keenly observed and duly satirized.

2.4. Moral Criticisms

The moral aspect of Haddis Alemayehu's criticism does not come out as strongly as his other criticisms. His works are not didactic, and as such do not intend to teach. Nevertheless, a keen observer cannot help noticing the moral essence embodied in all these works. Though there are moral lessons in all his creative works, they are abundant in his fables. Molvaer says, of his fables, that "most of them point a moral, often about the use and abuse of power."⁴²

At times he moralizes in such a way that we barely feel the fact. His technique is to let his characters raise the questions that Haddis himself likes to raise. He also lets the characters answer the questions that he himself would have answered, had he been asked. There is an instance in Fikir Esque Mekaber, where Bogale Hebratu soliloquizes:

⁴¹Ibid., P.273.

⁴²Tradition and Change in Ethiopia, P.14.

ዘመት ማለት ስለሚለው ስት ጋር ገብረ ዝማዔ መሰረት ትቻ
 ነጭ? አይደለም :: ሲያገቡ ሲፈቱ መኖርም ከዘመት ይቆራረሱ ::
 በተቀደሰው በተባረከው ጋብቻ ስም ስት አ የለ የወጡ ሲዳገቡና
 ሲፈቱ መኖር ከዘመት የተለየ አይደለም ::

Does adultery mean making sexual intercourse with a woman one is not married to? No. Marrying and divorcing repeatedly is as good as adultery. To go on changing women in the sacred name of marriage is by no means different from adultery. 43

Haddis emphasises the need for respect due to parents, old poor or uneducated. He also stresses the need for honouring trust and the bond of friendship. In the fable about a master who abused the trust of a loyal dog, he strives to point out the outcome of such a breach of loyalty. Greed, too, and what it entails, is stressed over and over again in many of his stories in Teret Teret Yemeseret. The fables about the two hungry wolves and the one about the friendship between the kingdom of mice and rats are good examples of the fact.

Haddis Alemavehu has great respect for human beings. He thinks that what makes a human being different from an animal is the former's ability to control his feelings, which animals could not do. In Bogale Mebratu's soliloquy:

በጭ ከገሰሰ የሚለይበት ራሱን ሰሰትን ሰሰገነትንና አነሱን
 የወሰሰሱትን ከገሰሰት ጋር የሚገራ ጥፍን ባህሪያቸ ለወገታት
 በጭ ቻሉ ነጭ ::

What makes a human being different from an animal is his ability to control his feelings of hunger, greed, lust and the like-characteristics that he shares with animals. 44

His moral criticisms, artistically handled, could have given the impression of preaching in the hands of lesser writers.

⁴³Fiker Esque Mekabir, P.25.

⁴⁴Ibid., P.24.

CHAPTER III

THE EXTENT OF HADDIS ALEMAYEHU'S CRITICISM

The two previous chapters have attempted to reveal Haddis Alemayehu's socio-political milieu and his reactions to that milieu. From his reactions in particular, one can see with whom the sympathies of Haddis lie. His works are clear pointers as to the kind of critic he is. Beyond doubt he is a social critic who relentlessly exposed the plight of the oppressed masses.

Haddis might be a social critic, but nobody can claim that he is a socialist in the true sense of the word. He is not a Marxist who strives for radical change. Socialism and its benefits for the working-class do not appeal to him. As it is evident from the author's own words in the interview with the researcher, Haddis considers revolutions and popular uprisings as chaotic and unfortunate incidents in the history of a country.

True, he has scorned the past feudal society. He has ceaselessly condemned the church's role__ its bowing to the propertied class and complete neglect of the welfare of the masses. In short, he has vividly portrayed the abject conditions of the time.⁴⁶ But he stopped there. Though we cannot deny him the credit for his whole-hearted hatred of the old feudal system his substitute for that

⁴⁶Realism and Amharic Literature, p. 207.

hated system puts a question mark on Haddis Alemayehu. The vague way in which he writes about the future society reminds one of what Lu Hsun has observed in relation to a similar situation in China:

A man may hate the old society, but all he has is hate — no vision of the future. He may clamour for social reforms, but if you ask what sort of society he wants, it is some unrealizable utopia.⁴⁷

Haddis Alemayehu's pamphlet-like book on the type of government Ethiopia needs, is an apt example of the haziness of his vision of the future society. In this same book, he seems to have concocted a sort of magic formula which he feels will transform Ethiopia to a developed country within ten years.⁴⁸ Even today, he is adamant on the point. He openly argues that the new transitional government which is to perform the "miraculous" feat should neither be a model of Western democracy nor that of socialist republics. It is going to be Haddis Alemayehu's own creation, with the monarchy — symbol of oppression and feudalism on the top. Nothing can be more unrealizable and utopian than such a notion.

Haddis Alemayehu, who in Fikir Esque Mekaber implies that, for the masses, the king is the symbol of degradation contradicts himself in Ethiopia Min Aynet Astedader Yasfelgatal? and tries to show the Emperor — Haile Selassie —

⁴⁷ Lu Hsun, "Some Thoughts on our Literature", Marxists on Literature, David Craig, ed. (Penguin Books Ltd., 1975), P. 396.

⁴⁸ Ethiopia Min Aynet Astedader Yasfelgatal? p.4.

as the centrifugal force of Ethiopia. He openly propagates the half century old belief that without Haile Selassie Ethiopia would be doomed:

ንጉሥ ነገሥቱ ከኢትዮጵያን ሁሉ የመሆን ሰዎች ከብር ያለባቸው፤
ከብር ተባብሮ አቋማቸው ባሰተገደረ ላይ እንደሚለዩባቸው የገለጹት
ከፍሎቻቸው አቋም የሚለዩባቸው ለኢትዮጵያ ነፃነት፤ ለገደባትና
ለገናና ከብር ዋጋ ሆኖ ሆነው የሚኖሩ ይሆናሉ፡፡

The Emperor will have the greatest respect of all Ethiopians, his respectability and position does not waver like that of the changing political groups; and will remain a symbol of Ethiopia's existence, its unity, its glory and respect. 49

But Haddis has outlived the despotic rule of the monarchy to become a living witness to the fact that without Haile Selassie Ethiopia still exists. And today the country's unity, respect and glory have been more enhanced than it has ever been in its long history.

The stand Haddis takes in the confrontation between the alleged "Rebel" or peasant leader Abeje Belew and Fita-wrari Meshesha is an instance where in the extent of his criticism can be further measured. Molvaer who has keenly observed the fact, puts it like this:

In Fəkr əska "makabar, Haddis Alamayyahu gives a rather vague impression of a radical peasants' leader who leads them in determined, even violent, opposition to oppressive landlords.50

49 Ibid. p. 34.

50 Tradition and Change in Ethiopia, p. 184.

His portrayal of Abeje Belew is half-hearted. He does not dare to show this noble hero with the colour and grandeur he deserves as a true leader of the oppressed peasants. The author glosses over the question of right and wrong concerning the actions of Abeje and his peasant followers. He does not let Abeje voice his opinion liberally as is the case with his other characters like Gudu Kassa in Fikir Esque Mekaber or Tilahun Feyissa in Woljolegnaw Dagna. It could be that Haddis has no strong opinions about Abeje Belew. He does not want to make Abeje a real hero and a true leader of his fellow peasants. Such an admission is too much even for the "liberal" Haddis.

This author's lack of conviction has greatly impaired the plot mechanism and the plausibility of the whole story in his novels. In Fikir Esque Mekaber, for example, it could have been more plausible had Fitawrari Meshesha died on the battle field while fighting with the peasants. This, of course, could have had a serious repercussion on Haddis Alemayehu. Because he dared not give the peasants victory over the landlords, or because of his own conviction that peasants could rebel but never really win, he killed Fitawrari Meshesha and his wife under shady circumstances. He did not want to kill Fitawrari Meshesha on the battle field; that would have been an outright victory for the oppressed. At the same time, Haddis does not want to imply that those who rebel against the social order are bound to fall as satan did because he tried to be the

equal of God.⁵¹

That is typical of Haddis Alemayehu's appeasement policy of both classes__ the oppressed and the oppressor. Even to say he is an opportunist who has sacrificed his principles for expediency would not be an exaggeration. Haddis is not the only critic of the past society and regime. Others have tried to criticize that society and the regime at large. These critics were too blunt to survive the censorship and the physical threats from the secret police and members of the criticized class. What makes Haddis different from these critics is the tactful way in which he went about his criticisms.

So, one thing can be said about Haddis; that is, he was very careful in his criticisms. He knew whom to criticize with impunity and how far to go with it. Molvaer has this observation to make:

Careful in his criticisms, Haddis Alamayyahu does not let Bazzabbah arrive at any definite conclusion about the cause of his plight nor that of society, but the reader is not likely to blame it all on God. Social criticism is often voiced in such indirect ways, least in the literature about life in the capital.⁵²

These indirect way of criticising, above all, were the "secret" of Haddis Alemayehu's survival, in spite of the

⁵¹John Markakis, Ethiopia: Anatomy of Traditional Polity (Addis Ababa Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 103.

⁵²Molvaer, op. Cit., p. 190.

⁵³Ibid., p. 31.

apparently ruthless antagonism of the past regime. In Fikir Esque Mekaber, for example, we are made aware of a vague royal presence at a royal banquet, but it is managed in such a way that no clear image emerges.⁵³

Haddis Alemayehu's defence of his stand concerning this glossing over and giving vague impressions is to the harsh nature of the censorship. In an interview with the researcher, the author admits to having purposely made the setting of the story in Fikir Esque Mekaber appear to be in pre-Haile Selassie Ethiopia. In fact, the story seems to have taken place somewhere around the turn of the century. This fact, according to the author, had misled the authorities of the time (including the Emperor) into believing that in Fikir Esque Mekaber he was condemning the old type of feudal atrocities which since the time of Haile Selassie has by implication improved. It might be because of this assumption, the author says, that he was awarded the Haile Selassie I Foundation's prize for literature in 1962 E.C.

One can conclude, then that Haddis used an appealing technique when and where he felt he has gone a little bit too far in his criticisms. He also takes great pains to make his criticisms only in general terms, like criticizing the church, the feudal society, the judicial system, etc. Never specifically. That is why at times he glosses over incidents where deeper perspective is due. Still, we cannot deny him the credit for boldly touching upon slum life, prostitution and socialization of land - touchy

issues of the time.

Some readers of Haddis Alemayehu's works are of the opinion that he is a dedicated socialist who believes in the common prosperity of the Ethiopian masses. A close look reveals that this is a vague utopian wellwishing. The following is one of the many blurred pictures we get about equal prosperity:

ሰጦ ራሱን ለመቻል የሚፈለገው ሀብት የተባረከ ስለሆነ ልንገኝ
ይገባል፤ ከዚያ ላይ የሚፈለገው ሀብት ገን ለሌሎች ራሳቸውን
እንዳይቸሉ መከላከያ ስለሆነ በሙሉ ሀይላቸን ልንቃጠው ይገባል!

The wealth that a man needs to support himself is sacred and we ought to approve of it; but extra wealth he requires is wealth that prevents others for supporting themselves; hence we ought to oppose it with all our might!⁵⁴

The amount of wealth__ be it from salary or land property__ that enables a man to support himself is not specified. By deliberately making himself vague. Haddis seems to play a dual role. On one hand, he does not want to imply that he is an out-and-out communist who wants to do away with private property. That might have discredited him in the ruling circle. On the other hand he clamours for restriction on the amassing of wealth without daring to set the limit. He did not want to lose favour

⁵⁴Wonjelegnaw Dagna, p. 179.

with either the propertied class or the destitute masses. He found it easy and safe to hurl such ambiguous opinions every now and then.

There is also one glaring fact that restricts Haddis Alemayehu from being a fullfledged socialist critic. He is an idealist. He himself makes no secret of it. Despite this fact, however, he has been able to successfully reflect life realistically in all his creative works. Fikre Tolossa's comment on this issue is very apt:

The history of world literature has known many good writers who, despite their idealism, have reflected life realistically. The author of "Fiker Isque Mekaber" is one of these writers.⁵⁵

⁵⁵Fikire Tolossa, Loc. Cit.

C O N C L U S I O N

For over two decades, that is, since the publication of his first novel, Fikir Esque Mekaber, Haddis Alemayehu has been one of the most talked and written about authors in the country. The socio-political milieu of Haddis Alemayehu was such that it enabled him to acquire a wide knowledge about the decadent society of Ethiopia as well as the new semi-feudal and semi-capitalist society which was in the making in the last few years before the popular Revolution of Ethiopia.

His background of traditional church education along with modern education is what helped Haddis to give us a comparative analysis of both cultures—the traditional Ethiopian culture and the modern Western one. His traditional church upbringing also helped him to reflect the role of the Orthodox church in the political, social, cultural and spiritual life of the masses. His long experience in the foreign service too, has elevated his political and modern views in general.

Members of the older generation—those who knew life as it was before the Italian invasion—like his works for the very fact that his presentation of the grim realities somehow seems to satisfy their nostalgic craving for "the good old days". The young generation applauds Haddis and his work, on the assumption that he is the best critic-author the country has ever produced.

A deeper look into his works reveals that they are controversial. What he says at one place is seen to be contradicted in another as is the case in Wonjelegnaw Dagna, where he condemns the amassing of wealth and at the same time preaches of the sacredness of property.⁵⁷ His works are witnesses to his lack of a firm stand and clear ideological conception. In regard to what type of change and society Haddis seeks, it is succinctly summarized by Zerihun Asfaw. Zerihun observes that "Haddis runs for an establishment of a new system based on the old."⁵⁸ He wants to retain the whole old system. But even the type of establishment that he wants to build on the old system does not come out clearly in any of his works.

Though Haddis has his own weaknesses as a social critic, he has reacted to his socio-political milieu by exposing the grim realities of the past semi-feudal and semi-capitalist society of Ethiopia. He has shown his reactions by criticising the feudal society, the Orthodox church and the despotic monarchy. These criticisms which were directed in the form of social, political, religious and moral criticisms were the medium through which he tried to expose the shortcomings of the past regime.

The extent of Haddis Alemayehu's criticisms is limited in scope. To begin with, he is an idealist with a hazy vision of the type of a system to replace the one he condemns. He

⁵⁷Haddis Alemayehu, Loc. Cit.

⁵⁸"The Literacy Styles of Haddis Alemayehu and Baalu Girma" p. 13.

is also a very cautious critic who knows whom to criticize and how far to go in his antagonisms of the ruling class. Despite the fact that Haddis is considered in certain quarters as a dedicated socialist, he is no more than a well-wishing utopian.

Haddis Alemayehu's one worthwhile contribution is that, like Charles Dickens, he has succeeded in exciting our sympathy on behalf of the suffering masses. Though the causes for mass suffering and the solutions for it are not beyond the understanding of Haddis, he seems to have deliberately made himself vague instead pinpointing the solution. Of course, that would have brought about the fate of the other outspoken individuals like Asheber G/Hiwot, Asaminew G/Wold and Abbe Gubegna on Haddis too.

At no time does he admit that the feudal system with the despotic monarchy at the head was the underlying cause for the backwardness of the nation and the miserable conditions of its working people. He deliberately avoids praising the monarchy; but he does not condemn it either, in spite of the glaring realities. In this regard at least he is better off than Sylvia Pankhurst who referred to Haile Selassie as "guardian of education, pioneer of progress, leader of his people in peace and war."

Haddis Alemayehu's silence on the downfall of the feudal regime, and the relatively inferior novel he produced on Haile

⁵⁹Sylvia Pankhurst, Ethiopia, a Cultural History (London, 1975), (front cover page).

Selassie's Ethiopia, years after the downfall of Haile Selassie, point towards one thing only—he did not expect this kind of a Lu Hsun and his comment on Chinese writers under similar conditions:

out There have been cases in China of writers who look forward to revolution but who fall silent once the revolution comes. As things turned out differently and found the realities unpalatable, they felt no urge to write.⁶⁰

So the same Haddis who was able to vividly portray the living conditions of the masses and who hinted at some sort of change in the face of the ruthless censorship, declined to voice his opinions one way or the other concerning the ongoing revolution.

Haddis Alemayehu's dissatisfaction with the change in the country stems from his idealistic and utopian conceptions in regard to change. The type of change he wished for Ethiopia was that which could be brought about in a very gradual process without uprooting the traditionally established system. The radical and swift revolution of 1974 was simply a thing beyond his expectation and desire. As a result, he lost the urge to write. The materialistic world outlook clashed with his idealistic one, for "Haddis Alemayehu is an objective idealist."⁶¹

It is then difficult, if not impossible, to categorize Haddis under either the radical or the reactionary camp. He should be appreciated for the fact that he is sensitive to the social problems that he raises, however, are questionable.

⁶⁰Marxists on Literature, pp. 396 - 397.

⁶¹Fikire Tolessa, Loc. Cit.

Though he is an idealist whose revolutionary contributions are limited, the fact that he has revealed the objective realities of the feudal past with striking vividness makes Haddis Alemayehu a cornerstone in the literary history of Amharic.

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APPENDIXES

A P P E N D I X A

An Interview with Ato Haddis Alemayehu

Q. Until the outbreak of the popular Revolution of 1966 E.C., no artist, you being an exception, has dared to expose the naked sordid realities of the feudal society directly. How do you account for this apathy on the part of our writers?

A. I am afraid I cannot claim that I was the only writer to point out the existing realities of the old feudal society. Countless others have directly tried to expose it over the years.

 If there was apathy on the part of our writers, which I am reluctant to admit, the cause could be attributed to sensorship. It used to be rumoured that very few writers got back more than one fourth of their original manuscripts after the censors were through—rewritten at that. Even after the work had somehow passed the censorship safely, legal or illegal actions against the writer could not be ruled out. What else can discourage a writer more than this?

Q. You were an official of the former government until its downfall. What was the "secret" of your survival after touching upon so many sensitive issues in your daring novel, Fikir Esque Mekaber?

A. First of all, I did not write Fikir Esque Mekaber, nor did I expose the gross injustices of the feudal past in my capacity as a member of the former government. I just put down in that book what I knew of feudal Ethiopia. I honestly felt it my duty as any ordinary Ethiopian to share my knowledge with the present generation.

The so called "secret" of my survival, I think, is quite obvious. Fikir Esque Mekaber deals with the feudal society and most of the malpractices mentioned in the novel, were at least theoretically non-existent after the Italian occupation. The Emperor felt that the credit for these abolitions goes to him. Moreover, my setting the story somewhere towards the turn of the century misled some people, the Emperor included, into assuming that I was trying to contrast the "dark" feudal Ethiopia with the "golden" rule of Haile Selassie. Had Wonjelegnaw Dagna, which is about Haile Selassie's Ethiopia, been published at the time, one could have told a different tale.

Q. Was there anything that happened to you or your work Fikir Esque Mekaber, after it reached the public?

A. My first novel, Fikir Esque Mekaber was received with mixed feelings. Some praised it and said it was good piece of creative work; others looked upon it as a kind of subversive activity solely designed to sow the seed of discontent among the innocent peasantry.

Apparently it seems that the people who counted, along with the Emperor, looked on it with favour and the Haile Selassie I Trust Foundation bestowed on me the 1962 E.C. prize for literature. That was about all that happened to me or my work.

Q. The setting of both, Fikir Esque Mekaber and Wonjelagnaw Dagna, is feudal Ethiopia. The former, published during the reign of Haile Helassie, hurls abuses on the decadent society and attacks it bitterly while the latter, published much later after the Revolution, tends to be somewhat mild. What are the reasons?

A. The question of Fikir Esque Mekaber being bitter in its attack on the feudal society and that of Wonjelegnaw Dagna being mild is relative. For one thing, unlike Fikir Esque Mekaber whose setting is pre-Haile Selassie, Wonjelegnaw Dagna, set in Haile Selassie's Ethiopia had to be mild if I were to get it published which was my aim at the time. Secondly, I cannot for one deny the big change that I observed between the Ethiopia of Fikir Esque Mekaber and the one under the later years of Haile Selassie. These changed conditions, though some find it very difficult to admit, have forced me to make my tone a little bit mild.

Q. What was the significance of the publication of

your second novel, Wonjelegnaw Dagna, after seven years of revolutionary struggle?

A. As I have clearly pointed out in the preface of the afore-mentioned book, the composition of Wonjelegnaw Dagna was before the Revolution. For a number of reasons its publication had to wait till after the Revolution.

It was my intention to get it published without alterations made on my original idea. This, I think, has made the book in general and the ideas expressed in there in particular, look incompatible with the present realities. But it is not so. As to the significance of the work and its publication, I leave the judgement to my audience: present and future.

Q. It is evident that you abhor exploitation of man by man. You have also made it clear in your works that you wish to see a strong and prosperous Ethiopia. How is it that you, who have been exposed to modern influence so early in life, did not realise and even tacitly suggest that socialism is the only road towards people's progress and prosperity?

A. I admire those imaginative science-fiction writers who have a wide scope of imagination. On my part, I cannot talk about things which I have not experienced. I tried, in a way, to point out the ways in which the masses of Ethiopia could achieve what others have achieved

in the shortest possible time.

Ethiopia Min Aynet Astedader Yasfeligatal? is a living example. The politics, the rule of socialism, Western democracy or what ever you might think up, is a luxury that our hungry, illiterate and backward people could not afford. The choice of the type of government to represent them should best be left to the masses themselves where and when they are ready for it and not forced upon them. Our society, I feel, is not yet ready for that.

Q. In your pamphlet-like-book, Ethiopia Min Aynet Astedader Yasfeligatal? you imply that the 1953 E.C. coup was uncalled for and that it was a rebellion that has left a black spot on our history. Do you still hold the same opinion?

A. The movement of 1953 E.C. cannot be called a coup in the real sense of the world. If we have to call it a coup at all, it was an abortive palace coup led by a handful of aimless, and disorganized officers. God alone knows where they would have gone from there had they been successful, for they had no objectives to be guided by. Hence, my little pamphlet, Ethiopia Min Aynet Astedader Yasfeligatal?, which was presented to the Emperor but could not be published at the time. To be honest with myself, I still look upon that movement as an anarchic and shameful rebellion as I did at the time.

Q. Based on the present objective realities, what do you think would have been the feasibility of what you have pointed out in your pamphlet, had it been carried out?

A. I wish not to base our discussion on hypothetical premises. But to answer your question, I do not see any reason why we could not have had a much more advanced and prosperous Ethiopia, provided, of course, the ten-year plans were put into practice diligently.

Q. You have beyond doubt fulfilled your responsibility of exposing and laying bare the drawbacks of feudal Ethiopia—the society as well as the regime.

As a conscious and conscientious artist, how do you rate our Amharic writers who have published creative works after the Revolution, form and content wise?

A. The statement about fulfilling my responsibility of exposing the short comings of the old feudal society is more than I deserve. We have produced conscientious artists after the Revolution as before it. As a result, I have nothing but respect for artist like Abe Gubegna and Dagnachew Worku for their works before the Revolution. When we come to the creative works done after the Revolution, the novels of Baalu Girma, Berhanu Zerihun and Tadele Gebre Hiwot are superb Amharic works of art which are unparalleled so far in form as well as in content.

Q. Drama is said to be suitable for satirical works of art. Why didn't you adapt this genre for your social criticism?

A. I readily agree with the suitability of drama for satirical work. In fact when I first started writing, it was in a drama form. A satirical play I produced around 1936 E.C. had earned me quite a bit of fame at the time. Somehow, in my later works I resorted to novel writing. I really cannot say whether the shift was fortunate or not.

Q. Besides your five published works to date, do you have other works for publication in the future? If so, are they set on the Revolution?

A. I have one novel which I hope will come out of the publishing house very soon. Once again, this work which should have come before Wonjelegnaw Dagna is set on pre-revolutionary Ethiopia. Almighty willing, I will endeavour to publish my memoirs. I am afraid I have no time or energy left for a new creative work, revolutionary or otherwise.

APPENDIX B

The Author's Autobiography in His Own Handwriting

ገበያ 1953-54 ዓ.ም. መጀመሪያ ጊዜ ለጋራ ገቢ ለተገባላት መገንባት ለገንባ
ሃገራዊ ጉዞ ለመገንባት ለጋራ ገቢ ለተገባላት መገንባት ለገንባ
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መጀመሪያ ለጋራ ገቢ ለተገባላት መገንባት ለገንባ
ሆኖ ለጋራ ገቢ ለተገባላት መገንባት ለገንባ
ሚሰጡት ገበያ 1961 ዓ.ም. ለጋራ ገቢ ለተገባላት መገንባት ለገንባ
ገንባት ለጋራ ገቢ ለተገባላት መገንባት ለገንባ
"የመጠን ገቢ ለጋራ ገቢ ለተገባላት መገንባት ለገንባ
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ሆኖ ለጋራ ገቢ ለተገባላት መገንባት ለገንባ

DECLARATION

The thesis is my original work and has not
been presented for a degree in any other University.

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Place ILS (AAU)
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