

Addis Ababa University
Institute of Language Studies
Department of Foreign Languages and Literature
(School of Graduate Studies)

Existentialism in the Selected Creative Works of Adam Reta

By: Aklilu Dessalegn

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By: Aklilu Dessalegn

Advisor: Melakneh Mengistu (PhD)

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Approved by Board of Examiners:

Signature

Advisor

Examiner

Declaration

I, the undersigned, declare that this thesis is my original work and has not been presented for a degree in any other university. All sources used in writing the thesis have been duly acknowledged.

Name: Aklilu Dessaegn

Signature: _____

Place: Institute of Language Studies, Addis Ababa University

Date of Submission: June, 2010

Advisor: Melakneh Mengistu (PhD)

Advisor's Signature: _____

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Abstract

Adam Reta, who has been writing for the last quarter of the century, has published a novel and three collections of short stories and novellas. Nevertheless, the critical attention given to his works was very insignificant. The author's relationship with existentialism, however, is much stronger and conspicuous. Thus, the study aims at discussing the tenets of existentialism found in the creative works of Adam Reta, which eventually gear up to elucidate his overall existentialist philosophical thinking as the term existentialism applies to a bunch of philosophers, whose philosophical views reveal their differences rather than their similarities. To this end, the philosophy of existentialism and its concepts are employed to analyze the selected works of the author; his novel, *Giracha Kachiloch*, and six other narratives from his anthologies. The researcher has also employed descriptive and textual criticisms as methods. From the analyses and interpretations made, the writer of this study found out that the characteristic tenets of existentialism are shared by Adam Reta; but with his own differences in relation to the philosophy of the proponents of existentialism. Absurdity, alienation, freedom of choice and responsibility, authenticity and inauthenticity, death and repetition are among the major ones. Thus, Adam Reta is found to be a literary existentialist, who achieves in turning his philosophical ideas into symbols and myths, which greatly add up to the aesthetic value of his works.

Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Background to the Study

Literature and philosophy are very much related to each other that philosophers philosophize about literature (art) and express their philosophical views through different literary works. Plato and Aristotle, who are the forerunners in theorizing about literature, are known for their opposing views concerning literature. When Plato excludes poets from his ideal republic thinking that poetry misleads citizens and calls up extravagant desires, Aristotle, on the contrary, asserted the value of poetry by focusing on imitation arguing that poetry provides a safe outlet for the release of intense emotions (Culler: 1997). The German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche is known for articulating his ideas in literary modes, especially his *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, an allegorical writing. In fact, Ridley (2007: p. 1) contends, "Nietzsche was bowled over by art, perhaps more so than any other philosopher of comparable stature". Ayn Rand, the American philosopher, also wrote novels like *Atlas Shrugged* and *The Fountainhead* to express her philosophical doctrine.

On the other hand, novelists, poets and playwrights are found to express deep philosophical insights in their works though they are not disciplined philosophers. In fact, Fyodor Dostoevsky and Franz Kafka are labelled as literary existentialists. Carré (1951: p. 114) further explains, "[poets, novelists, etc.] in every generation have naturally discussed the problems of knowledge and existence and have offered emphatic opinions on them". And he goes on to exemplify, "Spenser, Shakespeare, Pope, Wordsworth and many other supreme writers have questioned the semblance of nature and mind, and have sought to trace the ideal forms of reality".

Moreover, the Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy (1999: p. 677-679) describes the relationship between literature and philosophy in the following three senses: as philosophy of literature, which is more often concerned to place literature in the context of a philosophical system; as philosophy and literature, which takes the two as distinct and essentially autonomous activities; and as philosophy in literature, which attempts to discover matters of philosophical interest and value in literary texts.

Wellek and Warren (1993), who also discuss the relation between literature and philosophy (ideas) in somehow similar manner, emphasize on how philosophy interests the critic or student of literature. They contend that the concern of the student of literature should be the question of "how ideas actually enter into literature" and whether "philosophical novels and poems are superior works of art because of their philosophical import". Wellek and Warren (1993) answer the two questions respectively in the following way:

The [first] question arises only when and if these ideas are actually incorporated into the very texture of art, when they become 'constitutive', in short when they cease to be ideas in the ordinary sense of concepts and become symbols, or even myths. [Second], philosophy, ideological content, in its proper context, seems to enhance artistic value because it corroborates several important artistic values: those of complexity and coherence. A theoretical insight may increase the artist's depth of penetration and scope of reach. (p. 122-123)

But their reservation is that a work of art need not carry too much philosophy that goes to the extent of overshadowing its artistic merit. And they conclude, "Poetry of ideas is like other poetry, not to be judged by the value of the material but by its degree of integration and artistic intensity".

Be that as it may, the third sense, as philosophy in literature is the concern of this study. And of all philosophical perspectives, it seems that it is existentialism which is much more expressed through literature. Thomas Flynn (2006) further asserts that:

So strong is the influence of existentialist ideas in the fine arts that...some would prefer to describe existentialism as a literary movement. Certainly, authors like Dostoevsky and Kafka, playwrights like Beckett and Ionesco, and artists like Giacometti and Picasso exemplify many of the defining characteristics of existentialist thought. (p. 16)

Existentialism, a philosophical thought, which came to prominence in Europe immediately after World War II, seems to have a place in Ethiopian philosophy. Claude Sumner (1985), where he discusses Ethiopian philosophy in comparison with the Western one, points out that "the Ethiopian world is a world of persons" or "the Semitic Ethiopian universe is that of human beings and of human life". In line with this, the researcher, who is much interested in existentialism, observes several themes of existentialism as revealed in some texts of Amharic literature. In fact, Tewodros (1996 E.C) has shown in his study that Fikir Eske Mekabir, Yetewodros Emba, Adefris and Kadmas Bashager exhibit some tenets of existentialism. But this philosophical view is much repeatedly raised in the less studied literary works of Adam Reta, which can even establish him as a literary existentialist.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Adam Reta came to the literary scene for the first time with his four short stories in 1977 E.C which were published in an anthology, *Abadefar and Other Short Stories*, together with other co-authors. Since then Adam has published a novel, *Giracha Kachiloch* (Grey Bells) and three collections of short stories and novellas (Mahlet,

Alengana Miser and Etemete Lomi Shita) over the last quarter of the century; all in all, forty narratives. Moreover, he is widely acclaimed for introducing new techniques into the conventional narratives in Ethiopia, which calls on another research. The researcher is, however, of the opinion that his works have not received a sufficient critical attention as they deserve for they offer a wide variety of possible meanings. Of course, Adam's stories suggest connotative meanings comprehended after a thorough explication. And to take only one approach as an instrument to the study of Adam's works is only good in touching upon the tip of the iceberg. His works can be a good forum for exploration of several critical theories. But the researcher has preferred the existentialist approach since Adam's relationship with the philosophy of existentialism is much stronger and conspicuous.

Adam Reta seems to be fascinated with and overpowered by the major tenets of existentialist thinking as several of his stories render. It is the researcher's strong belief that his novel *Giracha Kachiloch* and short stories and novellas embody several characteristic tenets of existentialism, which enable one to name him a literary existentialist. However, since there are differences among the existential philosophers and authors concerning their religious, philosophical or political views, it should be attempted to point out Adam Reta's tendency within the framework of existentialism. For instance, among the existential thinkers Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky are theists, Jean-Paul Sartre and Martin Heidegger are atheists and Nietzsche is anti-Christianity.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

Suffice it to say, the main objectives of this study are to evidently identify the existentialist ideas with which Adam is overwhelmed and to title him as a literary

existentialist. In order to achieve these major objectives the following specific objectives are designed:

- ❖ to show that the narratives are existentialist stories through explaining the existential themes infused in Adam's stories.
- ❖ to discuss the general characteristics Adam's protagonists share.
- ❖ to see their relation to Camus's Sisyphus, if any.
- ❖ to identify his religious views.
- ❖ to elucidate Adam's overall existential philosophical thinking.

1.4 Delimitation of the Study

It seems essential to note something about the scope of this study. The time and scope allowed to the thesis has greatly posed a boundary to the aspiration of the researcher to include most works of Adam Reta. He has about forty narratives, but only seven are taken for analysis as they are existentialist stories or they carry many tenets of existentialism. The researcher believes that most of his works have existentialist tendencies. Nonetheless, the seven narratives can be considered as the representative selection from existentialist point of view.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The findings as well as the process of this study are believed to have their own importance. First and foremost, it is important for the author as well as Amharic (Ethiopian) literature in such a way that Adam Reta can be considered as an extraordinary literary giant with a profound philosophical thinking and Amharic literature can be elevated to a higher standard for it can boast of possessing rich philosophical insight. It can also be helpful in refuting Molvaer's statement that "Ethiopian authors of fiction are strongly concerned with the social and cultural life of their time..." (1980: p. 1). Secondly, this approach can serve as a method to

explore other Amharic literary works and explain the philosophical ideas with which the works are imbued. It can also indicate that there are several other critical approaches a student of literature or critic can use in addition to the already existing or conventional literary theories. Thirdly, this study can help readers discern the possible meanings of Adam's texts and trigger them to reread his corpus to come up with their own understanding. Last but not least, it can serve the purpose of introducing the reader of this study about existentialism and its inherent relationship with literature (art).

1.6 Methods and Procedures

As this is a critical (literary) study, it employs descriptive and textual criticisms simultaneously as methods since the researcher is engaged in close reading, detailed analysis and interpretation of the selected texts, and eventually classifies the narratives as existentialist stories and the author as a literary existentialist. In line with this, the philosophy of existentialism and its concepts are taken as an approach. However, the approach is not merely a theoretical framework but it serves as a reference to discuss the existentialist philosophical thinking of Adam Reta to show his tendency within the philosophy. The analysis is done with the help of textual evidences from the texts which are translated into English language.

As far as the procedures are concerned, after related studies are reviewed, the researcher makes an extensive library work to explore the philosophy of existentialism and to set a theoretical framework. After that, a close reading of the primary texts is made. Then each selected story is analyzed and interpreted in a separate section in a manner that follows the line of its story. This particular procedure is preferred to the thematically classified analysis according to the characteristic tenets of existentialism for some valuable reasons. Firstly, each story

is treated independently because every story has its own distinct features that have much to do with the concern of the study. Secondly, to point out the characteristics the protagonists share, which is one of the objectives of the study, it should first be attempted to show the life and overall propensity of the heroes.

Thirdly, the presentation of the analysis along the line of the story is preferred, because the life and the thoughts of each hero throughout the story are essential to reveal the absurdity of their world and to point out the shift in his/her consciousness since nothing in a person's life is fixed. Fourthly, such manner of analysis greatly helps to show the intricacies of all the fundamentals of existentialism, which in turn make a narrative an existentialist story. All the themes do not stand alone but in relation to each other and their totality characterizes the life of a protagonist and the kind of absurdity of his/her world. In fact it helps to explain the author's existentialist thinking. Last but not least,, it is the better way to illustrate the inherent relationship between existentialism and literature.

Finally, all the discussions, analyses and interpretations give rise to the overall philosophical thinking of Adam Reta, which is presented in a form of conclusion, taking the existential themes found in each of the stories into consideration. An attempt is also made to draw on his reflections he stated on a newspaper article. Moreover, at some junctures, some ideas are presented in dialogue with some existential ideas of the major existentialist philosophers.

Chapter Two

Review of Related Literature

In this part, it seems that it is important to note something about the emergence and trends in the study of (modern) Amharic literature in the last century since this study is somehow different from the precedent study of Amharic literature. Taye and Shiferaw (2000: p. 27) stated that "the study of Amharic literature is as old as the history of the literature itself". It is believed that the first modern Amharic novel is *Lebb Wallad Tarik (T'oby)*, published in 1908. The studies done since the publication of this work were, however, dominated by western scholars, especially in Europe until the 1980s (Taye and Shiferaw: 2000; p. 43). These studies have something in common in the sense that:

Their approach in their major studies is that of the survey, often (with the exception of Kane and Molvaer) from the historical angle, with a view to tracing the course of development of Amharic literature, occasionally noting the main sources and factors of influence and emerging literary trends. (Ibid; p. 30)

Though these scholars have made a tremendous contribution to the study of Amharic literature, it is important to note that few of their works are not free from some weaknesses. Yonas Admassu (2001: p. 25), where he examined the studies of Stephen G. Wright (undated, probably 1963), Albert X. Gerard (1968), Joanna Mantel-Niecko (1985), Thomas L. Kane (1975) and Reidulf K. Molvaer (1980), pointed out that these works have "some misconceptions, faulty assumptions and unwarranted, sweeping generalizations about Amharic literature".

As far as Ethiopian intellectuals are concerned, until the 1980s, with the exception of Professor Tamrat Amanuel, they were preoccupied with the writing of Amharic grammar, collection of folklore, and collection, classification and description of the

metric system of traditional verse (Taye and Shiferaw: 2000). Tamrat Amanuel, who is believed to be "the pioneer in the Ethiopian study of Amharic written literature", his paper is designated to be "the first historical survey of Ethiopian literature by an Ethiopian that provides semi-biographical information on the Amharic literature up to the immediate post-war period" (Taye and Shiferaw: 2000; p. 43). He is also described as the first Ethiopian writer or critic "to give an informed critique on T'obyā" and "to note the wide use of abstract allegorical names, rather than proper names, by early Ethiopian writers to reflect the traits of their characters" (Ibid; p. 44).

After Tamrat, the other Ethiopian intellectuals who presented the historical development of Ethiopian or Amharic literature were Mengistu Lemma and Tesfaye Gessese (Taye and Shiferaw: 2000). Tesfaye is, however, "credited with initiating a more focused literary study" as Taye and Shiferaw asserted.

Following him, the shift from the tradition of presenting a historical overview of Amharic literature in general to a narrower focus on a specific aspect of a given genre of Amharic literature manifests itself most markedly in the studies carried out by younger students of Amharic literature. Unlike previous surveys which reviewed works in the various genres, these young disciples tended to deal with selected genres, authors, themes or literary forms. Such is the case, for instance, with the study of Amharic literature by Fikre Tolossa (1983, 1995), Debebe Seifu (1983, 1988), Taye Assefa (1983, 1988, 1989), Zerihun Asfaw (1999), and Tadesse Adera (1995), to cite some of the recent writers. (Ibid; p. 47)

Furthermore, Yonas (2001: p. 25) states that "virtually all [the MA theses and Ph.D dissertations as well as journal articles written by students and university professors] whether crude or refined, are what I would like to call 'specialized' studies, in the sense that they deal with such aspects of fiction as 'characterization', 'setting', 'form', 'style', 'points of view', etc.". One of the PhD dissertations that is

worth mentioning here is Yonas Admasu's titled "Narrating Ethiopia: A Panorama of the National Imaginary". According to Taye and Shiferaw (2000: p. 51), it "stands out among recent Ethiopian PhD dissertations by the sheer depth of its philosophical erudition and the originality of its line of inquiry".

The two quoted articles by Yonas (2001) and Taye and Shiferaw (2000) in this part focused on studies done until their time of publication. The researcher, however, has attempted to make a quick glance of the PhD dissertations and M.A theses done after 2002 on Amharic literature, especially by students of English Literature that are available in the ILS library. To begin with, two M.A theses were on Bewketu Seyoum's works. Andualem Hadero (2007) focused on the stylistic aspect of Bewketu's narratives and Sintayehu Genet (2008) made an analysis of satirical and comic elements in Bewketu's works. Secondly, three M.A theses are on Sibhat G/Egziabher's works. Two of them, by Ayenew Guadu (2004) and Awet G/Egziabher (2006), are psychoanalytic reading of his works while the third is from narratological point of view. Thirdly, two M.A theses, Yihenew Melese (2004) and Tekle T/Lidet (2008), employed the feminist approach. Finally, the other studies used different approaches and these are: Marxism, deconstruction, interdisciplinarity, narratology, etc.

To note something about these studies, they focus on the depth study of the works of a single author or on the reading of individual works from the perspective of various literary theories, which provide a springboard to the "task of writing a literary history of Amharic" and that can be assumed as an immediate response to the scholarly recommendations of Yonas Admassu (2001).

The other M.A theses that are more related to the present research, which use the philosophy of existentialism as an approach, are by Tewodros Gebre and Tsedey Wondimu. Unlike the previous ones these are comparative studies that take the

works of different authors. Tewodros (1996 E.C) studied four Amharic novels (Fikir Eske Mekabir, Yetewodros Emba, Adefris and Kadmas Bashager) as 'novels of disillusionment' using some themes of existentialism like death, disillusionment, despair and exile as an approach. The present study is different from Tewodros's for two fundamental reasons. Firstly, his thesis examines the four novels comparatively to demonstrate that they are 'novels of disillusionment', whereas this study scrutinizes Adam's creative works. Secondly, he uses the aforementioned themes of existentialism as a theoretical framework, while this study takes the philosophy of existentialism in its entirety which is very vast and complicated.

Tseday Wondimu (2007) has also done a study which has something to do with existentialism. Her study claims that existentialism could be a solution for the social evils abroad in Ethiopia as revealed in the three novels she selected (Fiker Eske Mekabir, Kadmas Bashager and *Giracha Kachiloch*) by analyzing them using Sartrean existentialist philosophy as an approach. As far as the researcher is concerned, she has attempted to touch upon *Giracha Kachiloch*, the first novel of Adam Reta, to substantiate her claim.

However, this research is an attempt to study Adam Reta's novel and short stories and show that they exhibit intricate themes of existentialism to, eventually, confirm that he is a literary existentialist. The two studies are basically different. Firstly, her study is partly anthropological, partly philosophical and partly a literary study, but this research is prominently a literary study. Secondly, her research is a comparative study where she includes Adam's text, whereas this is a sort of case study which asserts that Adam Reta is a literary existentialist and examines his corpus where it analyses *Giracha Kachiloch* in depth. Finally, she took Sartrean existentialism as an approach, while this study uses philosophy of existentialism, which constitutes lots of thinkers and concepts, in its entirety.

Besides, the approaches the two studies employ have a profound bearing on the depth and width of interpretation of the novel.

Be that as it may, the gaps the present study is trying to close are the following. Firstly, none of the above reviewed studies have made the works of Adam Reta the concern of their studies, except Tseday (2007), who comparatively treated only his novel. But this study is dealing with the works of this author, who, as the researcher believes, deserves a higher place in Amharic literature and whose works need more critical attention. And this research can be taken as a response to this. Secondly, the theses by Tewodros and Tseday apply existentialism across the works of different authors comparatively, and the scope of their approach is limited: Tewodros uses some concepts of existentialism and Tseday takes Sartrean existentialism. However, the present study employs existentialism in its entirety, as the works of the author call on, to the study of a single author.

Thirdly, the above-mentioned researches take whatever approach they employ as mere approach to read their respective primary texts, but this study goes beyond that. It goes to the extent of confirming the philosophical view, which the study is using as an approach, that it is part and parcel of the author's philosophical thinking. It is important, however, to note that it is not due to the enforcement of the researcher, but it is the fact that the works of Adam Reta forcefully propagate the philosophical idea of their creator when they are studied in one. It is the researcher's strong belief that philosophy is not alien to Amharic literature or its literary giants, which can only be considered as a mere critical approach and Western-bounded phenomenon, but a rational and critical enterprise in which Amharic (Ethiopian) authors can take part. Needless to say, literary works are expressions of writers' philosophical thinking.

Chapter Three

Theoretical Framework: Existentialism

Existentialism is a term applied loosely to the philosophical attitude that came to prominence during and after World War II in Europe, particularly in Germany and France. By all accounts, because of the diversified and often contradictory positions of the various thinkers popularly called existentialists it is difficult to give a single appropriate definition of existentialism. Nevertheless, some dictionaries and encyclopedias attempt to suggest a definition that somehow holds the major issues discussed under the philosophy of existentialism. The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language defines existentialism as:

A philosophy that emphasizes the uniqueness and isolation of the individual experience in a hostile or indifferent universe, regards human existence as unexplainable, and stresses freedom of choice and responsibility for the consequences of one's acts.

Most agree that the modern philosophy of existence may be said to have taken its start from the attacks launched against the absolute idealism of the German philosopher, Hegel. Scholars, however, differ as to antecedents. Some see an existentialist precursor in St. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), whose philosophical thinking is "the philosophy of existence and existential realism" (Reinhardt: 1952; p. 228). Others contend that existentialism started with the philosophy of Blaise Pascal (1623–1662), who "saw human being as an essential paradox, a contradiction between mind and body" (Dreyfus and Wrathall: 2006; p. 3).

But the philosophy of existentialism and the term itself got their currency after the works of the French thinker, novelist and playwright, Jean-Paul Sartre. And scholars agree that Sartre endowed this philosophy with popularity, especially, after he delivered a remarkable lecture entitled Existentialism is a Humanism at

The Club Maintenant in Paris, on October 29, 1945, which was later published as a short book. In this lecture, he "offer[ed] a defense of existentialism against several reproaches that have been laid against it" (Kaufman: 1989).

Nonetheless, the Danish thinker Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) is believed to be the father of existentialism, who polemically rejected Hegelian idealism. According to him, "truth is subjectivity, the individual is higher than the universal, and eternity is only possible in time" (Dreyfus and Wrathall: 2006; p. 141). Following Kierkegaard, many thinkers and authors came to be distinguished as major figures of existentialism each with his/her own philosophical insight but still preoccupied with the central themes of existentialism. Among these are the French thinkers, Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Simone de Beauvoir, and Gabriel Marcel; German philosophers, Friedrich Nietzsche, Karl Jaspers and Martin Heidegger; and literary existentialists, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Franz Kafka and Samuel Beckett.

Furthermore, the philosophical movement mostly associated with existentialism is phenomenology, which existential thinkers of the twentieth-century are said to adopt as a method for their philosophy. The German philosopher, Edmund Husserl is designated to be the founder of this movement. According to Claude Sumner (1974: p. 244), phenomenology is "a philosophical movement devoted to the descriptive analysis and interpretation of Being as it shows itself in the pure forms of conscious life, its processes, attitudes, contents, and objects".

Besides, the influence of existentialism beyond philosophy is so widespread that several contemporary cultural movements and other activities were involved in or imported from this philosophy in one way or the other. Literature, theatre, music, film, theology and psychoanalysis were among them. The major figures of this philosophy were also active participants in these cultural activities. In fact,

Honderich (1995) claims that no other major philosopher has been a major playwright, novelist, political theorist, literary critic except Sartre.

The other point worth mentioning here is that there are diversified and contradictory views among the proponents of existentialism. If we take Heidegger and Sartre, for instance, Honderich (1995) states that:

Heidegger's existentialism is essentially metaphysical. He even denies that the authentic-inauthentic distinction has any ethical content, although his actual language betrays him here. Sartre, by contrast, explicitly presents existentialism as an ethical doctrine. He largely takes his existentialist starting-point from Heidegger, except that where Heidegger clearly separates human existence from the exercise of choice, Sartre reformulates the position as one in which the role of choice in human life is absolutely fundamental. (p. 261)

Despite such differences among the existentialist's doctrines certain themes common to virtually all existentialist writers can be identified. All the existential thinkers take man as the center of their philosophy and contend that the world is meaningless and absurd, so the individual is free and able to make sense out of its futile life. Moreover, Reinhardt (1952: p. 229) says, "the conviction of the primacy of existence is shared by all existential thinkers, ancient, medieval, and modern". All of them are concerned with concrete human existence and the condition of this existence. Therefore, with the principle of existential thinking as a general frame of reference, it may be attempted to recapitulate in a summary fashion the major tenets of existentialism.

1. The Precedence of Existence

The starting-point and central proposition of existentialism which signifies that there is no pre-determined human nature prior to human existence is the phrase "existence precedes essence". It is generally exhibited that although it was Sartre

who explicitly coined the phrase, similar notions are found in the thought of many existentialist philosophers. In the history of Western philosophical tradition, it was believed that the nature or essence of a thing is more fundamental and eternal than its mere existence, i.e. essence precedes existence (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: 2008). And this principle applies universally including human beings.

If we take a chair, for instance, the carpenter has an idea about the properties and the purpose of the chair before it is created. According to the design the chair comes into existence to fit the purpose; thus, essence precedes existence. But when we consider human beings this notion does not apply for the existentialists. Jean-Paul Sartre asserts that "there is at least one being whose existence comes before his essence, a being which exists before it can be defined by any conception of it. That being is man." (Anthony Kenny: 2007; p. 89).

For the existentialists, atheists and theists alike, man is thrown or born into this world without a god to create him with absolute values and rules pre-determined. Sartre as a representative of the existentialists explains this in his Existentialism is a Humanism as follows:

...man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world – and defines himself afterwards. If man as the existentialist sees him is not definable, it is because to begin with he is nothing. He will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of himself. Thus, there is no human nature, because there is no God to have a conception of it. Man simply is. Not that he is simply what he conceives himself to be, but he is what he wills, and as he conceives himself after already existing – as he wills to be after that leap towards existence. Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself. That is the first principle of existentialism.

Hence, it should be noted that what Sartre is talking about does not apply universally, but only to humanity. Besides, in order man to define himself he must

engage with himself, his society into which he is born, and the natural world around him. This proposition takes us to the concepts of facticity, anxiety and despair.

2. Facticity

Existentialists believe that when we are born we are nothing but we find ourselves in this world where certain things are irrevocable. The only option is not to avoid but to accept and make use of them. It is this situation human beings are "thrown" into that existential philosophers call facticity (in-situation). According to Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, facticity includes:

...all those properties that third-person investigation can establish about me: natural properties such as weight, height, and skin color; social facts such as race, class, and nationality; psychological properties such as my web of belief, desires, and character traits; historical facts such as my past actions, my family background, and my broader historical milieu; and so on.

In addition, one cannot choose his facticity except that he can choose his position in relation to it; it is just given where humans can exercise their freedom. In this case, facticity is both a limitation and a condition of freedom.

A concept closely associated with this is transcendence that "denotes the taken of our situation, namely how we face up to this facticity" (Flynn: 2006; p. 66). For instance, if I am physically impaired (my facticity), I may face up to the challenge in a positive, constructive manner. The fact that I go beyond my limitation is my transcendence. Despite the facticity of human beings, the future is fundamental in such a way that "nor is my life exhausted by what I am now and have hitherto been: I can be what I have not yet been, and my potentialities are as essential to my being as my achievements are" (Kenny: 2007; p. 85).

Another aspect of facticity is that whatever our achievements and possibilities are, for the existentialists, everything ends in death (which will be elaborated in a separate section). But the recognition of the inevitability of death is significant for human beings. Deurzen (2001) states that "the fear in the face of death allows us to claim back our individuality, our authentic being, as we are inevitably alone in death and find ourselves much sobered and humbled by the knowledge of our mortality". Therefore, death is considered as one form of facticity that is relevant to humans right now and source of living an authentic life.

In general, facticity evokes anxiety in humans; both in the sense that freedom gives off anxiety when limited by facticity, and in the sense that the lack of the possibility of having facticity intervene for you to take responsibility for something you have done also produces anxiety (Wikipedia).

3. Anxiety

The other key issue common to many existentialists is the concept of anxiety (also sometimes called angst, dread or anguish). The term was first introduced by the Danish philosopher, Kierkegaard (Honderich: 1995). Nevertheless, they distinguish the term anxiety from fear unlike the common understanding of the two words as synonymous. Flynn (2006) says, whereas fear has a definite object, for example one is afraid of falling off a narrow precipice, anguish is the awareness that one could throw oneself off the ledge. Thus, in existential anxiety man is not threatened by a definite object. Otherwise, man could defend him-/herself, repel the danger and maintain his/her security. On the other hand, fear is designated to be inauthentic, while anxiety is authentic. In *A Companion to Phenomenology and Existentialism* (2006), Heidegger maintains that:

... *fear* is inauthentic, not because there is anything wrong with it, but because it is an intentional state directed at things outside oneself; fear is fear *of* something, or *for* someone. *Anxiety*, by contrast, is authentic, again not because it is somehow right or good, but because it has no external object, but relates immediately to one's own individualized being-in-the-world. (p. 233)

As far as the existentialists are concerned, anxiety is very much related with human freedom, nothingness and death. The mantra of Sartrean existentialism is that "man is condemned to be free". And anxiety is generally believed to be the exercise of our freedom and responsibility. Flynn (2006; p. 67), further contends that "existential anguish is our experience of the possible as the locus of our freedom". In other words, the very awareness that one can possibly throw oneself off the cliff and that no one is responsible for the action except oneself evokes anxiety. This in turn allows one to experience one's freedom. Han-pile, (in Dreyfus and Wrathall: 2006; p. 247), explains that "when I am anxious, I become aware of two things: (a) that nothing in the world can determine my choices because I am radically separated from the in-itself by my nihilating activity ... and (b) that nothing *in myself* can determine my choices either". Therefore, anxiety and freedom are correlative.

On top of that, because anxiety, unlike fear, has no object or no-thing (nothing) to threaten, as mentioned above, it puts human beings face to face with nothingness. Reinhardt (1952: p. 235) says, "something utterly mysterious intervenes between [man] and the familiar objects of his world, between him and his fellowmen, between him and all his values". Hence, man finds out that everything is absurd and becomes alienated from the world. And this confronts him with nothingness and arouses anxiety in him.

In relation to this, anxiety is not only produced through nothingness but also via the recognition of the stark certainty of death. Reinhardt (1952: 240) explains "in

the vertigo of the "fear of death" man is overcome by the dreadful thought of "being-no-more," and it is this experience which reveals to him the final and total threat to which his existence is exposed". Thus, anxiety like despair is inherent and fundamental in human existence.

4. Despair

The term despair, which is commonly understood as a loss of hope, takes a different form in existentialism. Existentialists contend that it is a heightened form of anxiety. A despairing person, in Kierkegaard's terms, is a person who has no hope of anything higher than his present life (Kenny: 2007). James Park (2007) explains existential despair in relation to psychological despair as follows:

Psychological despair arises from definite life-situations. Whenever we wish for something specific, we can be disappointed. But existential despair is the comprehensive loss of hope for existence. When psychological despair strikes, we already understand it. We know why our dreams will never come true. We can easily see the cause, reason, or source of our hopelessness. But our existential despair has no specific cause. Existential hopelessness arises within us, not from the outside world. Most hopeless situations (except death) eventually pass. After a time we become reconciled to the loss, however great. We learn to live on, perhaps transforming tragedy into triumph. But if our basic problem is existential despair, it does not pass. Hopeless situations can be separated from one another. Each difficulty or problem can be met by itself. But existential despair is not limited to one dimension of life. It pervades every corner of our being. We handle psychological despair by accepting the situation and re-forming our lives around other values and purposes. But existential despair leaves no area of life untouched. We cannot climb into another boat and proceed as before. (p. 37)

Therefore, existential despair is inherent and permanent with no objective cause. It is also pervasive and one cannot overcome it except that he can conceal or embrace

it. But what is good for the individual is to recognize that one is in constant despair and act accordingly. Kierkegaard says we should “choose” despair rather than dismiss it, when it strikes, as an aberration, for someone to appropriate, in the “deepest sense,” the idea that “his self, exists before . . . God” (Solomon and Sherman: 2003).

5. Freedom

Perhaps the most prominent theme in existentialism is the concept of individual freedom (choice). Existential freedom is mostly related to the above-discussed concept, existence precedes essence. Existentialists believe that because there is no God to conceive of us, we do not have an essential nature or universal values and rules to rely on, thus, the individual is alone and has to choose or is free to make his own values and essence (Miller: 1984). Olafson (in Dreyfus and Wrathall: 2006) adds that:

...freedom constitutes the human essence. We are, as [Sartre] puts it, “condemned to be free” by the fact that we are always in situations that present alternatives, and so our lives have to be understood in terms of the choices we have to make, even if it is only by doing nothing. (p. 269)

We can also understand from this that not to choose is also a choice by itself. However, from an existential perspective, freedom cannot be separated from responsibility. I have to be equally responsible for what I do and am as well as for others. Because, Sartre says, “when I choose in the process of making myself, I choose not only for myself but for all people” (Stumpf and Fieser: 2003). For instance, when a father is making a decision, he has to consider his wife, children and his family as a whole. He is totally responsible for any kind of consequence that may come upon him and the family. Put simply, freedom without responsibility is dangerous and responsibility without freedom is hard to imagine.

In addition, the fact that existential freedom entails responsibility, as elaborated earlier, it causes feelings of anxiety and dread.

6. Authenticity and Inauthenticity

One of the most important ideas that came from existentialism is the concept of authenticity, which is directly or indirectly connected with the above four fundamental issues of facticity, anxiety, despair, and freedom. Existential authenticity is not about being sincere or genuine to oneself or others. Flynn (in Dictionary of Existentialism: 1999) states that authenticity means "having a true and lucid consciousness of the situation, assuming the responsibility and risks it involves, accepting it in pride or humiliation, sometimes in horror and hate". The Twentieth-Century Continental Philosophy (1994) further elaborates that authenticity has three elements:

...first, a heightened awareness of facticity and possibility, that is, of the existential situation; second, the exercise of creative choice of self within this situation; and finally, owning or appropriating the consequences of this choice, that is, of the altered situation, the altered self. (p. 70-71)

Hence, to be an authentic person is to accept the situation you are in to the extent of being aware that your death may come at any point in time (your facticity), exercise your freedom and choice while feeling anxious and despair about your existence and taking the responsibility for the consequences and for what you are. Besides, authenticity is mostly not concerned with the what but the how of living. It is all about the manner of human existence recognizing ones facticity (Dreyfus and Wrathall: 2006).

The converse of being authentic is inauthentic or in "bad faith". Contrary to the authentic person, the inauthentic individual discounts his antecedent condition in mere wishfulness, avoids choice and becomes a mere face in the crowd, and denies the responsibility for his situation (Flynn: 2006). An example of such an individual is a daydreamer; such person is always incapable of connecting himself with the real world. He fantasizes, for instance, about what he wants to be disregarding his facticity.

7. Absurdity

Absurdity is the notion that is concerned with the meaning of human existence. According to David Sherman, in *A Companion to Phenomenology and Existentialism*, absurdity (the absurd) "generally refers to the experience of groundlessness, contingency, or superfluity with respect to those basic aspects of "the human condition" that seem as if they should be open to rational justification". Existentialists, theists and atheists alike, believe that the very existence of human beings is pointless and purposeless and worse their futile toil ends in death. And as Albert Camus, the father of absurdism, explains it in *The Myth of Sisyphus* absurdity is the contrast between two things. He says, "the absurd is born out of this confrontation between the human need and the unreasonable silence of the world".

Man is entangled in this confrontation and absurd existence as Camus described it. This can be better exemplified by the following example taken from an internet source:

In his autobiography, Count Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910) tells the story of a traveler fleeing an infuriated animal. Attempting to save himself from the beast, the man runs toward a well and begins to climb down, when to his distress he spies a dragon at the bottom of the

well. The dragon is waiting with open jaws, ready to eat him. The poor fellow is caught in a dilemma. He dares not drop into the well for fear of the dragon, but he dares not climb out of the well for fear of the beast. So he clutches a branch of a bush growing in the cleft of the well and hangs onto it for dear life. His hands grow weak, and he feels that soon he will have to give in to his grim fate, but he still holds on desperately. As he grasps the branch for his salvation, he notices that two mice, one white and one black, are nibbling away at the main trunk of the branch onto which he is clinging. Soon they will dislodge the branch. The traveler is you and I, and his plight is yours and mine, the danger of our demise on every hand. The white mouse represents our days and the black our nights. Together they are nibbling away at the three score years and ten, which make up our branch of life. Inevitably all will be over, and what have we to show for it? Is this all there is? Can this brief moment in the history of the universe have significance? What gives life value or importance?

The answer to these puzzling questions is given by Camus where he compares human existence to that of Sisyphus of Greek mythology, who is considered as the "absurd hero" and "the prototype of the modern individual". Sisyphus, the mortal, was condemned by the gods to push a stone up a mountain only to see it roll back down and he must follow its course and retrieve it. He goes through this process again and again for all eternity. Richard Taylor (in Dale Jacquette: 2001) states that the commonest interpretation is that "it symbolizes man's eternal struggle and unquenchable spirit, his determination always to try once more in the face of overwhelming discouragement". And yet, Camus claims to consider Sisyphus happy at the moment he turns to retrieve the rock once more at the base of the hill (Camus: 1991). This is to mean that humans find meaning in their struggle with their meaningless existence. Finally, as indicated by Flynn (2006), "Camus counsels that our only hope is to acknowledge that there is no ultimate hope".

8. Alienation

The concept of alienation which has diversified senses in various doctrines, for instance in Hegel's and Marx's philosophy, takes a different form in the philosophy of existentialism. For example, as Honderich (1995) puts it alienation is fundamentally, for both Marx and Hegel, "a matter of whether your life objectively actualizes your nature, especially...your life with others as a social being on the basis of a determinate course of historical development". In existentialism, however, it is concerned with how one experiences his/her existence. Existentialists basically believe that "everywhere man finds himself locked out and alone with himself. He feels himself handed over to uncertainty and insecurity, exposed on the mountains of his heart". This is to mean that the world is a place of alienation and estrangement. Thus, for existentialists, alienation is not a specific historical phenomenon as it is in Marxism, but a universal human condition.

Put simply, existential alienation can be defined as "a state of divided selfhood in which one is distanced from one's true being and confronts the self as an alien being" (The Existential Primer).

Nevertheless, existentialist philosophers differ as to the cause of alienation. Some attribute it to absurdity, some to undevoted belief, some to nihilism, some to being inauthentic and some to being immersed in day to day life. This may be better exemplified by Phyllis Kenevan (in Haim Gordon: 1999) as follows:

Alienation, as recognized by existentialists, may be evoked by an absurd universe, silent in regard to passionate human questioning [Camus], or by the failure of humans to make the leap of faith needed to relate to their creative source [Kierkegaard]. It may also be the response to nihilism as religious, cultural, and social paradigm fail and begin to disintegrate [Nietzsche]. Since the self is a temporal process, one can be alienated from oneself, say, through self-deception about one's past or denial of responsibility for one's future

[Sartre]; one can also lose oneself in the absorption and preoccupation of everyday public existence [Heidegger]. (p. 5)

Hence, one can conclude that to live an authentic life is one of the solutions from being alienated.

9. Death

Existential philosophers are interested in the definition and interpretation of death as an important part of our existence. It is considered as the most significant limit-situations of man. It is indicated, in Dictionary of Existentialism, that death "stands out as the single most unsurpassable and ultimate possibility through which existential time is revealed as finite". Existential thinkers characterize death as it is certain and indefinite. Heidegger, who moved death into the center of discussion, claims, "insofar as death is certain, one must anticipate it rather than cover it up. However, insofar as death is indefinite, and one does not know when it will happen, one finds oneself pushed into taking action" (Dreyfus and Wrathall: 2006).

So how does the certainty and indefiniteness of death matter to the existential philosophers? Existentialists are of the opinion that it is as long as man is aware of his certain and indefinite death that he makes the absurdity of his existence meaningful. In fact, Reinhardt (1952) states, "fear of total annihilation may also have a very salutary effect: in existential perseverance in the face of the certainty of death man may reach an absolute "hold" beyond time and death". This is indirectly to mean that the authentic existential man concentrates on the here and now and makes his existence as consequential as possible.

10. Repetition or Eternal Recurrence

The last concept that is worth mentioning here is the idea of repetition or eternal recurrence; it is shared by some of the existential philosophers. They believe that everything in this universe is repeated infinitely; nothing is new but a repetition of the past and that will happen again. Kierkegaard contends, "if God himself had not willed repetition, the world would not have come into existence. ...the world continues, and it continues because it is repetition" (Tsakiri: 2006; p. 125). Nietzsche uses the term eternal recurrence instead of repetition. They understand it in the same way except that Kierkegaard attributes it to God. As Alexander Nehamas (1980) puts it, Nietzsche elaborates his point as follows:

...everything that is happening right now, and everything that will happen in the future, has already happened, and will happen again, preceded and followed by exactly the same events in exactly the same order, infinitely many times. ...there is only one cycle, repeated over and over again in infinite. There can be no variations, and hence no interactions, between such repetitions. (p. 332)

In general, to put the philosophy of existentialism in such manner is to oversimplify a complicated and vast philosophical thought, if it were not for the scope and relevance of this research.

Chapter Four

Analyses of the Narratives

1. *Giracha Kachiloch* (Grey Bells)

Giracha Kachiloch is Adam's first novel, published in 1997 (E. C) and has 462 pages. The story is episodic and is divided into two parts. It is set in pre- and post - revolution Ethiopia of the 1974. The present writer believes that this novel can be categorized in the genre of picaresque novel for it quite fulfills several of the characteristic features of this particular genre. Like the picaresque novel it is presented in a first-person narration, episodic form and presents strict realism. It is also narrated by a protagonist of low station (an abandoned youngster who lost his mother at three), who struggles for existence in a hostile and chaotic world. This, perhaps, throws light on the concern of this study in relation to the novel because this genre can be said that it provides fertile ground to portray or discuss the very existence of human beings. No wonder, picaresque novel was adapted to twentieth-century existentialism (Mancing: 1979).

It is essentially important to note that the author's use of stream of consciousness throughout the entire novel in order to reveal an existentialist point of view in the main character of the story is also another aspect of the novel that benefits the interest of this study. The internal thoughts of the protagonist reveal many of the fundamentals of existentialism such as taking responsibility for the choices one makes and understanding that nothing in a person's life is fixed.

Throughout the novel, we get a stream of consciousness first-person report of the protagonist and narrator from his teenage to his adulthood in his birth place NefasMewcha and Addis Ababa. It is this small town and Addis that form the backdrop to the story. Mezgebu lost his mother when he was only three, which is

one of the most traumatic events in his life. His father, who is remote and uncaring, married another woman who made Mezgebu's life hell. Mezgebu spends most of his time lonely sitting under an electric pole on a hummock ('gubeta') somewhere around the centre of the town and wandering around the town's streets doing not more than thinking and observing. In the second part of the story he becomes a policeman and lives in Addis. In Addis, he shares a room with other three policemen and a nurse. But one of his roommates, Bekure, gives him a hard time to the extent that Mezgebu likens him to his stepmother. Later, Mezgebu falls in love with a beautiful young girl, whom he married to later in the novel. The story, in general, captures the absurdity of human existence through the life and internal thought of Mezgebu in an inimical world. And the selection of such an ordinary individual as victim heightens the impact of the absurd.

To start with his name, 'Mezgebu' which literally means 'the record' signifies much more in the novel. Mezgebu himself thinks, after he contemplates on the possible meanings of his name, that the name suits him and claims that he is "God's record" because he believes he knows everything that goes on in the town. But he is not only God's record who would be called on as a witness when the people of NefasMewcha appear in front of God on Judgment Day (ታዲያ እግዚአብሔር ወደዚህ ምድር ሲመጣ የንፋስ መውጫያ ሕዝብ ለፍርድ ሲቀርብ መስካሪነት የምጠራው እኔ ነኝ። (11)), but a record or an example of the victim of the absurdity of the world in the sense that he is the sufferer and writer or recorder of his own story or suffering. At one instance, he likens himself to "attacked shooting leaves" he sees in bean plantation and claims that he is "the victim and the recorder" (የተጎዳውትም የመዘገብኩትም እኔ ነኝ) (11).

Furthermore, his full name, Mezgebu Dubale, makes a sentence that gives a literal meaning 'the record has plunged'. This means that the story of his life is narrated

in a random manner as it comes to his mind without making distinction between different levels of reality. And this is literarily speaking stream of consciousness.

What we get from Mezgebu through Adam Reta is descriptions, reflections and interpretations of what his world looks like. On the other hand, he is a kind of character who does not involve with anything. He is not deeply engaged in life. He just lives his life without passion. He does not have ambitions and he does not want to do anything with his life except for some quick thoughts what his future life would be. He lives moment by moment.

The story starts with telling what his daily routines are. Mezgebu starts his day getting up early in the morning to see the sun rising sitting on the hummock, his favourite place, for hours. He then returns in the late afternoon to his place and watches the sun setting till evening. He says that he wants to see the sun when it rises and sets. The sun, here, possibly symbolizes life. And his desire to see the sun rising and setting could mean that he wants to see what life looks like. This meaning makes sense with what he does at the end of the novel. At the end of the novel, he tells us that he sits on a stool in his compound every morning and afternoon giving his back to the rising and setting sun. In relation to what he used to do in his childhood, this means that he knows what life is. And he concludes that "ሕይወት ወፈረም ቀጠነም ዞር ብለን ስናየው የሆነ አስማትና ተአምር አለው" (441) (No matter how life is high and low, there is something magical and miraculous about it when you see back at it). Existentially speaking, this signifies that it does not matter how you live; you live one way or you live another way, it just does not matter, what matters is life itself. It is not the quality of life that counts but it is life itself which is meaningful.

Another thing he does, perhaps his major activity, is watching and observing while sitting on his hummock ('gubeta') and wandering around the town. But

what is strange about or missing from him is that he does not involve in anything except for some reflexive actions. At one instance, for example, he sees a kid who stole a tin full of raisin and ran. Mezgebu spontaneously springs to his feet and runs to follow the kid. Together, they eat the raisin. Nevertheless, he hardly engages in anything else that anyone would be expected to act. He does not want to play games with his equals, does not have childhood friends, and is not as inquisitive as a child about things one would normally be. He generally does not behave as a child would. In fact, he characterizes himself as lonesome and an observer. He says, "የምቀርበው የማፈቅረው የማምነው ሕፃን ጓደኛ አልነበረኝም። ለምን እንደሆነ አላውቅም። ከመጫወት፣ እየተንጫጫሁ ከመዝለል ወይም እየዘለልኩ ከመንጫጫት ቁጭ ብሎ መታዘብ ነበር የምወደው።" (4) (I did not have a childhood friend whom I feel close to, love and trust. I do not know why? Instead of playing, gamboling and frolicking, I liked to observe sitting).

Catholic missionaries built a church at the outskirts of NefasMewcha and were inviting school children to come to their church using fliers and some other things that the children would fancy for. At this juncture, when most of the children flow to the church and seem to be interested with everything in the church, Mezgebu shows little or no interest. He receives a flier and throws it away after reading a line from it. On one Sunday, he goes to the church just because he did not think of another place to go to, but when all the children try to sing hymns they did not study, he keeps silent and watches. After the hymn, the children disperse and start playing different games of their interest; but Mezgebu just stands apart and watches when all the action goes on.

Another essential moment in which he failed to act is when Elias, to whom Mezgebu is befriended at his teenage, persuades and takes him to a prostitute to start experiencing sex for the first time in his life. When you expect him that he

would hardly miss this chance as a teenager, he watches her naked, shows no sexual desire and goes away without doing it refusing her sensuous efforts.

His relationship with and involvement in his family is also not different. In his family, there are his father, stepmother and stepsister. His father is very distant to him and does not show the slightest parental care to his son. Mezgebu never liked him. In fact, what remain are only the fact that he is his father and Mezgebu lives in the family. And worse, Mezgebu has the most odious and obnoxious stepmother. She never even served him proper meal at the right mealtime except one day to save her face in the company of some neighbor women. She always accuses him with every minor thing and often seeks for reasons to blame him or avoid him from everything that goes on at home. He is completely abandoned. But it seems that he has a little better relationship with his stepsister until he becomes to hate her later.

Even though, owing to his relationship with his family, it is unfair to blame him for his involvement in his family, because it is the family itself isolating him, he is partly responsible in the sense that he barely does anything that could improve the relationship. The more they abandon him the more he does to comply with their wish. He could do otherwise. He could struggle and do everything he can to win their love and care as a child. However, that does not happen due to his reluctance to act and rebel. He rather immerses himself in some superfluous thoughts, day dreams, fantasies, etc., to isolate himself more from the people around. For instance, he associates and identifies himself with objects or nonhuman things like the hummock ('gubeta'), which he considers as his territory, the light bulb, insects, etc.

Generally speaking, Mezgebu does not throw himself into life and lives a life without passion or commitment. Nevertheless, from existentialism point of view,

for a man to define himself, he must engage with himself, his society into which he is born, and the natural world around him. According to most existentialist philosophers, a person is defined only insofar as they act. Thus life for Mezgebu is meaningless and absurd. Because "it is only by immersing ourselves in our lives that we might find meaning, and then only within them, for it is only within our lives that meaning might be generated" (Dreyfus and Wrathall: 2006; 278).

Furthermore, Mezgebu is inauthentic for most of his life. First and foremost, he does not accept his facticity or in-situation instead of acting to transcend it. For example, he wishes he was not born; he wishes his mother was alive; he wishes his father was Abebe Bekila (his childhood hero), etc. However, you cannot choose your birthplace, your parents, etc, but you can transcend your facticity. Secondly, he does not feel responsible for his actions and situations. He attributes the responsibility for his actions and situations to God or to the people around him. When he narrates about his disease, i.e. sleepwalking, he claims that God is responsible for it and says that "በዙ ጊዜ ግን ሰው ሳይሆን በዳዩ እግዚር ሳይሆን አይቀርም" (28) (Oftentimes, it is not human beings, but God who must be the culprit). On the other hand, because of the relationship he has with his stepmother, he does things wrong when she sends him on errand, but he blames her for his mistakes.

Thirdly, he immerses himself in daydream, fantasy and wishful thinking denying his facticity, antecedents, possibilities and abilities. He daydreams about his childhood obsession (Wossen), about his mother, etc. He fantasizes that it could be the rabbit (the one he saw in the middle of the marketplace), who inhabited NefasMewcha before human beings; he fantasizes when angels treat him to wine and meat on a balcony waving their wings on him, etc.

Finally, he is inauthentic in the sense that he confirms to the society's values and rules. He does not recognize his individuality and make choices, but he lives his life as the society commands him. When his family abandons him, he accepts it. When the society judges him as 'vagabond', he agrees with them. At one point, he starts reading a novel, 'Chereka Setweta' (when the moon comes out), at home and outside, but he stops reading immediately due to the society's comments and teases. Then he goes to the extent of fearing the book and says, "ለእኔ የማይገባ ያልተፈቀደልኝ ነገር እንደማደርግ ተሰማኝ። ከዚያ አቆምኩ። ማንበብ አቆምኩ። የሚያዩኝ፣ ያዩኝ ግን በመርዘኛ ነገራቸው ነክሰው. . አለቀቁኝም።" (169) (I felt that I was doing something that is not permitted to me. Then I quitted; I quitted reading. But those who were observing me did not stop from pestering me with their venomous intrigues).

As a result of his reluctance to act and to be engaged in life, and due to his inauthentic existence, he becomes lonesome and alienated from the society, the world and eventually from himself. This sort of alienation has its roots in the discrepancy for the person between "reality or the world as it is and utopia or the world as desired or as it ought to be". By the same token, for Mezgebu the gap between the actual world and the utopian world is so wide that his alienation is great. Of course, there is no clear cause for his fate, but it happens that he is confronted with alienation. From existentialism perspective, however, this is not a special thing that happens only to him, but it is universal and it happens to all human beings. We suffer from the sense of loneliness as Mezgebu does.

His alienation is manifested in such a way that even though he lives with his family, in a town where there are lots of people around him, he is far away from them spiritually; he does not relate to them with his soul and mind. He is an island or lonely in the midst of others. He is rather close or feels intimate to objects and insects. He does not participate in group life, does not love the people around him

except Wossen (his childhood obsession) and does not trust anyone. On the contrary, he feels close to the hummock, the electric pole, the bulb, the insects that hover around the bulb, etc.

In line with this, Mezgebu has a feeling of uprootedness. He does not feel that he belongs to the society in which he lives and does not feel at home in the world. For example, towards the end of part one, Mezgebu goes to another town with his friend, Elias. But, unfortunately, because Elias is taken away by soldiers, he is told to get lost immediately. However, he is confused where to go and thinks he does not have a place to go. He says:

የመጣሁበትን ከተማ ለረጅም ጊዜ የተውኳት መስሎኝ ነበር። በዚያ ምድር ላይ ያለች አልመሰለኝም ነበር። ፀሐይ ስትጠቅስልኝ ግን በመጀመርያ ጉብታዬ ትዝ አለችኝ. . .ከዚያ ሙስጠፋ. . .ከዚያ እሁቴ. . .ቀስ በቀስ ንፋስ መውጨያ እየተገነባች. . .እንደ እውነት ታየችኝ። ወደዚያ መመለስ ግን እንደማልፈልግ ገባኝ። (188)

I thought that I have been long away from my hometown. It seemed to me that it does not exist. But when Tsehay reminds me of it, first thing I remembered my hummock, next Mustefa, then my sister, ... gradually, NefasMewcha is assembled and I saw its real picture in my mind. But I realized that I did not want to go back to NefasMewcha.

Retreatism is also another manifestation of Mezgebu's alienation. Instead of completely complying with or fighting back the social system, he keeps running away in order to avoid confrontation, involvement or commitment. If he ever involves in anything it is only accidental. He attempts to run away by filling his time with superficial things like watching the sun when it rises and sets, watching and observing everything that goes on in the town, etc. He also prefers to be lonely and if anyone comes closer to him he considers it as a trespass and feels uneasy.

However, his loneliness is distracted by a young man, Elias, whom Mezgebu befriended in his teenage. He never had a friend until then. Even though Mezgebu at first sight considers him as an invader, he befriends him for the reason that he finds him looking at the sun lying supinely on his hummock. He says, "እኔን የመሰለ ሌላ አንድ ሰው ያገኘሁ መሰለኝ።" (80) (I think I found someone who looks like me). However, Elias is not only his friend, but his savior in the sense that it is him who saves him from his unfathomable loneliness, who helps him to involve in some activities and to show some commitment. He starts swimming, reading books and traveling out of NefasMewcha, which are different from his daily routines. He also begins to commit himself to something he does not even understand and believe in but for the sake of his friend. He distributes political party fliers. No matter what the reason is, he makes a choice and acts accordingly for which he would be responsible.

In fact, his life changes because of his choice and action. When Elias is taken away by soldiers, he returns to his hometown and registers to be a recruit policeman for two reasons. His reasons are that he might be arrested like his friend and he takes it as an opportunity to change his life. This is the end of part one.

In the second part of the novel, Mezgebu becomes a police officer and is assigned in Addis Ababa. In this part, he struggles to be more authentic than he was. Towards the end of part one, he started to act (make a choice), be responsible for his actions and commit himself to something. In the second part, even though he usually finds himself indulged in daydream and fantasy, he strives to throw himself into life.

He is a policeman, but he helps a young man who stole a hen from a marketplace. Whatever his justification is he decides to act and we see him being responsible for his action and the consequences. Bekure, his roommate, and Chaltu, his landlady,

stand against him for helping the young man, but he defends his ground with everything he can.

On the other hand, even though Mezgebu is a policeman, he is not simply is like "the way a stone is a stone". He is not a slave to an image that other's expectations have imposed upon him. He rather appears to be an individual who recognizes and accepts his individuality. As a policeman, he is alert and disciplined in the sense that he is diligent in crime prevention and other police services but he behaves like an individual in the sense that he usually treats people with kindness and compassion and does not show unreasonable fear to his bosses like his colleagues do. In other words, he realizes that he has the possibility and freedom to shed his uniform and leave the profession. After all he chose to be a policeman just to make a living (ለመኖር፣ ለመኖርያ ፖሊስ የሆንኩ ነኝ። (265)).

In this part of the novel, Wolloyew (Entiko Zufan, in the first part), who changes his personality and pretends to be insane, appears to be Mezgebu's mentor. He teaches him to be an authentic existent with various means. In their first meeting, Wolloyew says to Mezgebu, "... ወደ ሕይወት እሳት እጅህን ማስገባት ትፈራለህ። ብዙ ሰው እንደዛ ነው" (243) (You fear to put your hand into life's fire. Most people are like this). This, from existentialism point of view, signifies that Mezgebu and most people do not throw themselves into life. In another meeting, Wolloyew says, "ለሰራሁት ነገር ሁሉ አላፊነት አለብኝ።" (338) (I am responsible for every action I take). And he continues to tell him,

እኔ አደርጋለሁ. . . ሰው አያስፈራም። ማየት ምን ይጠቅማል? . . . ትንሽ ካልረበሽክ፣ ትንሽ የአንተን ቦታ ካላሳየህ። መፈጠርህን ማስመስከር አለብህ። እዚች ምድር ላይ እንደ ነበርክ ማሳየት አለብህ። ያሳቀህን ያሳክህን ያሳዘነህን ካልገለጥክ ሰው መሆን ምን ረባ? (341).

I act. ... Man is not fearful. Unless you disturb, prove that you exist, what good does watching do? You have to prove to others that you

exist. You have to prove to others that you have existed. ...Unless you reveal what made you laugh, sad, or irritated, what is the use of being a human being?

Wolloyew as his mentor is teaching him that it is as far as he acts, be responsible for his actions, be committed to something and involved in group life that he can define himself. Of course, Mezgebu also has come to understand that there is an element of truth in what Wolloyew says to him (ወሎየው የተናገረው ውስጥ የሆነ የዕውነት ኮረት ነበር። (342)). And he continues to confirm that:-

አልፎ አልፎም የምሰላቸውና የምደበተው ድርጊት የፈለጉ አካሌንና ነፍሴን በግዴታ አንቁ ስለምይዛቸው ይመስለኛል። በራሴ የብቸኝነት ጎዳናዬ ላይ ያጋጠሙኝን ሰዎች በግዴታ ከማወቅ ሌላ ሰውን ልወዳጀው፣ ተጋጭቼ ላርመው የፈለግሁበት ጊዜ አልነበረም። ጉዋደኛ የመሆን ፍላጎቱ እንኩዋ ቢኖረኝ በቸልተኝነት አስቀረዋለሁ። ተጣልቼ አላውቅም። አፍቅሬ አላውቅም። በአካባቢዬ የተሳሳተ ነገር ባይ ለማስተካከል ከሰው ጋር መሆን እንዳለብኝ እዘነጋለሁ. . .(342)

I think I occasionally feel bored and depressed, because I forcefully keep hold of my agitated body and soul. Except to unwillingly get introduced to people whom I encountered in my lonely world, there never was a time I wanted to befriend, to clash with and correct a person. Even if I want to befriend one I withhold it in negligence. I never fought. I never loved. Whenever I see something wronged in my presence I forget to be on the side of others to amend it...

Because of Wolloyew's spurring or stirring words, Mezgebu is encouraged more to be an authentic individual and to have an understanding of the condition of the existence of human beings.

In fact, in this part of the novel, Mezgebu falls in love, in the real sense of the word, with a young girl, Genet, which has never happened to him before. After a slight reluctance he does everything he can to woo her. Sometime later he wins her heart and marries her. This condition marks a shift in Mezgebu's life from a "life of mud" (የጭቃ ዘመን) into a "life of pearl" (የዕንቁ ዘመን). According to Wolloyew, a life of

mud represents unpleasant life whereas a life of pearl signifies delightful life. Now, his wraths are ended.

From the perspective of existentialism, unlike in the first part, in the second part of the novel, especially after he falls in love and marries, he becomes a doer, committed person, who lives a life of passion. To love and marry someone is not a simple project but something that requires your decision, commitment, responsibility, relentless care and all that. Since then, Mezgebu starts to get meaning out of his life, this world. He says, "ቀድሞ ነፍስ ካወቅሁ ጀምሮ የመኖርና ያለመኖር ትርጉም አይገባኝም ነበር። . . . እስከዛን ካወቅሁ-ዋት ጀምሮ [ግን] መነጋገር ጀምራለሁ። . . . ከሕይወቴ ትርጉም እያገኘሁ ሐጃለሁ" (435) (Since I became mature, I did not understand the meaning of life....[But] since the time I knew Genet I have started communicating. ... I am getting meaning out of my life). The moment the world becomes meaningful to him, he begins to love life and this world.

This particular moment also marks a shift in Mezgebu's consciousness. For him what matters was the quality of life, but now he understands that what matters is life itself and nothing else. Towards the end of the story, he says, "እይወት ወፈረም ቀጠነም ዞር ብለን ስናየው የሆነ አስማትና ተአምር አለው" (441) (no matter how life is high and low, there is something magical and miraculous about it when you see back at it). He opens his heart to the indifferent world. But the most important or curious question, here, is that is Mezgebu an absurd hero like Sisyphus, who was condemned by the gods to spend all eternity in fruitless labor, rolling a rock up a mountain until it would roll back down of its own weight, again and again and again.

The answer is yes. But what makes him an absurd hero? In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus considers Sisyphus happy in spite of the tragedy of his condition, because he devotes himself to his labor. He is engaged in his task. Otherwise, there is no

tragedy than to be cursed to a lifetime futility. Similarly, Mezgebu is thrown into this world and lived his life the way he lived which is an absurd one like the existence of human beings. As mentioned earlier, he is inauthentic, unhappy, alienated, etc, in the first part of the novel but he becomes to be more authentic (but, no one can be entirely authentic) and happy because he has thrown himself into life. Finally, like Sisyphus, he comes to understand that life makes sense insofar as one is engaged in his life.

Considering Mezgebu and Wolloyew as the mouthpiece of the author, Adam Reta, they have some interesting reflections that are worth mentioning for their existential tendency or element. One of the things that Mezgebu used to see when he was on his hummock was flies. He reports that it is common to see flies everywhere in NefasMewcha. Once, he sees a man who is dressed well in white clothing and describes him as "someone who seems to be eternal" (ከአካሌዱ ዘላቂ የሚመስል. . .) (14), but when he looks at his back after the man walked by, his back is full of flies and Mezgebu says, "በአፍታ ስለ ሰውየው የነበረኝ አመለካከት ተለወጠ. . . የመጥላት ወይም የመናቅ ሳይሆን እንደሌሎች እዚያ አብረውኝ እንደሚኖሩ ሰዎች ተራ ሆኖ ታየኝ።" (14) (right away the impression I had about the man changed...it is not hating or contempt but he appeared to me as ordinary as the people who live with me). Some other time again, he was looking at a bridegroom, which is the first time for him to see one. He described his looks and dressing style, but he saw a fly on his neck tie and says, "ይኼን የክራቫት ጨምዳዳ ሳይ፣ አረፋ የመሰለው ሽሌን፣ መኪናዎቹ፣ ጥቁሩ ሱፍ ዋጋ አጡብኝ።" (18) (when I see this wrinkled cravat, the snow-white wedding dress, the cars, the black suit seemed to me worthless).

The flies here possibly symbolize ephemerality or brevity. When Mezgebu sees the stranger and the bridegroom who are dressed well and immaculately, he assumed that they are blessed with some superhuman qualities; but later he concludes that

they are human beings the same as he is and the people around. He believes that they too are mortal and their life is too short. This universally connotes that the life or existence of human beings is very short like the life of flies.

One of the things that Adam Reta hammered on is the concept of repetition or eternal recurrence that holds the idea that everything in this universe is repeated infinitely. Thus Adam expresses this in several different ways. The first and second parts of the novel, which possibly represent two different generations or worlds in the sense that what happened in the first part, happens in the second part and the world in the first part is the same as the world in the second part. The title of the novel, Grey Bells (ግራጫ ቃጭሎች), stand for the two parts of the novel (note that the bells are only two). The worlds in the two parts are the same in the sense that they are equally absurd. Of course, for Mezgebu grey (ግራጫ) symbolizes unpleasant life. In the first part, everything is routine; things happen over and over again with out difference. For example, when Mezgebu thinks of what other people do, he could not think of any other thing than the following:

ራት ይበላሉ	(ካልበሉ ስለሚራቡ)
ይጠጣሉ	(ካልጠጡ ስለሚደርቁ)
ይጫወታሉ	(ካልተጫወቱ ስለሚያብዱ)
ይተኛሉ	(ካልተኙ ስለሚደክማቸው)
ያወራሉ	(?) (4)
They dine	(because if they do not eat, they would be hungry)
They drink	(because if they do not drink, they would be dried)
They play	(because if they do not play, they would go insane)
They sleep	(because if they do not sleep, they would be tired)
They talk	(?)

They do this every day, every week, every month, and every year again and again and again. This also applies to him. He tells us that what he eats every day, and every week at every mealtime is "Shiro" (Ethiopian staple soup) to symbolize the absurdity of this world. By the same token, in the second part of the novel, things

routinely happen. He says that "አንዱ ቀን ከአንዱ ብዙ የማይለይ ተመሳሳይ ነበር" (213) (everyday is almost the same).

In addition to that, he once found a small stone at the bank of a river in NefasMewcha. He liked it very much and started to play with it, but he could not find it again when he threw it up. It just vanished. Surprisingly enough, however, he found the stone again in the second part of the novel in his compound. At this time again, he throws it up and it vanished, but he tells his wife that "ይመለሳል ግን ቆይቶ ነው። ድንጋዩ ሲመለስ የሚመጣም እንግዳ ተአምረኛ ሰው ይኖራል" (442) (The stone will come back again and when it returns a miraculous guest will come). The appearance of the stone in the two parts and the fact that it will come again possibly represents that there is always repetition and everything repeatedly happens in the same way time and again.

Some minor characters that appear in the first part of the novel also appear in the second part of the novel in some way or the other. Entiko Zufan, a character we meet in the first part, appears in the second part with a different name (Wolloyew) and personality (crazy person). His stepmother, which appears in the first part, occurs in the second part in the appearance of a man, Bekure. Because of their personal trait and relationship with him, Mezgebu says, "ወንድ ባይሆን ኖሮ በኩረ እንጀራ እናቴን ራስዋን።" (386) (If Bekure were not male, he would be my stepmother herself). He also likens Alemayoh to Elias and Negassa to Mustefa, who respectively appear in the second and first part.

Astonishingly enough, Addis Ababa and NefasMewcha are the same geographically. What surprises Mezgebu, when he comes to Addis is that Addis, like NefasMewcha, is surrounded by mountains in east, west and north directions. When he travels to Addis through Enteto Mountain and sees Addis from up the mountain, he says, "የአዲስአበባ የመሬት ቅጥ ሠፋ አለ እንጂ ያው እንደ ንፋስ መውጫ

ነው።” (445) (Except for its [Addis Ababa] spatial width, it is the same as NefasMewcha).

Nevertheless, the concept of repetition or eternal recurrence is more clearly expressed by the words of Wolloyew when he talks to Mezgebu. He says:

ከሺህ ዓመት በፊት የተፈጠረ ተረትና ምሳሌ አለ እስከዛሬ። ለምን? ብዙ ያልጠፋ ነገር ስላለ። ለውጥ ለውጥ ብንል ተረትና ምሳሌው ካልተለወጠ ለውጥ የለም ማለት ነው። ለውጥ ነፍስ ውስጥ ነው። ነፍስ ደሞ ቁዋንቁዋ ነው። ልባስ ብንለውጥ ምን ይሰራል። «የአባት ዕዳ ለልጅ» ብዬ ብተርት ዛሬም ይሰራል። ለምን? ድሮም ዛሬም አባትና ልጆች አሉ። ዛሬ ያለበጀነው ነገር ቢተላለፍ ችግሩ ነገ ብቅ ይላል። ዛሬም አለ። የተረትም ክብ አለው። ምክንያቱም ሰው ክብ ነው። ርጦ ርጦ ወደ ጀመረበት። የሚለወጠው እውቀትህ ነው። ይህ ዕውቀት የትም አይደርስም። ለምን? ማስተማር ትፈልጋለህ ግን የሚማር የለም። ትክክሉ ይህ ነው ብትል የሚሰማህ የለም። እያንዳንዱ በስህተት መኖርን ይሸታል። ሕይወት ክብ ስለሆነ። ሰዎች በእንጀራ ይጣላሉ፣ ሰዎች በሹመት ይጣላሉ፣ ሰዎች በሴት ይጣላሉ፣ ሰዎች ይወለዳሉ ይሞታሉ፣ ሰዎች ከተቃራኒ የታ ጋር በአልጋ ይተኛሉ፣ ይዋለዳሉም። አልተለወጠም። ድሮ ያጎፍሩ እንደሆነ ዛሬ ይተካሉ። ቢለወጥ እንኩዋን ካልተለወጠው አይበልጥም። (339)

A proverb made one thousand years ago still lingers. Why? Because many things have not disappeared. We talk of change, but unless the proverb changes there is no change. Change is inside soul. And soul is language. Changing the cover never does. If I say “A father’s debt is on his child” it works even today. Why? There are and were father and children. If something that we do not attend to transfers, the problem will turn out tomorrow. It lingers even today. Even proverbs are circular. Because man is circular. He ends up at his starting point. It is your knowledge which changes. This knowledge does not go beyond. Why? You want to teach, but no one learns. If you say that this is the fact, no one listens to you. Everybody wants to live wrongly. Because life is circular. People fight for bread, they fight for promotion, they fight for women, they get born and die, they sleep with opposite sex, and they bear children. It never changed. If they used to do their hair in afro style, now they get their hair straighten. Even if it changed, it is not more than the unchanged.

Hence, Adam can be said to believe that everything in this universe is repeated infinitely; nothing is new but a repetition of the past and that will happen again time without number.

To add one interesting point, Mezgebu believes in the existence of god. But what is most important in his belief is that he considers that God merely watches and observes; he does not have a hand in the existence of human beings, his creatures. This is evident in his question. He asks, “ለምን “እግዚህር” ብለው አይጠሩኝም ነበር? እሱ እንደ እኔ ተቀምጦ ከማየት ሌላ ምን ሰራ?” (9) (Why didn't they name me “God”? What does He do rather than sitting and watching like me?). Nevertheless, his belief is more clearly palpable in his picture on the cover of the novel. His portrait is depicted in Ethiopian traditional painting style; an afro-style and big eyes. These big eyes symbolize all-seeing God. Thus it means that Mezgebu has angelic quality, which by implication is to mean that God is silent and sits hand-folded while his creatures suffer in this absurd world, like Mezgebu himself, who just does not act but simply watches and observes.

2. "Elzabel" (Jezebel)

"Elzabel", a well-crafted short story, authored by Adam Reta, is included in his anthology, *Mahlet*. In this story, Adam has developed a form of multiple first-person narration. The narrators tell the story taking turn, especially, Paulos and Selamawit; the third narrator, Mesfin, takes his turn toward the end of the story. Each turn is numbered and the whole story has thirty one turns. Until the 22nd turn Paulos and Selamawit narrate one after the other. Then Mesfin takes the 23rd turn and goes to the end narrating alternating with Selamawit. The story starts and ends with Selamawit's turn. However, each turn or telling contributes to the whole picture of the story.

Through the three I-narrators, Adam, has given the reader the chance to get the narrator's inner thoughts, different perspectives of same events or the world and the whole image of their relationship with each other and the society.

The story recounts about a couple (Paulos and Selamawit), who had unpleasant childhood experience, which eventually led them to the overwhelming fate of human beings, that is, alienation. The path of their lonely worlds brings them into unity, in the paradoxical sense of the word. Paulos and Selamawit have an illegitimate daughter and live under one roof as partners. In the meantime, Paulos enters into harsh dispute with his best friend, Mesfin, while his relationship with Selamawit is deteriorating from time to time. Finally, he abandons his partner taking his daughter with him without telling a soul that he has changed his job and address. Selamawit manages to stay at home for sometime with the help of Mesfin, but they start an affair which cannot even last three months. Mesfin, one day, tells her that he sleeps with her making her a fall guy for the grudge he held against her partner, Paulos, and she hits him on his head with a bottle to death out of great shock. The story ends with her imprisonment.

This short story, in general, catches the intricacies of alienation and/or Tantalusian condition of human beings, through the life and relationship of Paulos, Selamawit and Mesfin amongst each other and with the society or their world that subtly foregrounds the absurdity of this world.

Without making reference to their religious standpoint, existentialists believe that there are no absolute values that human beings can rely on. For instance, for Sartre "... because there is no god, there is no objective standard of values....We establish and invent our values." In an absurd world, in which there are no values or social codes ready made, humans create standard sets of conducts to give meaning to the meaningless, and to create "order" to absurdity. In the story, the society in which Paulos' mother used to live invented its own values and codes of conduct. In this society, there is a superstition that people with the evil eye should be discriminated and stigmatized for they inflict pain on people. They are the unwanted parts of the society. Because of this false belief that the society blindly follows, the neighbors of Paulos's mother allegedly accused her for harming her neighbor woman, since she was believed to possess the evil eye.

Paulos narrates, in flashback, that the neighbors took her pushing and shoving away from her house and beat her to death. The society snatched his beloved, helpless mother away from him when he was only ten. The society rocked his world. He says, "ልጅነቴ በዚያች ዕለት በዚያች አባራማ መንገድ በእናቴ የውርደት ዕለት ልመልሰው የማልችል ጎዳናን ቀየሰ።" (129) (my childhood engineered an irrevocable path on that dusty road, on my mother's humiliation day). It was since this very day that he bore a grudge against and started to distrust the society (ቲም አለኝ። ይኸ ጎብረተሰብ እናቴን ቀምቶኛል። የተከናነበኳትን ፍቅሬን ገፍኛል። በእናቴ ያላመንኩት በማን ልመነው?) (129).

He was fated to be detached from the society at his early age because of the values and sets of conducts the society established and upheld, which paradoxically hurt individual members of the society and eventually itself.

But what is missing in the story is that there is no clue how he grew up and managed to graduate from Addis Ababa University, because he never knows his father's whereabouts and he never talked about a relative to take care of him. What we get is that he remained alone in this world without any root of family. Of course, he says, "የዘር ግንደ ተገርሶአል።" (142) (My family tree is uprooted). The story starts when he becomes an employee for some office and runs his own family.

Similarly, Selamawit, his partner, had encountered a chaotic world right from her early childhood because of her family. She was the only child to her parents. Her parents are young and they are a kind of parents who never give little attention or care to their little daughter and take all the time to enjoy their life as if their end is at the threshold of their house. She grew up in the harsh hands of a maid. They entirely drove her to the abyss of lonely world where she could not experience parental or human love. She was more estranged from her family than from a stranger.

Consequently, she was more related to nonhuman beings like insects. She retrospectively, narrates that she used to get love from butterflies.

በዚያ ሰፊ ግቢ ለእኔ የሚያደሉልኝ ቢራቢሮዎች ይመስሉኝ ነበር። በእጆቼ አፍኜ ይገዜ እየተንፈራፈሩ በክንፋቸው የእጆቼን ውስጥ ሲኮሮኩሩኝ በቀጫጭን እግሮቻቸው ሲዳስሱኝ ደስታ ፍንቅድቅ ያደርገኛል--ምናልባት ለሰው ያለኝ ፍቅር በመታፈኑ ነፍስ ካላቸው ነገሮች ላለመለያየት ነርቦቼ የፈጠሩት አሳሳቢ ማባባያ ይሆናል። (148)

I thought butterflies were favoring me in that spacious compound. When I enclosed them in my cupped hands, they tickled and caressed my palms with their wings and fine legs flapping their wings, ecstasy encompasses my whole being—perhaps it could be my nerves which created this shameful enticement not to be detached from living things since my love for men is suppressed.

When individuals are isolated, whenever they cannot get love from their fellow human beings, they feel more attached to nonhuman beings or things, like Selamawit and Mezgebu (in *Giracha Kachiloch*), to quench their thirst for human love.

This absurd, irrational world, which does not deliver the desire of man, “blessed” these two characters, Paulos and Selamawit, with estrangement starting from their childhood. Both of them met, when they were seeking for an emendation to their fate in their own way. Selamawit befriended Elizabeth and thought she could get what she missed from her parents. Paulos had an acquaintance with Elizabeth. There is a hint, at this juncture, that he used to escape from his worries and problems by immersing himself into the excitement of the present and seeking immediate gratifications. On page 144, he tells us that Elizabeth came to be the agent of their meeting because Elizabeth is a kind of girl who cannot help to reject an invitation to a dance party. He most possibly was a dance lover and merry-maker or even a womanizer himself, by implication.

Not long after they started a love affair, Selamawit got pregnant. Immediately, they began living as partners. What is curious about their union is the fact that they never had or have an intention to get married legally and according to the custom of the society. When he talked to a friend, his friend advised him that it is good for him if he marries to a girl legally and customarily. But Paulos replied, “አያስፈልግም። ከልጅትዋ ጋር ከተዋደድን ይበቃል።” (141) (That is not necessary. It is enough, if we love each other.). Selamawit also chose to live with him without the

consent of her parents and relatives, and without legal marriage. It is one form of an act of dissatisfaction or rejection of the social value system. On the side of Paulos, as an alienated person or victim of the social values, the act is a vivid indication of his desire to destroy the system or avenge himself on the society, which robbed of his mother. He outrageously says, “የወጋ ቢረሳ የተወጋ አይረሳ” (132) (One who inflicts may forget but the inflicted does not), which clearly tells that he is all ready to revenge himself on the society. He is a revenger. For Selamawit, it is an act of showing her resentment on her family, relatives and the society. She is very much angry with them because they always estrange her.

Another means of Paulos’s revenge on the society is revealed in his outlook towards women and the kind of relationship he establishes with them. For him, a woman is a mere sex object and is only meant to bear and rear a child, as he once tells Selamawit with reference to her. Paulos and Selamawit live as husband and wife, but he also sleeps with other women like Roman, his colleague. This is, of course, a double-edged action. On the one hand, it is an act of infidelity and contempt on his partner, considering her as meek and weak. On the other, it is a deed of adultery, which is socially and religiously unacceptable. He is whimsically attacking the social values and norms. He believes that “ሮማን ትሔዳለች--ሮማን ትመጣለች:: ሰላማዊት ትሔዳለች--ሰላማዊት ትመጣለች::” (170) (Roman goes— [another] Roman comes. Selamawit goes— [another] Selamawit comes). For him, a woman is a woman; women are the same, unlike their individual difference. This holistic implication makes sense when treated in relation to the following two quotations: “ራቁ! ሔዋን ራቁ!” (145 and 146) (Go away! Eve, Go away!) and “ኤልሳቤጥ [ሸርመጣ] ነሽ::” (168) (You are Jezebel [harlot]).

When he says, “Eve, go away” he is referring to Selamawit. Addressing her as Eve, when it is a biblical name for the female or woman gives the impression that she is presented as a representation of women. Therefore, in whatever way he describes

her, it implies to women (holistically). For instance, on page 136, he describes her as weak, which signifies by implication that women are weak. But what is most striking is the second quotation where he describes her as harlot or Jezebel. The name Jezebel basically alludes to the Phoenician princess in the Bible, in the Book of Kings. The sense in which Paulos attaches to the name is based on the second Book of Kings 9: 30-33, where Jezebel puts on her cosmetics just before being killed. Paulos, in fact, used this name to mean that Selamawit is a sexually promiscuous woman, in the same way as it is used in modern times. By the same token, it seems that he wants to say that women are in general promiscuous.

In line with this, the result of his alienation or isolation from the society other than revenge is extreme distrust. He trusts no one. And this is the main reason, if not the only, for him to leave Selamawit. He does not have the slightest trust on her. He thinks that the fact that she got a daughter from him and that she left her parents for him cannot be a guarantee that she would not one day abandon him. He even wonders how he stayed with her for more than a year. The only soul he believes he can love and trust now is his little daughter (... ተግምኝ ፍቅር መስጠት የምችለው ለልጄ ብቻ ይመስለኛል:: (170)). The stark fact is that he never loved Selamawit; he just wanted her to give him a child.

Concerning Selamawit, the consequences of her isolation are manifested in two ways. The first is that due to the lack of love and attention from her family, she feels easier to get close to strangers to find what she missed from her family. It did not take her much time to befriend Elizabeth and to fall in love with Paulos. Surprisingly enough, after Paulos leaves her, she immediately starts an affair with Paulos's friend, Mesfin. She believes that “አንድ ብቻ ከመሆን ሁለት መሆን ይሻላል:: . . ሁለቱም በአንድነት ቢተኙ ይሞቃቸዋል::” (175) (Being two is better than to be alone. ...If they both sleep together, they get warm). The second is that she retreats in the form of regression into the past in an attempt to go back to the security of

the womb. In fact, she asks herself, “ምን ይጎድልብኛል?--ወደ እናቴ ማህፀን ብመለስ?” (169) (What would I lose, if I were to return to my mother’s womb?).

Let us return to the relationship between Paulos and Selamawit as partners. The situation of their relationship is exemplar of the Tantalusian condition of man. The Tantalusian condition, according to Barakat (1969), is a concept that shows how human beings are close to each other without relating to their souls and minds, which is comparable in many ways to the legendary situation of Tantalus who was doomed by the Gods to stand in water which receded whenever he tried to quench his thirst. Paulos and Selamawit live as partners, (husband and wife) under the same roof, sleep in one bed, eat together on one table, have a daughter; but paradoxically enough they are inexplicably very far from each other. They never understand or know each other. They have no idea how the other grew up. She lives with him because she loves him, but he lives with her only to get a child. Everything Selamawit does to impress him never appears appealing to him; he holds her in contempt. Their thoughts, dreams and intentions are entirely divergent. Their souls and minds are not united; it is not a “marriage of true minds”.

No wonder, their relationship ends up in a striking separation after two years or so. Paulos one day leaves her taking his daughter with him, unbeknown to Selamawit and disappears. However, it is later after he disappears that Selamawit comes to realize the nature of their relationship. She says:

**የተገመደ መቼ ፈጥኖ ይበጠሳል:: ቡጢ የሚሆኑት ጣቶችና መዳፎች ናቸው::
አልተገመድንም ማለት ነው--የተተረተርን. . . .
አልተቋጠርንም ማለት ነው--የተበጠስን. . . . (175)**

Something entwined...never snaps easily. Fingers and a palm make a fist.
We are not entwined – We are slitted.
We are not knotted – We are snapped.

The same is true with Selamawit and Mesfin and Paulos and Mesfin; they are close to each other and yet spiritually they are far away from each other. Thus, they eventually all separate. Paulos disappears, Mesfin is killed and Selamawit goes to prison. They are unable to quench their thirst to transcend their loneliness.

As far as their destiny is concerned, it is Selamawit's imprisonment which signifies a lot. She is imprisoned because she is found guilty. But her guilt can be understood in two possible ways. Her first guilt is obviously the fact that she killed a person which can be proved legally. However, what is really under judgment is her humanity or existence and she is guilty in different senses. Firstly, she is a kind of individual who shows only a passive resistance and who is very reluctant to act unlike Paulos. The friendship she builds with others is not under her strong will but just because they ask her to be a friend. She has no idea what friendship, love affair or pregnancy entails. But we see her making friendships, love affairs and getting pregnant. She is very reluctant to act in the sense that she does not rebel; if she does it is only accidental or thoughtless. When her parents isolate her, she does not react to win their hearts; when Paulos quits spending time with her as he used to before she gets pregnant, she does not react. Thus she is guilty of leading a passionless or passive life and of being a cog in the crowd without recognizing her individuality.

Secondly, she is deficient in some human ways. One of the most typical examples for this is the reaction we observe when Paulos abandons her and takes their daughter away with him. What worries and saddens her most is not her lover's and daughter's vanishment but what will happen to her and her life in the future. When she knows about their disappearance, she simply wonders how cruel Paulos is and how her daughter would react to people whenever they ask her who her mother is. Hence, she is guilty in the sense that she is the one or the mother who

does not weep, and is not troubled and traumatized by her little daughter's disappearance.

To make one last point, one of the most terrible insights which the story conveys is that life is absurd and pointless more than one can think of it. Even though this is comprehensible through the life of the three characters, it becomes more easily intelligible in the consciousness or words of Selamawit, which she makes in prison. At the end of the story Selamawit thinks of her life and says:

*ዕቃዬን በሙሉ የቤት ኪራይ አለባት ብለው አሮጊትዋ ይዘውብኛል። --
ሕፃን ሁኔ እኔ ግድ የምስጣቸው ቤተሰቦች አልነበሩም። ወድጄው ባል
ባገገም ዘሎ ኤልዛቤል--ሸርሙጣ አለኝ። ጓደኛው መበቀያ አደረገኝ . . .*

ሕይወት የሚባለው ይኸ ነው እንዴ? (180)

The landlady has kept my household in compensation for unpaid rent. -When I was a child, I did not have a loving family. I loved and married a man, and he snapped 'Jezebel-harlot'. His friend made me a fall guy...

Is this what life is?

But she has no answer for her question, and she has no explanations for what happened to her. It is, however, evident that she has come to understand that the world is absurd beyond her imagination and is indifferent to her desires and expectations.

Nevertheless, in line with this last point, it is important to say something about the title of the story in addition to the point made previously concerning the significance of the word or name Elzabel (Jezebel). The researcher believes that the title, "Elzabel" (Jezebel) has something to do with the notion of absurdity which is portrayed in the story. It seems that Adam Reta wants to express the absurdity of this world or the world in the story in terms of what the name Jezebel connotes,

that is, harlot. A promiscuous woman sleeps with many partners, she does not deserve ones trust in every conceivable way, she is never expected to fulfill ones desire always in the sense that she follows her mood etc. Likewise, the world is a home for innumerable human beings who come and go, it is irrational and indifferent to the human desire and expectations and it is distrustful that as Nietzsche said "the ground under your feet may slip away," which is to mean that the world does not worth ones trust.

3. "Sphinx"

Like many of Adam's stories, this short story deals with an individual, who finds himself "thrown" into a hostile and chaotic world from the very outset. Like Mezgebu of *Giracha Kachiloch* and other Adam's protagonists, Ali the protagonist of this story is fated to lose his mother at his early childhood, before his fifth birthday and to be "raised" by a horrible stepmother. Ali's father is also uncaring the same as Mezgebu's father, Dubale. Ali is estranged by his family mysteriously, which heightens the absurdity of human existence.

The condition of Ali's existence supports Adam's main themes: absurdity and alienation. They are presented here through Ali's estrangement that encompassed his whole being which makes his life miserable. But fortunately enough, Ali finds a way to save himself from despair and forlornness. He becomes mesmerized by the music his neighbor old man plays with his Ethiopian lyre (Kirar) and learns from him how to play. Then he starts to ignore his task as a shepherd and to spend most of his time with the old man listening to his music and playing for himself. He gets the chance to transcend his loneliness through the music and with the company of the old man. From time to time, he becomes more and more drawn to the old man's hut and away from his family.

The most striking part here is that his father and stepmother pose a threat to his sublimated soul by scolding and punishing him to let him stop playing lyre thinking that being a folk singer (Azmari) would not earn him a living and social acceptance. The old man has also warned him that it is better for him to be a clever farmer. The old man, of course, knew what a village singer's fate would be since he had a lived experience. Even though there is no detail about his account, there is a clue about his life as a folk singer. From the description we know that this old man lives in an abject poverty in a ramshackle hut alone or better to say deserted

by the society. In this society and period in which the story is set (it is set in the last years of imperial Ethiopia) to be a folk singer is not a celebrated and respected profession, although paradoxically enough folk singers are spices of wedding ceremonies, social parties, etc., and mouthpieces of the society in times of plight and oppression. Nevertheless, the society invents values and sets of conducts where there is no absolute value, to give meaning to the meaningless and dictates its members to be clever farmers ignoring individuality of the members.

This is what happens to Ali in this story. His family, especially, his father would not like to be called “the father of Ali the folk singer”. Eventually, his family sets a plan to detach him from his lovely lyre. When he is nine, they send him to a small town to start his elementary schooling, but their plan could not succeed. He pursues his love for the lyre (music) and the old man. They try for the second time by sending him to another town very far from their village to further his education when he passed sixth grade. But the more they strive to stop him from playing, the more he loves his lyre. In fact, he fails at grade seven because he spends most of his time playing music; he never gives attention to his lessons. Immediately, his father marries him to a girl in his best intention to make him a farmer. However, Ali fails his father again; he becomes more of an amateur singer to quench his thirst for music and to make a living from it.

Ali knows very well what is best for him. His mother died when he was a child, his stepmother gave him a traumatic childhood, and his father is only good to put the condition of his son from the frying pan to the fire. Ali’s world just drives him to the sphere of estrangement, which he cannot get an explanation for. However, Ali has not revenged himself on his family or immersed himself in superficial things—he does otherwise. He comes to be a sublimator through his creativity to change the world for the better by helping out himself and others from anxiety, emptiness, sadness and despair with his music.

Ali as a husband and amateur singer uses his talent to earn a living by entertaining his audience in the town (Guro) bars. And his wife becomes very enchanted by his music unlike his expectations. But soon enough things change and he becomes puzzled. His audience starts to use his music to tease, mock, insult each other by giving him words to recite with his lyre instead of enjoying the beauty of his music. However, when he sings his favorite song with his lyre, they ignore him their ears and immerse themselves in their talks. Their response to and manipulation of his music allow him to understand their attitude towards his career as a folk singer. The worst thing that baffles him more happens after this.

One day, Ali was singing in a local bar reciting his audience's words as usual to insult each other. In the middle of this, two drinkers shot at each other and one of the town's figures (Hajji Mohammed) got injured. Probably the most serious paradox here is that the town court claims that his career as a folk singer is a crime (ነገሩ ፍርድ ቤት ሲደርስ የዐሊ አዝማሪነት ወንጀል ነው ተባለ። (106)) and he is fined one hundred birr. This is possibly the last severe message he gets from the society that his profession is most unwanted and unrespected by this society at that period.

His plight is ceaseless. Hajji Mohammed writes on the wall of the bar, “ዐሊ አዝማሪው ይሙት!” (108) (“Death to Ali the singer!”), and his wife leaves him for this telling him that his being a folk singer would not do him any good. Then he remains alone in his house overwhelmed by his feeling of estrangement that fills his whole life from his childhood. Everything in his surrounding, his world turns out against his expectations and desire, which is only good to drive him to the unfathomable sphere of alienation, beyond his imagination. Nothing works out for him. He remains helpless and defenseless.

Nevertheless, Ali leaves his village for Gobba (a town far away from his village) to struggle for his survival and in search of an audience, who may understand and embrace his music. But he finds nothing interesting in Gobba, too. Fortunately, however, after a week's stay the whole colony of campaigners (university students who were sent on campaign to literate the illiterate and help local officials in administrative activities) arrive at Gobba, which is a divine intervention for him. These campaigners, unlike Ali's local audience, adore, blissfully enjoy and wholeheartedly recognize his music and its standard. One of the campaigners, in fact, admires him, “. . . ታይቶ የማይታወቅ ዘፋኝ፡፡” (112) (...Unmatched singer). And a flicker of hope starts to lighten up his heart once again.

Then Ali returns to his hometown with the campaigners in the hope that things will change with the help of these young campaigners. But the bourgeois local officials become fury to see Ali with the campaigners. At night, Ali goes to the bar where the wall on which the words “Death to Ali the singer!” were written and he rephrases it into “Long live to Ali the singer!”, which signifies that he has come to love life more than ever, unlike the hardships he has encountered.

Even though this makes clear that Ali has started to understand the absurdity of this world and the certainty of death, he has missed to understand that death is not something that matters at a later time, but an existential truth that affects ones life here and now. According to existentialism, an authentically existing individual must live in such a way that he is prepared to die at any moment and that a sudden end does not render his life meaningless. But Ali has missed the point and considers death as a possibility that will occur in his later life. This is what makes Ali's death most tragic and absurd, before he even finishes reading the rephrased words for the second time. Someone from behind shot him to death. The absurdity of all absurdities is the fact that man toils in this pointless world and his futile struggle ends in death.

Finally, one of the most interesting features of this short story lies in its title: Sphinx. The title speaks louder as the existence of Ali, which comes out more vividly after you finish reading the story. It possibly symbolizes the absurdity of this world as the world presented in this story. It is essential to note that the researcher is not exactly referring to the Great Sphinx of Giza, but to the female monster with the body of a lion, the breast and head of a woman, in Oedipus the King, by Sophocles, who was sent by the gods to plague the town of Thebes as punishment for some ancient crime and she preyed on the youths of the land, devouring all those who failed to solve the riddle. Initiates who had attended their education for years in Egypt and youths from far and wide, who demanded entry into Thebes, were devoured by Sphinx all who could not answer her riddle. Similarly, the world is deemed absurd. Man is “thrown” into this world and pointlessly struggles in the face of the absurd to give meaning to the meaningless, eventually, everything stops in his death, which renders his life more tragic and absurd.

4. “Keljitwa” (From the Girl)

This short story is one of the narratives that are included in Adam’s anthology, *Alengana Miser*. Even though there is a clue that it is presented in the third-person narration, what we get throughout the story is a stream of consciousness of the main character, who is nameless. The narrator is unidentifiable and just interferes with the main character’s internal thoughts to tell us the setting (time) of the story and to report what happens to her at a particular time by other people. Adam’s use of stream of consciousness in this story to reveal the main character’s inner thoughts has helped him to highlight the human experience of total strangeness and forlornness in regard to, especially, lifeless objects, in addition to fellow human beings.

What is distinctive about this story is that the title is accompanied by a piece of poem (it is put under quotation above the title) that is possibly written by the main character and that craftily describes what is portrayed in the story. The poem is:

“በብቸኝነት ክር ላይ. . .
ሁሉ ያገጣጥራል. . . .
ተኮስኮ ቢል እንኳን ጎበዝ ነኝ ባይ
እስከ ሕልፈተ--ዓለም ይስታል::
ክሩ እንኳን ቢኖርም
ለተመልካች አይታይም”

“On the thread of loneliness...
Everybody aims...
Even a sharp shooter who shoots
Misses till doomsday.
Even though there is the thread
It is not visible to an observer”

The poem, in general, signifies that loneliness is inevitable or inescapable that prevails the existence of human beings and that appears invisible to others and a

truth to oneself. It foregrounds the idea that man everywhere finds himself locked out and alone with himself.

The story narrates what goes on in the mind of the main character and what happens to her in thirty minutes from 9:30 to 10:00 pm. It starts with the girl walking to her house at night in a dark empty street. In this particular time, the reader is encountered with the depressing situation of the main character through her internal thoughts. What is curious about her is that she constantly conflicts with herself. She is going home but she thinks that getting home early does not make a difference. She says, “ስለምን ቤቴ በቶሎ እደርሳለሁ? ተኝቼ ለማለም? ሁልጊዜም አልማለሁ። . . . የሰው ታክሲ ውስጥ እንኳን ሆኜ ዐይኖቼን ከድኜ አልማለሁ።” (158) (Why do I get home early? To sleep and dream? I do always dream; I even dream closing my eyes in a taxi). And she asks herself many questions. For example:

- ልጅነቴን አልጨረስኩ ይሆን? ያልገባኝ ነገር አለ? (158)
- ሁለት ሰዎች መውደድ መጥፎ ነው? መውደድን በአንድ ሰው መወሰን ይቻላል? (158)
- የደስ ደስ ያለኝ ሽኚ መወለዴ ከፋ? (160)
- እናቴን ‘እወድሻለሁ’ ያልኳት እወነት ነው? (161)
- ሁሉ ሴት እንዲሁ ነው? እንዲህስ እንደ እኔ ጠልቶታል? (161)

- Haven't I outran my childhood? Is there something I do not understand?
- Is loving two men bad? Is it possible to bound ones love to one person?
- Is it bad that I am charming?
- Was it true when I said 'I love you' to my mum?
- Are all women like this? Do they hate their being female?

The tragedy about her questioning is that she never has answers or explanations to her questions. She keeps asking and bothering herself with unwinding questions. She is not only estranged from the world but she is detached from herself. Her soul and mind become a stage for a great dialogue and struggle between conflicting emotions and orientations.

She had a family, but it did not work out for her because of her decisions. She loved her husband and had a son. But because she does not exactly “know” all about marriage and love, she had a love affair with another man. She says that she loves her husband and her lover equally. Then she left her husband for her lover and unfortunately, he sent her away telling her that he does not love her. She returns to her husband, but he told her he married another woman and she remained alone. Even her son ignored her. Whatever the case is, she made a decision and acted upon it, but the responsibility is hers.

Be that as it may, because something mysteriously intervenes between her wish or aspiration and the actual world, it leads her into estrangement. She has no explanation for it, because the world is absurd in the sense that there is always a discrepancy between what is real and what is ideal, which remains incomprehensible to the rational mind of human beings. Hence her perpetual questions and disharmony with herself end up in detaching her from the world. As a result she feels empty, anxious and hopeless.

Let us return to the most prominent issue highlighted in the story. The main character finds herself estranged to the lifeless objects or objective world. The wind, the road, her photo album, her purse, the darkness or everything surrounding her and even her body, her head, her breasts and her womb appear to her strange unlike her familiarity with them. They seem to warn her off. For instance, she says:

እዚህ ብቻዬን እሄዳለሁ። የለመድኩትን መንገድ እንደ እንግዳ ሰው እረግጣለሁ። ልጅነቴን አልጨረስኩ ይሆን? ያልገባኝ ነገር አለ? ይህ ሁሉም መንገድ ነው። የመንገዴን ርዝመት በልቦናዬ፣ የጠጠሮችንም ብዛት አውቃለሁ። እግራ ግን እንደ እንግዳ ይረግጣል. . . . (158)

I am walking alone. I am treading on my familiar path like a stranger. Haven't I outran my childhood? This is my everyday path. I know by heart the distance of my path and the amount of pebbles. But my legs are treading like a stranger.

Even the most tiniest and harmless animal appears very fearful to her. She tells, “በመንገድ መብራት እሳትራቶች በክንፋቸው ይንተባተባሉ። እኔን አያዩኝም። ካዩኝ ክንፋቸውን ስለው እንደ ግልገል አንሳ፣ እንደ ጭልፊት ይወርዱብኛል. . . .” (159) (Fireflies are hovering around the street light bulb. They do not see me. If they see me, they would come down to me like a lamb-snatching eagle or hawk). She is completely surrounded by a world of utter strangeness and feels herself handed over to uncertainty and insecurity.

In the middle of these feelings, emotions and thoughts, three men come out of the absolute darkness and rape her frightening her with a knife. What makes this horrible incident more terrible or striking is her unbelievable reaction to the whole scene. She remains very quiet and still immersed in her thoughts. She thinks of her ex-husband and -lover, compares them with the rapers, keeps asking herself who the three men are, and appears sensitive to the dry grass and the ground under her back. In fact, her reaction surprised the rapers most and they conclude that “she has been in the mood”. She also paradoxically wanted to say “ቀስ በሉ” (‘slow down’) (162) to them when they run away.

But the most significant point here is that everything in her surrounding sets danger to her. She feels most helpless and defenseless; nothing comes in her rescue. Her ex-husband, -lover and son hated her, the objective world remains

silent and strange, animals appear frightening to her, the three men rape her and nobody comes to save her. The world just does not care about her.

However, she eventually accepts the world with all its absurdities, which marks a shift in her consciousness. She says:

መጨረሻው አንድ ነው። ወደ መጨረሻው የሚወስዱት መንገዶች ሕልቁ ናቸው። መጨረሻው አንድ ከሆነ ልዩነቱ ምንድን ነው? በፊት ተታልፏለሁ። አሁን አልታለልም። ጥላቻን ከነክክታዋ አቅፋታለሁ። (161)

The end is the same. The ways that take to the end are many. If the end is one, what is the difference? I was cheated. I won't be cheated. I would embrace hate with its phlegm.

As an absurd hero, she comes to realize that it does not matter how you live, but that it is life only which is meaningful insofar as everything ends in death. She recognized that the pointless struggle, hardship, fear and hopes of human beings get their halt in death. On top of that, she is prepared to die any moment knowing the indefiniteness of death, which renders her existence authentic. And this is evident in her counting down to zero at the end of her thought thinking that she is dying.

5. "Yeabeboch Tarik" (A Story of Flowers)

This short story recounts about a flower that encounters unpleasant situation against its wishes and desires amidst other flowers. The flowers are endowed with human qualities such as talking, conversing and thinking. Through the projection of plant characters onto human situations and predicaments Adam has successfully illustrated once again the existence of human beings and the inexplicable forces upon them.

The flower, which is planted in a flowerpot on a balcony, is always taken care of by a young girl and blossomed earlier than the other flowers. Unlike the flower's hope, the girl does not show up for two days to water it. Very unfortunately, a wind accompanied by a snowy rain strikes the flower with its power and makes her life more miserable after a hardship of a couple of days. She has not got water and has been attacked by a scorching sun and chilly wind.

The wind, which is also personified, converses with the flower and drops pollen, he carried from the island where he came from, unbeknown to the flower while the flower opens its petal. What is tragic about the situation is that the pollen came from the island where the flowers have drunk blood of virgin girls who were not willing to marry the king of that island. And any flower which receives pollen from these defiled and evil flowers is thought to produce wicked seeds. Then her fellow flowers alienate her considering that she is defiled too.

It is this condition that makes her existence more traumatic and intolerable. As a beautiful flower her wish was to be an object of beauty for the girl, to be smelled and be admired by onlookers, but she finds herself incomprehensibly deserted by the girl and exposed to the atrocity and attack of the different forces like the sun, wind and rain. And the worst is that she is estranged by the other flowers. All this

situation illuminates the misfortune and plight of man in this absurd world where some mysterious forces make his existence more unbearable.

Due to the estrangement she encountered and her understanding that she would produce evil seeds and contaminate the whole area, if she let herself live, the flower commits suicide. This act of the flower, of course, can be interpreted in two different ways. The first is that the flower takes this action as an exit from her unbearable and meaningless life, which makes her an inauthentic existent. To prepare yourself to die at any moment for the day and hour of your death is uncertain makes you an authentic individual, but to put an end to your life by yourself to escape from the absurd makes you inauthentic in the sense that it is after all death that makes the absurd more absurd and that an authentic person does not commit suicide since he is not startled by life's predicaments and misfortunes. According to Camus, suicide is not a solution to the absurd, but the very opposite.

On the other hand, the fact that the flower chooses to commit suicide for a good cause to save the flowers in that area from being contaminated by the vice of the seeds she might produce makes her an authentic existent. To sacrifice one's dear life for the benefit of the mass entails one's great commitment, decision and responsibility and "when one chooses, he chooses not only for himself but for all people". Hence the choice of the flower is the dearest one and is authentic insofar as it is her decision taken from her moralistic point of view. For Soren Kierkegaard, truth is an idea for which one is willing to live or die.

On top of that, suicide as a "truly serious philosophical problem," becomes the concern of Adam Reta in this story; but it can be said that he is in dilemma concerning the philosophical problem attached to it.

To take one last point, Adam's use of the flower to illustrate the very existence of human beings in an absurd world suggests more on the briefness of human existence. A flower symbolizes brevity. Thus it seems that Adam wants to accentuate the ephemerality of human life as he does in *Giracha Kachiloch*.

6. “Yedenech Mewase’et” (A Potato’s Book of Hymn)

This is Adam’s another story where he uses a non-human protagonist like in ‘Yeabeboch Tarik’. It is the story of a potato who does not want to die unlike his fellow potatoes, who eagerly and happily want to die to fulfill their creator’s words as scribed in their Holy Book. Like the flowers in ‘Yeabeboch Tarik’, the potatoes in this short story are given some human qualities. Through the use of vegetable protagonist, Adam has prominently discussed the issue of death and its effect on human beings.

In the prologue of this story an article or quotation from potatoes’ Holy Book is presented to give an insight into the belief of the potatoes about death. According to the words of praise of potatoes, death is not something they fear and try to escape from but a truth that is holy, sweet and meant to be zealously expected.

The story starts with the singing of the potatoes while their time of harvest is approaching. From the song one can understand that those who are not fattened or remain unripe are considered as escapees from death and their death is believed to be tragic because they do not want to die. When they sing for two weeks in praise of their creator and to celebrate their forthcoming death, one of them remains partly unripe, unclean, and silent not to participate in their celebration and singing. After they try hard to persuade him to join them, they realize that he is trying to escape from death and they sing that he should be lynched.

However, what is special about this potato is that he is not a cog in the crowd. An authentic existing individual, who engages himself in group life and commits himself to the betterment of his society, has to recognize and uphold his individuality, which makes his existence more authentic. The potato as an existent, realizes his individuality. But this detaches him from the community of potatoes.

When the farmers collect the potatoes from the plantation, one of the farmers throws this potato from his basket and the potato rejoices and sings that he wants to die after he enjoys life. He understands that death is certain, but misses the point that the hour and day of death is indefinite. For him, death is not a phenomenon that happens at any moment, but a possibility that may occur at a later time. This makes his existence inauthentic. To his surprise, because he happens to be on a footpath a passerby potato seller picks him up and puts him on her basket.

But the other potatoes, which are on the basket, alienate him for his sinful and hateful act to escape from holy death and for his untidiness; according to The Book of Cleanliness (መፀሐፈ ቁልቁሉ) (168), in the Holy Book of potatoes, the prime sign of the potatoes for their observance is their skin's tidiness. Then the potatoes start to converse with him and try to convince him that there is nothing good in living. As a questioning potato, he replies them that he wants to live because of his thirst for knowledge of what living looks like. And his questioning of the rules in the Holy Book to which the potatoes strictly follow detaches him further from them. In an absurd world, where there are no objective, predetermined values and rules, questioning of the norms of the society isolates a thinking individual more from the reactionary consciousness of the people around him.

In the marketplace, the potato seller prepares the potatoes for sale, but the potato fortunately manages to roll down and escape from the seller's selling-bed to a nearby ditch. Then the ditch water carries him to a stream and it takes him to a muddy and grassy field. After a few days stay in the field the potato starts to germinate and feels responsible and happy to help the new sprouts of the potato grow. This sense of responsibility existentially speaking makes him authentic and equates his exercise of his freedom.

Nevertheless, not long before he enjoys his ecstasy and sense of responsibility a porcupine eats him. The potato cries out loud thinking that his life has come to its end. Death takes him at a time when the potato least expects it. This is what makes his death more tragic. An authentically existing individual is ever ready for his death for the time of death is indefinite. Even though death makes every person's absurd life more meaningless, a sudden end makes an authentic existent's death less meaningless, because an authentic individual's preparedness for his death at any moment allows him to accomplish his desires, tasks, responsibilities or commitments in his life and uses his existential time efficiently. Kierkegaard describes "the present moment as the point in which time and eternity meet and intertwine". Hence a sudden death of a non-authentic person, who lives thoughtlessly and distractedly from day to day without realistically facing the possibilities and boundaries of his being (life), renders his absurd life more meaningless.

7. “Etemete Lomi Shita” (Madam, Lemon’s Smell)

Etemete Lomi Shita is a short story included in the anthology entitled by the title of this story. To note something about the most distinctive feature of this anthology, it is built through intertextuality. All the stories in this collection are interrelated to one another through different intertextual devices. To come to the specific feature of the story, Adam has again employed a multiple first-person narration, as in ‘Elzabel’, to foreground one of his main themes, alienation. However, as this theme has been discussed in every detail in the previous analyses in relation to the other stories taken for analysis, the writer of this study likes to deal with the other prominent issue highlighted in this story. The story examines the arbitrariness of justice, especially, through the internal thoughts of one of the characters, Tadesse.

Tadesse is a lawyer, who lost his lonely mother before he realized that she was alienated because of the spiteful intrigue of her husband’s friends and the society’s blinkered blackening of her name, even though she used to tell him everything about what happened to her husband and her or the family. After she died he says:

አግሚቷ እንደተበደለች ነገረኝ። . . . እማማ ብቻዋን እንደነበረች ገባኝ።
የምስማት እኔ ከነበርኩና እየሰማኳት ካለመንኳት፣ ከዛ የበለጠ ብቸኝነት አለ?
(124)

Her manner of death told me that she had been hurt. I realized that my mum was alone. If I listened to her and was not believing her, is there a loneliness that is more severe than this?

He comes to uncannily understand her state of mind and loneliness. But more importantly this situation has led him to raise some serious and reflective questions about the arbitrariness of justice.

Before we deal with this, one interesting point worth mentioning is the question he asked after he started his career as a prosecutor. He says and asks,

ባዘገመ ሂደት የተረዳሁትና የተገለጸልኝ አስፈሪ ሁኔታ ቢኖር ከእውነት ቀድሞ መተማመን/እምነት መኖሩ ነበር። እንዴት ከተጨበጠ ‘ሳይንሳዊ’ መረጃ የበለጠ ሰዎች መተማመንን ያምኑታል? ለምን ብሎ ውሸትንም ሆነ እውነትን በመተማመን ላይ በተመሰረተ ግንኙነት ብቻ ደግፈን እንቀበለዋለን? (121)

One fearful thing that I gradually realized was that there is trust/belief before truth. How can men trust trustworthiness better than concrete ‘scientific’ evidence? Why should we accept truth as well as untruth by supporting them with a relationship based on trust?

This seems to signify that the legal or court process that courts follow to prove someone guilty or innocent is highly questionable that many suspects must have been wrongly punished or sent free. Thus, Tadesse came to doubt if those whom he proved guilty and sent to prison were really guilty.

To return to the main point, for the existentialists, “man is not the measure of law. Man has not the power to enact the law he deems good”. In view of this, Tadesse claims that “. . .ሕጎችን ፍርድ-ገምድል ነው።” (126) (...our law is biased.). He does not accept the fact that courts punish one who injured someone’s eye with money or prison sentence. And he asks:

ለመሆኑ ዐይንና ገንዘብ የሚለዋወጡበትን ሂሳብ ማን ይሰራዋል? ከአንድ ጤነኛ ዐይን የማገኘው ደስታ ምን ያህል ብር ያወጣል? ትክክል ልውውጥ መሆኑን በምን እንለካለን? በየአገሩ ብቻ ሳይሆን በየዳኛው ዓይነት የተለያዩ ፍርድ አይኖርም? (127)

Who does calculate the means by which an eye and money exchange? How much does happiness obtained from a healthy eye cost? How do we measure if the exchange is balanced? Is there not a

judgment which varies not only from country to country but also from judge to judge?

Hence he believes that Hammurabi's code or law "eye for an eye" is justice or Emmanuel Kant's Retributivism is the right theory of punishment. Hammurabi's code means that a person who has injured the eye of another is instructed to give his or her eye in compensation, which is parallel to Kant's retributivism. Therefore, unlike Camus, who argued the abolition of death penalty in his essay, "Reflections on the Guillotine", Tadesse (Adam Reta) takes the position that a person who takes the life of another should be killed.

With respect to his belief, he thinks that those who caused the death of his father should be punished with death. Moreover, he applies this law when his wife betrays him and leaves him for her lover. He punishes her by conspiring with an acquaintance, who is the boss of his wife's lover to separate her from her lover by sending him to a remote area in disguise of job transfer.

In conclusion, it seems that Adam wants to assert that human law is arbitrary and that man is not capable of enacting a law that is based on the principles of justice.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

To offer a concise and clear conclusion to the comprehensive discussion and argument presented so far, it is preferred to put it in two subsections: Adam Reta and existentialism and recommendations. The first section prominently concentrates on the elucidation of the tenets of existentialism that are encapsulated in Adam's narratives, his protagonists' common features and their relationship to Camus' Sisyphus, and his religious view based on the analyses made. Some ideas will also be drawn from his reflective and partly autobiographical article, he wrote in an Amharic newspaper, Addis Negar, where it is necessary.

1. Adam Reta and Existentialism

As mentioned in the first chapter, Adam's narratives render a wide variety of possible meanings that are accessible after several readings. Thus, to pigeonhole his world-view as some "ism" or other is to obscure his writings. Nevertheless, according to the analyses and interpretations done, Adam's relationship with existentialism becomes significantly crystal clear. Dostoevsky and Kafka as literary existentialists have a certain existentialist dimension in their writings, as do Camus, Sartre, Jaspers and Heidegger, with whose works the term existentialism has been more or less equated since World War II. Even though the difference concerning their religious, philosophical, or political view is wider than their commonalities, they share certain characteristic tenets in Adam Reta.

Adam certainly remained fascinated and overwhelmed by the major themes of existentialist philosophy. To start from his religious view, as pointed out in the analysis of his novel, *Giracha Kachiloch*, which is a good start to discuss his

philosophical thinking, Adam seems to assert the existence of God but he considers that He does not have a hand in the existence of his creatures. Thus Adam appears to believe with Sartre and Camus, unlike their atheistic view, that it does not matter if god exists, because the world remains absurd whether He exists or not. The workings of God are not acceptable to him contrary to the Danish thinker, Kierkegaard who believes in God and counsels a “leap of faith” as a cure to existents.

Nevertheless, Adam’s preoccupation with the condition of the existence of individuals in his works is what puts him in the group of existentialist writers. He is greatly concerned with the life of existents in the face of the absurd. In most of his works, in addition to the narratives dealt with, we find the protagonists struggling for existence and to give meaning to the meaningless. Likewise, existentialism claims to be “a philosophy of the “I” rather than a philosophy of the “It” “. “Man is,” existentialism tells us, “at the core of every philosophical quest; with him philosophy begins, and with him it ends”.

This tendency of Adam’s great concern with the individual or man can be supported with a quotation from the newspaper article. When he talks about his soft spot for reading and watching thriller, he states that he is not influenced by such works when he writes. He reasons out:

ግን ይህ ሁሉ ከማየው [እና ከማነበው]፣ መራት ላይ እግራ ስር ካለ ዕውነታ ጋር አይገናኝም። ወደ ሌላ ጋላክሲ መብረርና በሎንዥና ስንዴ ለመግዛት ተፍኪ መውረድ የተለያዩ ናቸው። በራሴ ማህበራዊና መልካምድራዊ ማጣቀሻ የሚያጫውተኝ ነው የፈለኩት። (2)

But these things which I watch [and read] are not matched to the truth on the ground. Flying to another galaxy and traveling to Tefki [a town village] to buy wheat by bus are different. I wanted something that could occupy me with reference to my own social and geographical sphere.

Thriller as a genre basically elaborates an imaginative or fantastic premise rather than the world in which we actually live; it is not fiction of the observed reality. As a writer with a philosophical thinking, Adam does not want to deal with the imaginative or the ideal world, but with the reality that is the primary and most significant concern of man as a subject. Man or the individual is at the center of his writing and thinking.

When he deals with the individual, Adam recognizes the difficulty of responsible commitment in the face of an absurd universe. Without all the supernatural rules and values, a man is compelled to act morally in a world where death renders everything meaningless. He alone must be responsible for the consequences of his actions although he can never foretell that. Hence as Sartre states, "human freedom is not a blessing, but a curse and a horrible yoke". The guilt of existentialist heroes, as of Adam's, lies in their failure to choose and commit themselves in the face of too many possibilities. Like Camus' Sisyphus, who was condemned to roll a rock uphill only to see it roll down of its own weight, they find themselves with the fate of trying once more in the face of overwhelming discouragement. Nevertheless, unlike Sisyphus, the heroes of Adam Reta remain reluctant to act in a world devoid of metaphysical anchoring and suffering from the demons of absurdity and alienation.

The world which Adam portrays in his narratives helps him to display the absurd that is the fate of human beings. His protagonists find themselves in an inimical world and encounter with the absurd from the very outset. The discrepancy between the actual world and the ideal world and the protagonists' incapability to give solution to this incompatibility are the causes for their sense of estrangement. Beyond absurdity, the society's struggle to give meaning to the meaningless with

man-made values, sets of conducts and laws is the reason for the isolation of Adam's heroes.

Adam himself is the victim of this calamity, alienation. As he puts it in the newspaper article, it is his boredom that provided a stimulus for his creativity. And the root of this boredom is, as he elaborates it, perhaps the fact that the society in which he lives is abided and entangled by law and logic and that it predetermined its initial point and destination (የምኖርበት ህብረተሰብ ሁለንተና በሕግ የተሳሰረ፣ በአመክንዮ የታተመ፣ መነሻውና መድረሻውን ቀድሞ የደነገገ. . ስለሆነ ይሆናል::). His society's invention of values and rules causes his alienation and/or boredom as a thinking individual. The same is true with his heroes; they find themselves detached and lonely because of their encounter with the social codes. Besides, Adam has touched upon the arbitrariness of human justice and seems to justify Hammurabi's code "eye for an eye" or "tooth for a tooth".

Moreover, Adam has vividly described the human experience of total strangeness and forlornness in regard to the lifeless objects, especially with reference to his short story, "Keljitwa". For him, man appears as a stranger to the world into which he has been "thrown". Hence Adam asserts with the German poet, Rainer Maria Rilke, and Karl Jaspers, that "the animal is sheltered...but man is homeless". He is the most helpless and defenseless of all creatures.

In their attempt to find a way out of their loneliness or estrangement, Adam's protagonists vary in some ways. Some become sublimators, others are revengers, and some others end up in prison or death. Mezgebu of *Giracha Kachiloch* who becomes a writer and Ali the folk singer in "Sphinx" turn out to be sublimators the same as their creator, Adam Reta. They transcend their world for the better through creativity. The revengers like Paulos in "Elzabel" on the other hand engage in activities aimed at destroying the social system rather than improving it.

However, Selamawit in “Elzabel” goes to prison, which is only good to deepen her loneliness, and like the non-human protagonists, the flower in “Yeabeboch Tarik”, other heroes come to the end of their life.

To raise one important point here, Adam has brought the issue of death to the center of his thinking through the death of Ali the folk singer and his non-human protagonists. He recognizes that death is the ultimate “limit situation” of human beings. But this total annihilation, according to Adam, has a great impact on the life of the existing individual. He agrees with the existential thinkers that it is constitutive part of life and that it should be incorporated into the texture and pattern of the existent. Thus he realizes, as he illuminated it in his stories, what death renders to the meaning of the life of the individual, when it is least expected or otherwise, for the day and hour of death is indefinite.

Nevertheless, Adam has also indicated his conviction, through his works, that human existence is essentially surrounded by limitation, physically as well as psychologically. As pointed out in his newspaper article, he asserts that “አለም የምትሰጥህ የተመጠነ ነገር ነው። በዛ ውስጥ ነው በማባወዝ ስፋት መክተት የምንሞክረው. . . ግን ብዙ ጊዜ ተፈጥሮ ከሰጠችህ ገደብ አይወጣም።” (What the world gives us is limited and we can live by permuting what is given, but we cannot go beyond the limitations). It can be claimed that he believes that this limitation and finiteness of human existence cannot be closed or bridged over by any exertion of human thinking.

Another issue that Adam has attempted to illustrate in his works is the ephemerality of human existence. He strongly states that human life is too short. He deems, however, that this brief and absurd life can be meaningful and enjoyed to the utmost insofar as one exists authentically, through his freedom of choice, sense of responsibility for his actions, commitment (passion for life), etc.

One of the matters that Adam has highlighted, with special reference to his novel, *Giracha Kachiloch*, is the concept of repetition or eternal recurrence. In this regard, he contends with Kierkegaard and Nietzsche that there is only repetition of everything in the world. The same things happen in the same way infinitely in the past, present and future. It is just like Sisyphus' hauling a rock uphill each time it rolls back down for eternity.

By way of conclusion, the writer of this study likes to enumerate the findings of the thesis. The first findings are that the narratives are existentialist stories and that Adam Reta is a literary existentialist. The second is, as the researcher profoundly believes, that Adam has accomplished the concern of Wellek and Warren (1993) that ideas in literature should be "incorporated into the very texture of art... [and] cease to be ideas in the ordinary sense of concepts and become symbols, or even myths". As a philosophical thinking, his ideas have helped enormously to heighten the aesthetic value of his works. Finally, it can be claimed that Adam Reta is one of the Ethiopian literary giants, who can comparably be listed on the same plane with Haddis Alemayoh, Bealu Girma, Dagnachew Worku, Tsegaye Gebremedhin, etc.

2. Recommendations

The meaning which the researcher explicated out of the works of Adam Reta is one of the many meanings that his works may render, though it is the most substantial one. In fact, the researcher has read his novel through existentialism in this study and had made a psychoanalytic reading of *Giracha Kachiloch* for a term paper to be presented to the course, Major Topics in Contemporary Literary Movements. There is no single best interpretation insofar as a text exists in relation to others

since Julia Kristeva contends that “any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations”.

The works of Adam Reta readily lend themselves to many types of readings and approaches. Feminist, structuralist, poststructuralist, and realist readings are among them. His narratives are also fertile grounds for various stylistic analyses; for instance, foregrounding and stream of consciousness. Moreover, the several mythological elements and symbols in his works can open a good opportunity to come up with new insights. To add one last issue, the researcher is of the opinion that Adam’s anthology, *Etemete Lomi Shita*, is a stage for one who wishes to understand and study the practice and theory of intertextuality and to interpret the anthology in general and each story in particular, through this theory.

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