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## Chapter 1: Research Problems, Goals and Assumptions.

### 1.1. Introduction

Narratives are universal phenomena. As Barthes (1977:20) argues, narratives are found all over the world in countless forms. He adds the following:

Under this almost infinite diversity of forms, narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and there nowhere is nor been a people without narrative. All classes, all human groups, have their narratives, enjoyment of which is very often shared by men with different, even opposing, cultural backgrounds. Caring nothing for the division between good and bad literature, narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself.

As Barthes explains above, narratives exist everywhere. Ethiopia—a country with a number of ancient historical, cultural and spiritual traditions—also has narratives that are the products of a number of languages spoken there.

Amharic is one of these languages. Since its inception as a court language following Ge'ez, an ancient Semitic language that served as the official language of the early Ethiopian kingdoms until the fourteenth century, Amharic started to play “a preeminent role in the nation until the present” (Taddesse and Ali 1995:17). However, there is a kind of consensus among scholars that it became a literary language in the nineteenth century. Since then, Ethiopians have produced a number of important religious and secular literary works in this language.

Novel writing in Amharic is a century-old practice. There is a consensus among Amharic literary scholars that the novel written under the title *Lebb Wälläd Tarik (Fictional Story)* by Afawarq Gabrayasus in 1908 is the first Amharic novel to pave the way for the history of modern Amharic literature (Ge'rard, 1971: 5; Molvaer, 1980: 8; Taye, 1995:61; Yonas, 1995:93). Following this novel, a number of novels have been produced in this language. Importantly,

present-day writers are also contributing to this history by writing novels that belong to the socio-political and cultural milieu of their time.

Contemporary Ethiopia, that means the period after the incumbent government took power, differs from Ethiopia of the past in its political and economic systems. Most of the systems are new and are the source of both hope, on the one hand, but also of despair in the country on the other hand. In his recent Amharic novel *Ramatohara*, Yesmake Worku (2010: 113) prefers to adapt Charles Dickens's (1859) words to explain present-day Ethiopia. He asserts that in present-day Ethiopia, it "is the best of times, is the worst of times, it is the age of wisdom, it is the age of foolishness, it is the epoch of incredulity, it is the season of light, it is the season of darkness" This writer's uncertainty regarding the essence of present-day Ethiopia seems the result of a number of challenges in the political, economic and socio-cultural practices of the country. Politically, it is practicing a 'democratic' system; nonetheless, many local and foreign bodies often condemn it for being 'undemocratic'. Economically, the government boasts a double digit economic development figure each year, though the country is still one of the poorest in the world. Culturally, though there is development in some areas (for instance, in developing the culture of ethnic groups), information technology, popular western literary works and the film industry, for example, are westernising the country more than ever before. In general, this period is one full of contradicting phenomena.

Hence, with all these oppositions, one may wonder about what contemporary Amharic novels may look like- thematically and esthetically. As one may guess, the aforementioned socio-political milieu exerts a significant influence on them. Hence, what does the literary feature of present-time Amharic novels produced under such influence look like? In this research, an attempt is made to shed light on the artistic and thematic features of contemporary Amharic novels focusing on three selected examples by investigating form as a narrative strategy in them.

Studying Amharic novels from their artistic perspective, however, seems not a common practice to Amharic literary scholarship, for the dominant trend in the arena is rather thematic and biographical. The following review of previous works on Amharic literature reveals this fact.

## **1.2. Review of Previous Research Works on Amharic Literature**

Taye and Shiferaw (2000) wrote an article that reviews researches on Amharic literature throughout the world. They reviewed more than one hundred and sixty- five published works and/or articles, no fewer than five PhD dissertations and more than thirty-five MA theses. What makes their review important is the magnitude of the works they covered in their review. Their dedication to discuss research works that were originally written in European languages other than English such as Italy, French and Germany adds to the significance of their review. Had it not been for the review by these scholars, an Ethiopian researcher who is unable to read and understand these languages, the present researcher included, might not have even known the existence of these research works. Therefore, the review of research works on the Amharic literature in these languages is included in this section of the present research in the form of a summary of Taye and Shiferaw's discussion. Otherwise, the works originally written in English and in Amharic are reviewed by consulting the original ones. My review also incorporates works that are not incorporated in the review by Taye and Shiferaw. Though it is difficult to incorporate all the research works done on Amharic literature in general and Amharic novels in particular in this review, in what follows, an attempt is made to discuss the major ones that I think are important to support the objective of this review, i.e., to elucidate the dominant approach in Amharic literary scholarship.

According to Taye and Shiferaw (Ibid: 27), Amharic novel and the study on it have a parallel history. According to them,

[n]o sooner was the first Amharic novel, *Lebb Wälläd Tarik* (*Fictional Story*), published in 1908 than the leading Italian Ethiopist<sup>1</sup>, Ignatio Guidi published an extensive review of it in the same year. Since then, this field of study has grown parallel to the growth and expansion of the literature.

By this statement these scholars make it clear that the study on the Amharic literature has come a long way and Italians led the way in this regard. According to them, one of the scholars that deserve special mention is Ignatio Guidi (1932) because he is the one who makes “the most interesting, pioneering and influential contribution” (Taye and Shiferaw 2000: 30) to the history of Ethiopic literature. Guidi attempts to discuss the literary works produced in Amharic chronologically in various periods. His aim in doing this was to investigate the development of Amharic as a written language. Therefore, according to Taye and Shiferaw (Ibid) “his approach was primarily philological rather than literary. He does not attempt to identify dominant ideas and trends and organize his historical narrative around them”.

The other Italian scholar that Taye and Shiferaw discuss in their review is Cerulli (1968). In his work *La Letteratura Ethiopica*, he discusses the history of the Amharic literature following the same format Guidi applies in his study. Because of this, as Taye and Shiferaw (Ibid: 30) assert, his work does not add to our knowledge of the Amharic literature. However, Cerulli and other Italian scholars’ works had influenced other western scholars to take an interest in Amharic literature. One of these scholars, whom Taye and Shiferaw (Ibid: 31) refer to as “one of the influential Ethiopists writing on Amharic literature,” was Pierre Comba in France.

According to them, Comba contributed a number of research works on Amharic literature. In his works, Comba highlights the literary and non-literary works produced in Amharic from the fourteenth century up to the 1950s. His intention was to identify the factors that contribute to the

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<sup>1</sup> Ethiopist is the name used to refer to foreign scholars involved in Ethiopian studies.

emergence of Amharic literature. After a thorough investigation of these works, he concludes that the early Amharic literary works had their roots in Ge'ez. As Taye and Shiferaw (Ibid: 32) summarise his conclusion, "[t]he heritage of this budding literature is derived from the moral, religious, philosophical tradition already well established in Ge'ez literature." They indicate further that, although he does not deny the fact that this established literary tradition also has an influence on the modern Amharic literature, he identifies the spread of Western culture in the country as a major factor for the emergence of the novel as a literary form in the language. In addition, he attributes the influence of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's progress*, the first western novel translated into Amharic, to the existing form and content of most Amharic novels.

Another westerner who wrote on Amharic literature is Stephen Wright (1963). In an article entitled *Amharic literature* that surveys approximately thirty- five literary works, Wright mainly discusses the foundation of Amharic literature as well as its form and content, which Comba had already discussed. Though this work contributes few regarding the history and literary feature of Amharic literature, it is still important because it crystallises some of the issues raised by Comba. Even though he does not tell us specifically how this influence is manifested in it, Wright articulates, among others, the influence of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* on modern Amharic literature. Moreover, his work is considered as an important one in the history of Amharic literary study because, as Taye and Shiferaw (Ibid: 37) point out, it is the earliest work produced by an English-speaking scholar which may introduce Amharic literature to the English-speaking world. It may be because of such works that other scholars started to become interested in it.

Albert Ge'rard is one of these scholars. In fact, he devotes a large number of pages to Amharic literature in his book *Four African Literatures* (1971). In this book, together with his study of the rise of vernacular literatures in southern Africa, he holds an extensive discussion on Amharic literature. He presents a useful summary of the major themes of many works published before 1967 together with valuable biographical information about many Amharic authors. Though his

approach in most cases resembles Comba's and Wright's, he differs slightly from them as he incorporates biographical information of the authors of the literary texts in his discussion. This biographical information of authors helps him to associate the foundation of modern Amharic literature with the background of the authors. His understanding of the factors that contributed to the emergence of Amharic literature is also another point that differentiates him from the previous scholars. According to him, this literature is born "chiefly due to native initiative" (Ge'rad, 1971: 278). However, he does not discuss widely what this native initiative was except referring to the financial support which used to be given by the Emperor (Emperor Haileselassie) at that time. Moreover, he does not pursue this conception throughout his discussion. Neither does he escape from repeating his predecessors' notion of the influence of *Pilgrim's Progress* on the literature. This and other contradictory ideas make Ge'rad's work less valuable in revealing the artistic and thematic features of Amharic literature. His contribution, however, could have influenced other English-speaking students such as Thomas Kane and Reidulf Molvaer to decide to write their PhD thesis on Amharic literature.

The title of Thomas Kane's (1975) PhD thesis is *Ethiopian Literature in Amharic*. He later developed it into a book, which is one of the few written on Amharic literature. As Kane (1975:1) remarks, his purpose in writing this book was, "to answer the questions what do Ethiopians write about and how do they write [...] what they do not write about that one expect them to write." To achieve his objective, he attempts to explore the origin and development of Amharic literature together with biographies and works of prominent modern Amharic poets, novelists and playwrights. The influence of Comba and Wright in terms of approaching this literature persists in this work also. He discusses the historical foundation of Amharic literature and its thematic issues. In this regard, we can say that he adds very little new information about Amharic literature. Kane's important contribution to the development of the history of the Amharic literature is seen in his attempt to classify Amharic literary works under broad thematic



categories such as; “moralistic-didactic,” “historical fiction,” “love and marriage,” “education”, and “political writings”. The effort he makes to summarise the stories and thematic preoccupations of works grouped under each category deserves acknowledgement. However, his inability to answer the questions he sets at the outset, quoted above, in a complete manner, reduces the value of his work. Though he answers the first question, which is related to the “what?” of the Amharic literature relatively well, he does not answer the question, which asks how this literature is written. If one says he tries to discuss the artistic qualities of this literature, it is only to identify their weaknesses by evaluating them through the literary criteria developed for western literary texts.

Molvaer wrote a book under the title, *Tradition and Change in Ethiopia: Social and Cultural Life as Reflected in Amharic Fictional Literature (ca. 1930-1974)*. In this book, he attempts to study Amharic literature sociologically in which he indicates that he applies an approach that helps “to learn about the author or the society in and by which it is created” (P: VIII). This approach is slightly different from the approach found in the history of Amharic literary study since the time of the Italian scholars. Rather than dealing with the historical foundations of the literature as well as criticising the artistic qualities of the literary texts by judging them in terms of certain criteria, he prefers to look at what is written in the literary texts and how it is related to the actual socio-cultural conditions of the society from which it emerges. Taye (1986: 2), however, criticises Molvaer’s attempt by saying, “there is a marked tendency to take the isolated statements of the characters literally and the fictional episodes at the face value without reference to their intended functions within a given plot-scheme.” Yonas (200:28 ) also criticizes Molvaer for his invariable treatment of Amharic literary works as “nothing more than sources of sociological data in respect of ‘culture’, ‘customs’, ‘beliefs’, ‘marriage’, ‘class’ etc.”

I share the aforementioned observations. It is not polemical to say that Amharic literary works often reflect the socio-cultural life of the society from which they emerge. However, they

deserve to be treated as literature rather than sociological and political documents. Molvaer seems more interested in the sociological information stocked in Amharic literary works than their artistic qualities, which makes his work insufficient with regard to expounding their literary features.

The review I have done so far indicates the dominance of foreigners in the field of Ethiopian literary scholarship until the 1980s. However, there were few Ethiopians in that period, i.e. before 1980, that attempted to study Amharic literature. An Ethiopian scholar that Taye and Shiferaw (2000:43) indicate as the first one to write on Amharic literature is Tamrat Amanuel<sup>2</sup> who wrote an article entitled *Selä Ityopya Därasyan (About Ethiopian Authors)* in 1943. According to them Tamrat's work is "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." In this work, Tamrat attempts to study the historical development of Amharic literature by classifying its evolution into three periods. Following his classification, he describes the main types of Amharic writings produced in each period and their literary characteristics. His attempt to explain the changes observed in Amharic literature throughout these periods makes his work helpful in that it focuses on the continuation and/or interruption of the literary tradition that has been established in the country since the Ge'ez period.

Mengistu Lemma, one of the most prominent personalities in the history of Amharic literature, was an Ethiopian scholar who contributed a scholarly work on Amharic literature next to Tamrat. In his article *From Traditional to Modern Literature in Ethiopia* (1973), Mengistu discusses the development of Amharic literature in chronological order. Most of the issues he raises in his discussion are similar to the previous scholars. However, his attempt to explain some key terms makes his work different from his predecessors. He is the first person who attempts to define

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<sup>2</sup> Since I could not get the original source, my discussion on the article written by Tamrat is just a summary of what Taye and Shiferaw (2000) discuss in their review.

Ethiopian literature. As he contends, this term refers to creative writing in Amharic. He further explains modernisation in the context of Amharic literature. He explains that “modernisation” in the context of Amharic literature is related to a shift in a linguistic medium—from Ge’ez to Amharic, the secularisation of content and the acquisition of “sensitive contact with the cultural cross-currents of world literature.”

Following Mengistu, a number of Ethiopian students started to study Amharic literature from different perspectives. Among the PhD dissertations carried out on it, the first is Fekre Tollosa’s *Realism and Amharic Literature*. In his work Fekre (1982) attempts to show how “socialist realism” is reflected in Amharic literary works that were published before the 1980s. Fekre, through the historical approach, investigates realism in fifteen prose works of Ethiopian writers that he deems “important”. He divides the history of Ethiopian literature into four periods and attempts to search for realism in the selected literary works as per their period of production. However, his search was not for Ethiopian realism; it was rather a search for socialist realism in these works. In addition to this, he does not attempt to investigate how these texts manipulate their own realism; rather, he tries “to point out the strength and weakness of Amharic literature” (Ibid: 4) in relation to treating socialist realism. This judgemental approach shows how much he is influenced by the previous scholars: evaluating the literary quality of Amharic works by set criteria.

Taye Asefa is another Ethiopian who wrote his PhD thesis on Amharic literature. In his work *Form in Amharic Novel (1986)*, he investigates the form of ten “representative novels” from different periods. He shows less interest in the content of the works saying that it was well researched by scholars prior to him. This work is different from the other research works that are done on the Amharic literature prior to him because of its interest in the artistic nature of the Amharic novels. The focus of most research works before this work was on the thematic or social value of the literary works with little interest in their artistic value. In this work; however,

the main focus was on the artistic value of the Amharic novel. His reliance on classical narrative theory while investigating these novels helps him to reveal “the plot construction, the delineation of characters, the modes of exposition, the rendition of scenes, and the intrusions of the narrator” in the novels. Taye’s work is significant in that it provides information on the artistic quality of Amharic novels. His generalization, however, is similar to the previous works that point out the artistic feature of Amharic literature in passing. As his predecessors, he pronounces that the artistic quality of Amharic novels is only mediocre.

The role of the intellectual in Ethiopian literary history is discussed in research works by most of the previously stated scholars. However, how these intellectuals are reflected in the Amharic novels in terms of their roles in the society is dealt with in the PhD dissertation written by Fekade Azeze in 1988. In his work entitled: *The Intellectual in the Ethiopian Novel, 1930-1974*, Fekade attempts to examine “the theme of progress through close study of the missionaries of change, namely, the intellectual characters in Ethiopian novels.” He takes four novels published between 1930 and 1974 and analyses their mode of literary presentation along with the study of image of the intellectual. Even though he says that he follows an eclectic approach to investigate the selected novels, one can say that his work is highly influenced by theoretical conceptions of sociology of literature. His analysis of the novels based on this conception then leads him to conclude that the “intellectuals portrayed in the novels set to change their society.” Even though this conclusion is not a new finding because a number of research works on Amharic literature starting from Comba propagate this fact, his scholarly discussion on how pioneers of change are portrayed in Amharic novels exhibit his intent to relate the literary works with the social reality from which they emerge.

Yonas Admassu (1995) has written his PhD thesis under the title, *Narrating Ethiopia: A Panorama of the National Imaginary*. In this work Yonas presents an original idea that has never

been touched upon by many scholars on the subject. His attempt to write this dissertation was “to examine the ‘imagined component’ of the community as it applies to Ethiopia.” He indicates that the primary concern of his dissertation was “to show how Ethiopians imagine themselves as a community that is not only ‘distinct’ from others, but also being ‘uniquely’ endowed with ‘virtues’ that are theirs and theirs alone.” This positive approach regarding the capability of Ethiopian narratives to represent their own people makes him different from the other scholars. He does not attempt to evaluate them with set criteria but rather tries to understand them as they are, and within their own context. He discusses three types of narratives such as legends, semi-historical chronicles, and prose fiction as “representative(s) of Ethiopian national imaginary.” He investigates how Ethiopia and Ethiopians are portrayed in these narratives. In addition, he attempts to demonstrate how Ethiopian imaginative works should be read “in spite of itself, as a negative discourse of the other.” Yonas is interested in magnifying the originality of Ethiopian narratives and this interest is reflected not only in this work, but also in a number of his articles published in different journals and anthologies. *What Were They Writing about Anyway? Tradition and Modernization in Amharic Literature* (2010), and *The First Born of Amharic Fiction: a Re-evaluation of Afework’s T’obbiya* (1995) are some of his most prominent articles.

So far, we have seen some major research works done on Amharic literature in general until the end of 1990s. Needless to say, these research works contribute a lot to Amharic literary history by unfolding its thematic and artistic qualities from different perspectives though thematic and biographical approaches dominate the arena and makes further studies with new approach and analytical paradigm still essential, as Taye & Shiferaw (2000: 60) contend as follows:

Thanks to the mass of knowledge passed into our hands by the pioneers of the study of Amharic literature, we are now at the threshold of a stage where we would not need to revert back to the old style historical/philological investigation of everything written in Amharic... Our predecessors have made it easier for us to embark on more focused inquiries into the genres and sub-genres of Amharic literature, into specific

trends and features of literary periods, into specific sources of influences, into the originalities and contributions of individual authors, into the type of links with our classical literary heritage, into the aesthetic qualities of works and tests of readers.

In addition, they make an appeal to researchers as there is a need for detailed research on the Amharic literature from a different perspective. Accordingly, Taye and Shiferaw (Ibid) further remark the following:

Students of literature have now reached a historical turning point where they are called upon to apply the specialist's critical know-how in marshalling world literature's theoretical wealth, analytic paradigms and models to the task of laying bare Amharic literature in all its facets.

It seems with an aspiration to be part of the answer for this call that, recently, works with a different approach from the old style is starting to emerge. In this regard Tewodros Gebre's book, entitled *Interdisciplinary Literary Reading: Myth, Psychology, Philosophy and Literature*<sup>3</sup> (2009), can be cited as an example. In this book, he introduces an interdisciplinary approach to the Ethiopian literary circle. We can say, it is the first in its kind in the history of the Amharic literary study because we do not have many books written in Amharic about Amharic literature that focus on theoretical analysis of novels.

In addition to this book, bunch of papers written by students at the graduate and post graduate levels in Ethiopian universities attempt to investigate Amharic novels within the tenet of different literary theories. MA theses written by Hailu Abebe (2001) entitled, *A Comparative Study of First Person Narrative Technique in Four Amharic Novels*, Girma Mengistie (2002), *Major Symbols in Selected Amharic Novels*, Misrak Tarekegn (2002), *Alienation in Three Amharic Novels*, and others that are written on the novels I am dealing with in the present research, and that I will discuss in the forthcoming section briefly under a new subsection, are

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<sup>3</sup> This is the English translation of the Amharic title of the book.

some instances that show the attempt being made by Amharic literature researchers to shift from the old trend to a new one that Taye and Shiferaw pronounced in the above quotation. With this entire attempt, however, context based literary approaches dominate the analytical paradigms of most of the research works that are written on Amharic literature still today. As it had been in the past, context is as important as the text itself for the present time researchers also. At this juncture, hence, it seems essential to examine the reason why researchers of Amharic literature are more interested in contextual issues than the artistic ones. In what follows an attempt is made to figure out the reason and to propose a new way of understanding Amharic novels.

### **1.3. Text and Context: An Alternative to Understand Amharic Novels**

The above review of previous works conducted on Amharic literature at large and on Amharic novel in particular reveals the fact that the trend in Amharic literary scholarship is dominated by context based approaches. For me this feature is observed because of the nature of the literature itself. From the review made in the above section, what we grasp as a general feature of Amharic literary works is that they have been the mirrors to the life of the society from which they emerge; writers have been the spokesperson of their society as they reflect its socio-cultural and political outlooks and criticize the socio-political systems of their respective times through their writings. Trying to understand these literary works alienating them from their authors and the social milieu from which they emerge is, therefore, a difficult task, for the intrusion of the author in the textual world is inevitable and the realist portraiture of the society in the texts is unavoidable. Quoting Sumner, (1985:427) helps fortify this conception. Sumner comparing Ethiopian writers with the western ones writes as follows:

Whereas, the Western world has a tendency to consider things as they are in their impersonal objectivity, the Ethiopian [...] world is clearly anthropocentric. The westerner takes as its starting point the world of external reality, which is distinct and measurable. The [...] Ethiopian does not break away from the world in which he leaves. He does not disengage himself from it, he does not stand out; he is part

of it. His starting point is within himself, in his own personal experience. He does not try to express what is in his mind: he rather attempts to evoke it.

Though Sumner refers to Ge'ez writers, I believe that his observation is still valid when it comes to modern Amharic writers, for we hardly understand their works out of the social context in which they belong. Having such characteristics of Ethiopian writers, understanding their works within the socio-cultural and political context to which they belong is, therefore, acceptable. However, it is my contention that the societal significance of the literary works should not be magnified at the expense of their artistic quality. As we observed in the previous review, though most of the research works thoroughly reveal the representation of socio-political issues in the literary works, they evaluate their artistic quality as mediocre. For me this conception is not convincing enough because of two reasons: one, as most of the research works are obsessed with thematic and biographical discussions, they do not treat the artistic feature of the works in a strict sense, and two, even the ones that strictly discuss the form of Amharic novels attempt to evaluate them from the vantage point of set criteria which do not go along with their true nature.

In the present research, I intend to alter this conception and attempt to propose an alternative to the understanding of Amharic novels. Accepting context as an important component of Amharic novels, I attempt to examine not only how this context is represented in the novels but also how it influences the craftsmanship of the texts themselves. Differently put, I endeavour to understand Amharic novels discussing the tripartite relationship among form, meaning and context. For me, the thematic and artistic feature of Amharic novels is well understood when form and context are scrutinized inseparably, conceiving one as a product of the other. While venturing on this task, selected Amharic novels published from 2000 until 2010 are used as examples.



Amharic novels published in the period covered in the present research are not studied adequately; consequently, little is known about their thematic and artistic features. Scholars such as Yonas Admassu (2010) and Asfaw Damtie (2010) in their articles that discuss the history of Amharic literature and the history of Amharic novel respectively, strongly urge the importance of detail research on the present time novels because, as each of them put in different words but in a similar tone, we hardly know about their literary features. This demand for intensive study of present time Amharic novels divulges the knowledge gap that exists in the arena. Dealing with the selected novels published in this period, therefore, I believe, helps fill this knowledge gap.

#### **1.4. The Selected Amharic Novels**

Talking of Amharic novels, the first decade after the current government took power in 1991 can be taken as a period of decadence, for most of the novels published at that period were translations of western popular works and the number of novels written by Amharic writers were very few. It seems that Amharic novels with a better quality in form and content started to emerge with a significant number in the second decade- starting from 2000 until 2010.

The novels published from 2000 until 2010, can fall in to two categories. The first category encompasses the ones that are published in this period but their socio-cultural set up pertains to Ethiopia of the past. I contend that they cannot be regarded as representatives of the present time Amharic novels, at least from the vantage point of the present research, because their social context is different from the present one. Novels in the second category are the ones published in the present period having socio- political, cultural and economic issues pertaining to the present-day Ethiopia as their content.

Favouring to the second category, for the novels in it are, I believe, the products of the socio-political and cultural conditions of the time that the present research aspires to deal with, three novels are selected. Since having representative and/or canonical novels in this particular period is not simple, for little is known about their literary features, these three novels are selected based

on their artistic quality. As the present research mainly aspires to entwine theory with analysis while dealing with the relationship among form, content and social milieu, the novels to be treated are expected to fit the theoretical conception of the research, for the reason that “[t]o a certain extent, this is inevitable: a theory is usually selected in relation to a text and vice versa” (Herman & Vervaeck, 2005:104). Hence, to get artistically fit ones, I made a judgemental reading of novels<sup>4</sup> that belong to the second category and I took three novels that are found relatively better in their functional manipulation of major narrative forms such as story, focalization, and characterization respectively, as examples. My selection criterion basically is related to suitability of the novels to the theoretical perspective of this research. The decision on the number of the novels was made based on the narrative forms planned to be discussed in each of the analysis chapters of this research. As will be explicated in the forthcoming chapter, narrative forms considered to be investigated in the selected Amharic novels are story, focalization, and characterization. Each novel was selected with regard to its appropriate manipulation of the aforementioned specific form as a narrative strategy. In addition, an attempt was made to be inclusive in representing the period covered in this research. Therefore, I selected one novel from the early years of the decade, one from the middle and one from the end. The selected novels are the following:

1. *Yeburqa Zemeta /Burka’s Silence/* (2000), written by Tesfaye Gebere’ab.

*Yeburqa Zemeta*, here after referred to as *Burka’s Silence*, is a historical novel that encompasses real people and incidents in the past and present Ethiopia. Its story mainly evokes an issue that lingers sensitive in the contemporary history of Ethiopian politics, i.e. ethnic politics. When we

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<sup>4</sup> It is obvious that reading all of the novels published in the period this research focuses is not possible, for a number of Amharic novels published outside the country and even the ones published in the country are not widely distributed for the reading public. Hence, when I pronounce a judgemental reading of novels, I am referring to the ones that are available mainly in major universities of the country such as Addis Ababa University, for academic purpose.

closely read it, we get complicated political interests, favouring one ethnic group for instance, embedded in the novel, which inspires me to take it as a sample and to investigate how the uncommon story of this novel is used as a narrative strategy in it.

2. *Gerač<sub>a</sub> Qač<sub>eloč</sub> /Gray Bells/* (2005): Written by Adam Reta.

The realist novel *Gerač<sub>a</sub> Qač<sub>eloč</sub>*, here after referred to as *Gray Bells*, is the first one for the author, which has got warm welcome not only from the reading public but also in the scholarly circle, as it is one of the most studied novels published after 2000. Apart from a number of articles published in different journals, more than three MA theses are written on it. Aklilu Desalegn (2010), for instance, studies this novel in his MA thesis entitled *Existentialism in the Selected Creative Works of Adam Reta*. Similarly, Emebet Bekele (2011) investigates it within the tenet of psychoanalysis. In her MA thesis, *A psychoanalytic Interpretation of Adam Reta's Gracha Qachiloch*, she attempts to study the characters from the vantage point of Lacanian psychoanalysis. Hiwot Walelign (2012) also writes her MA thesis on this novel under the title *Narrative Techniques of Adam Reta's Gracha Qachiloch: Stream-of-Consciousness in Focus* in which she investigates how stream of consciousness is used as a technique in this novel. The fact that this novel is the center of attention for the present time researchers indicates its artistic quality. Sharing this view, I believe that the writer's renowned talent to apply sophisticated narrative techniques in his short story writing is also revealed in this novel. Particularly, the way he presents the story of the novel through the eyes of the protagonist inspires me to investigate focalization in the novel and to explore how and why the writer employs this narrative form as a strategy to reveal the meaning of his novel.

3. *Dèrtogada / Dertogada/* (2009): Written by Yesmake Worku.

Emerging from nowhere, Yesmake receives huge success as a novelist and a poet in the country right after the appearance of his first novel. The novel *Dèrtogada*, entitled after the name of a

place where the story is established, has been re-printed more than eight times within a year or two, which is not usual in Ethiopia where the demand for novels is not that much developed. This frequent publication of the novel indicates its uniqueness. For the present researcher, the uniqueness of the novel lies on its manipulation of characters. The way characters are manipulated in it and the meaning evoked through them, therefore, inspires the present researcher to select it from the present time Amharic novels with the view of depicting how characterization is used as a narrative strategy in it.

### **1.5. Research Questions**

While dealing with form as narrative strategy in the selected Amharic novels, this research mainly asks whether a relationship exists among the form of a narrative text, the meaning of the text and the social milieu from which it emerges. This main question gives lead to the following specific research questions:

- How does form in the selected Amharic novels motivate their meaning?
- How does the social milieu in which the novels emerge, influence the form of the selected Amharic novels?
- What are the common literary features of the present time Amharic novels?

### **1.6. Aim and Objectives of the Research**

While asking the above stated questions, the research aims to shed light on the relationship among form, meaning (content) and the social milieu when determining the nature of a literary text. In tandem with this broader aim, the research also attempts to:

- Bridge the gap in the history of the Amharic novel by disclosing the artistic and thematic nature of the present time Amharic novels

- Propose an alternative approach for the Ethiopian literary scholarship in studying the Amharic novels.
- Show the functional relationship between form, content and social milieu in the selected Amharic novels

### **1.7. Chapters Organization**

This dissertation begins with an introductory chapter in which discussion on Amharic literature in general and Amharic novel in particular is held. While dealing with this discussion, an attempt is made to unfold the knowledge gap that exists in the Amharic literary scholarship regarding Amharic novels and the gap that the present research endeavours to fill. Following, a chapter is dedicated to a research design where the theoretical orientation of the present research is specified and methodological issues are explicated. The rest of the chapters are the ones in which the selected Amharic novels are studied and investigated. Chapter three deals with a novel called *Burka's Silence*, Chapter four focuses on *Grey Bells*, and chapter five deals with *Dèrtogada*. Story, focalization and characterization are investigated as narrative strategies independently in respective novels. At last, in the conclusion chapter an attempt is made to fuse findings in individual chapters into a generalization.

## Chapter 2: Sketching Out the Blueprint

### 2.1. Introduction

As discussed in the previous chapter, in this research I attempt to investigate form as narrative strategy in selected Amharic novels of contemporary Ethiopia with a wider view of adding to the theoretical discussion on the relationship among form, content, and social milieu in fictional narratives. In this chapter I attempt to present the research design, in which the theoretical position of the research and its methodological assumptions are explicated. This chapter comprises two sections that are devoted first, to the survey of narrative theory, and second to the discussion on methodology of the research.

The discussion on narrative theory in the first section of this chapter is an endeavour to give an insight into the theoretical position of the research. The section aspires to reflect the belongingness of the present research to this discipline, to delineate the circle in which it belongs in the wider scholarly world of narratology, and to outline the theoretical framework that this research uses as a basis for its discussion.

The view of having the methodological section in this chapter emanates from the overall nature of the research. Since the research endeavours to investigate the narrative strategies of selected Amharic novels, methodological issues such as research assumption, and analysis mechanisms should be determined at the outset to overcome inevitable methodological concerns that may affect the quality of the research. With this end in view, the section attempts to depict how and with what premise the research is carried out.

However, before probing to theoretical and methodological issues, it is essential to delineate the key term *narrative strategy* as applied to this research, for it may help us to insure the validity of the theoretical perspective utilized in the present research.

## 2.2. Narrative Strategy Defined

It is interesting to note that the term *narrative strategy* has not been widely used in narrative studies. Nonetheless, a few scholars have conducted narrative studies using this terminology. Roston (2006) can be taken as the first example. In his book entitled *Graham Green's Narrative Strategies: a Study of the Major Novels*, he attempts "to identify the strategies where by [the novels] achieve their effects" (p, 5). While dealing with this task, Roston claims that he follows text based approach underpinning his discussion mainly on reader response theory. In Roston's work the term *Narrative Strategy* basically refers to the relation between the authorial craft such as the portrayal of characters and its intended effect on the readers.

Shen (2006) is another scholar who conducted a serious work under the term *Narrative Strategy*. In his dissertation *Narrative Strategies in Robert Cormier's Young Adult Novels*, he "explores the reciprocal relationship between Cormier's narrative techniques and his treatment of controversial themes in his young adult fiction." Applying contemporary narrative theory, Shen studies Cormier's novels from the story, text and narration levels. Though his work is more of descriptive than analytical, it gives us an impression that authorial craftsmanship can be studied as a narrative strategy. To add one more work done on this topic, we can refer to an article written by Rahman (2001) entitled *Narrative Strategies in Postcolonial 'Return home' Novels*. In this article, Rahman considers form in "a more encompassing conception of narrative Strategy including: Choice of protagonists and secondary characters, linearity or non-linearity in structure, setting, and voice or mode of storytelling." With this wider conception of form he endeavours to unfold the content of the novels motivated through it.

These examples give us an impression that there is a possibility of using the term *narrative strategy* to study the relationship between form and content in literary texts. However, studying narrative strategies in a novel, as to my concern, does not only enable us to see the relationship

between the form and content of the novels, but also help us to investigate the relationships among various literary features at the text and context levels. Therefore, in the present research form is accepted as a narrative strategy which is employed in a literary text with the writer's skilful manoeuvre to motivate the meaning of the texts at the textual and contextual levels. With this conception, an attempt is made to understand the nature of the selected Amharic novels by investigating the relation between the narrative form, the meaning it motivates at a text level and the social milieu from which the text emerges. These three are considered as pillars that make the being of the novels. Investigating how the form establishes the meaning of the text and how the social milieu affects the manipulation of the narrative form in the selected Amharic novels is what the present research aspires to deal with under the title *narrative strategy*.

Another lesson we get from the above example works is that there is no set criteria to select a theoretical approach to deal with narrative strategies in literary texts. Roston relies on reader response while dealing with Graham Green's narrative strategies, whereas Shen takes classical narrative theory as a basis for his discussions on narrative strategies in Cormier's novels. Though not clearly stated, while dealing with narrative strategies in Return Home novels, Rahman follows hermeneutic approach, as he is mainly interested on the meaning narrative techniques entail in the novels. This divergence in theoretical approaches informs us that in the course of investigating narrative strategy in a given literary text one can rely on a certain theoretical conception as per his/her intended goal.

This said, as the present research mainly deals with narrative texts, it understands form in its narratological conception; therefore, the theoretical orientation of this research is derived from narrative theory.



## 2.3. Narrative Theory: An Overview

Prince (2003:1) writes,

I decided to survey narratology: not merely, because I had already reviewed, remoulded and revisited it a number of times ... but mainly because surveying involves the examination of boundaries and because, from the beginning, the question of boundaries has played a significant role in narratology.

Surveying narrative theory is not a simple task, for it holds a number of complex and debatable theoretical issues. Its broadness and multidisciplinary nature, consequently, forces a research such as the present one, to mark, as Prince in the above quotation says its boundary and/or to determine the circle in which it belongs in the wider sphere of the discipline. This section therefore, attempts to delineate the circle in which the present research belongs in the wider scholarly world of narratology and to outline the theoretical framework of the research starting from asking about the theory itself.

### 2.3.1 The Ubiquitous Question: What is Narrative Theory?

The purpose of raising this question is not to come up with a new definition of narrative theory other than an endeavour to summarize what has been said so far about it as well as its subject of study.

Even though there seems to exist a kind of consensus among theorists to define narratology as “a science of narrative” (Herman, 2005:1; Prince, 2008: 115), theorists in the field are still asking what narratology is about, and they are seeking explanation for its nature. Citing Meister (2003:56), for example, validates this statement. “What is narratology?” Meister starts his question and extends it by asking: “approach, praxis, project, school, sub-discipline, discipline, science? And/or which narratology is what?” Meister is not the only one who appears to be uncertain about the ‘what’ of narratology. B. H. (1980:6), who is also seriously concerned with the nature of narratology, asks as: “what is narratology? Is it a logical division of poetics? Does it constitute a clearly defined discipline with a specific object of study? Or is it a methodology?” A

number of other scholars in the field have asked such a series of questions frequently and attempt to define narrative theory in different contexts albeit it lingers polemical throughout its history.

Significantly, as Schmid, (2003:36) observes, “[m]ost definitions of narratology are derived from definitions of its object of study, which is typically seen as consisting of something referred to as ‘narrative’.” This observation gives us an impression that theorists attempt to accomplish the task of defining narrative theory through defining its subject of study-narrative. It seems why scholars such as Herman and Vervaeck (2005:11) express their firm stand on the issue as, “if narratology is the theory of the narrative text, then it should first come up with a definition of narrative”. Hence, in the “narratological scholarship” where defining narrative “has generally been the norm” (Rudrum, 2005: 2), a number of definitions of narrative subsist though none of them are taken as a definite one. David Rudrum (Ibid, 1-2), for instance, states around nine, excluding his, definitions of narrative forwarded by different theorists. These definitions have considerable similarities regarding their conception of the nature of narrative, however, their divergence is more pronounced. Prince (2003, 1) puts this fact as follows:

As we know, nothing like a consensus has been reached on that subject [what narrative is] [...] some define narrative as a verbal recounting of one or more events and others as any kind of event representation (including non-verbal once). Some argue that it involves consecution, consequence, and even closure, that it must be populated with anthropomorphic individuals, that it must be anchored in every human experience; others do not agree with all, many, or any of these specifications.

Prince’s observation on the theorists’ divergence on their conception of the nature of narrative indicates the broadness of this concept and the complexity it entails.

Regardless of the divergence and complexity of the nature of narrative, since I mainly take it as my subject of discussion, it is undoubtedly essential to specify its definition applicable to my research, for it is as per the definition of narrative I accept that the theoretical as well as

analytical discussions in the coming chapters are moulded. However, dealing with the polemical issues that exist in the field at the outset, I believe, helps me to reach at the appropriate definition that fits to the intended aim of the present research.

### **2.3.2. Opponents and Proponents: Polemical Issues in Narrative Theory**

Classical and post-classical phases of narrative theory mark the two critical boundaries in its historical development. According to Herman and Vervaeck (2005, 103), “in the case of narratology, there is definitely a classical structuralist and a post-classical phase.” Since its existence as a field of study in the literary scholarship, narrative theory has passed through these two major stages of development (Fludernik, 2003; Herman, 2007; Keen, 2003; McQuillan, 2000; Onega and Garcia Landa, 1996; Prince, 2003 & Shen, 2005). The polemical issues that characterize narratology, therefore, primarily emanate from the difference in the theoretical conceptions of theories categorized under these two phases.

Classical phase of narrative theory comprises theories of narrative that based their theoretical foundation on Saussurean linguistics. Being indebted to formalist and structuralist thoughts of literature, these theories attempted to apply Saussurean linguistics for literary study in the view of formulating universally accepted “systematic ways of studying narrative that would not be limited by the individual work” (Keen, 2003: 11). For them, narrative texts are constructs with different levels of analysis. Consequently, most prominent theorists of this phase of narrative theory start their theoretical discussion on narrative by defining these levels although they differ, as it often happens in the whole scholarship of narratology, in their way of defining these levels of analysis. For some of them, a narrative text has two levels of analysis, for others it has four (Onega & Garcia Landa, 1996:7). However, “the three important structuralist narratologists” (Herman & Vervaeck, 2005: 45), Gérard Genette, Mieke Bal and Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, elucidate three levels of narrative with different terminologies. Genette (1980) distinguished the levels as “story”, “narrative”, and “narration”; Bal (1985) calls them as “fabula”, “story”, and

“text”; whereas, Rimmon-Kenan (1983) puts them as “story”, “text”, and “narration”. As the terminologies they use for each level of narrative differ, their conceptions of the nature of each level and the levels’ relation to each other also differ in so many ways. Their similarity, however, manifests itself in their treatment of these levels of analysis as textual components. For all of them, these levels are components of a text and have relational function to each other within the text itself.

Even though few advocates of this theory do not deny the fact that the outside context, the biography of the author for example, contributes to the meaning of a literary text, they believe that narrative at its textual level is worth studying to attain valid interpretation of the text. Genette (1980: 28), for instance, contemplates that there is a connection between the content of a narrative text and the life of its author, but, as he writes, “this connection is not such that the latter can be used for rigorous analysis of the former (any more than the reverse).” This “synchronic outlook” (Fludernik 2003: 331) on literary narrative, consequently, is responsible for the achievements and/or criticisms of this theory.

Regardless of their contribution for the emergence and development of the theory, classical narratologists have been criticized by a number of narrative theorists that emerge after them for being inattentive to the context of a narrative text as part of narrative analysis. Significantly, these theorists start to question the relevance of typological and formal approach to narrative and begin to lay bare the incapability of structuralist narrative theories to make a perfect marriage between theory and practice. Here, Fludernik (2005: 38-39) is worth mentioning:

The major problem of narratology in its early structuralist and typological phase, however, lay [Sic.] in the difficult relation between theory and practice. On the one hand, narratology claims to deliver a set of instruments for analyzing texts [...] on the other hand, narratology focuses on the why and the wherefore, the

semiotics and grammar of narrative. In other words, narratology is both an applied science and a theory of narrative texts in its own right. As applied narratology it faces the critical challenge “so what? – What’s the use of all the subcategories for the understanding of texts?” As a theory, narratology [...] encounters the criticism that its theoretical proposals do not help to produce significant readings.

Being aware of the drawbacks of classical narratologists, narrative theories after them start to study narrative from a different perspective. This new perspective realizes the birth of the second phase of the discipline, which is widely known as post-classical narratology<sup>5</sup>.

At the outset, contextuality and plurality characterize postclassical narratology. According to Herman and Vervaeck, (2005: 8) post-classical narrative theories “insist that a text always functions in a context.” This insistence on context attributes the debt these theories owe to the significance of external agencies of a text for narrative analysis. However, since these external outfits are very many in number and broad in scope, post-classical narratology paves the way for the emergence of a number of narrative theories that comes up with enormous theoretical concepts with delineated notion of context: feminist narratology, rhetorical narratology, cognitive narratology, socio-narratology, postcolonial narratology, ethno-narratology, psycho-narratology, are but some of them. The proliferation of theories with varied subjects of study and diverse methods of analysis, therefore, furnishes the distinct feature of plurality for this phase of narratology. Accordingly, theorists such as Currie (1998); Herman (1999); Nünning (2009), and Shen (2005), prefer to use the plural term “narratologies” in their discussions about this phase in view of indicating its multifarious nature.

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<sup>5</sup> Shen, (2005:141) discusses various terminologies used by different theorists to denote this phase of narrative theory; in this research, however, for the benefit of avoiding terminological confusion, the term post-classical narratology is used unless stated otherwise.

It is evident that these two distinctive features enunciate a significant change observed in the discipline at its later stage, but they do not make post-classical narratology independent of its predecessor. According to prince (2008:116), the name Post-classical narratology does not entail negation or a complete rejection rather it represents, “an extension, an expansion, a broadening, a refinement” of classical narratology.

Based on this notion one may extrapolate that post-classical narratology is more concerned in rejuvenating classical narratology than launching new paradigms of its own. Nonetheless, for its proponents, despite the fact that it does not free itself from structuralist thoughts, it is not a mere revitalization of this phase of narratology. As Kindt, (2003:414) says, it “differs in essential respects” from its predecessor. Nünning (2009:53) in his part assures us that in the second phase of narratology, “there has not only been a proliferation of new approaches, the field of narrative theory has also gone a number of sea changes which have ushered in new phases in the study of narrative”

In view of this, having based its foundation on the limits of classical narratology, Post-classical narratology fosters inclusive and multidimensional approaches to narrative and introduces new instruments of analysis. Confirming this idea Prince (2008: 121) writes:

[b]y means of instruments, expanded corpora and original inflections, postclassical narratology identifies or (re)examines various aspects of narrative and (re)defines or (re)configures them, it also suggests several important tasks to pursue or undertake.

Such elucidation of post-classical narratology with respect to its differences with classical narratology takes us back to our discussion about the former’s characteristics of contextuality, because of the fact that almost all differences of these two phases of narrative theory primarily emanate from their difference of being the first textual and the second contextual. Amid its “plurality of models for narrative analysis” (Herman, 1999: 28), postclassical narrative theory

adheres to contextual approach for narrative analysis. This contextual orientation therefore shapes the object of study, methods of analysis, and overall aims of the theory.

Here, it is essential to note that the aim of the present research is to foster the tripartite relationship among form, meaning and the social milieu. In other words, its premise to the nature of narrative texts concurs with the theoretical foundations of post-classical narratology. Because of this, further discussion on this theory focusing on its singular features is needed not only to articulate the debt this research owes to this phase of narrative theory but also to elucidate how the conceptions and paradigms of this theory are used as guidelines in the course of investigating the narrative strategies of the Amharic novels that are under study. Moreover, by discussing more on post-classical narratology it attempts to enunciate its belongingness to this circle.

### **2.3.3. Contextual Narratology in Focus: Theoretical Framework**

As pointed out in the above section, post-classical phase of narratology is the home of various theories and approaches which attempt to answer a corpus of questions that structuralist narrative theories “ignored and left unanswered” (Nünning, 2009:50). Unlike structuralist ones that establish their narratological conviction on the text only, the contextual feature of narrative, commonly inspires the theoretical conceptions of these various theories. This strict orientation to context consequently enables a number of non-literary narrative theories to get into the shade of postclassical narratology. As a result, the postclassical phase of narratology comprises literary narrative theories that principally foster the intertwined correlation between text and context, and non-literary narrative theories that engage in “the application of narratological paradigms to legal, medical, psychological, or economic discourse” (Fludernik, 2005).

Bounded to its scope, the present research considers itself as part of “literary narratology” (Currie, 1998); therefore, its discussion on postclassical narrative theories is restricted to the literary ones that are often categorized under an umbrella term- contextual narratology. According to Nünning (2009:60) Contextual narratology is “a kind of integrated approach that

puts the analytical tools provided by narratology to the service of a cultural analysis of narrative fictions.” Nünning’s explanation about contextual narratology comprises two key concepts that deserve more explanation.

The first point indicated in Nünning’s explanation is the integrated approach that contextual narratology uses for narrative analysis. Unlike structuralist ones that were obsessed with descriptive analysis of narrative, narrative theories included under this category focus on “the study of narrative forms in their relationship to the culture which generate them” (Onega & Garcia Landa, 1996: 12). What is integrated in their approach is the textual feature of texts with the context from which they emerge. By integrating form with context<sup>6</sup>, these theories attempt to investigate “cultural experiences translated into, and meanings produced by, particular formal narrative practices” (Helms, 2003: 14).

The second key concept indicated in Nünning’s explanation about contextual narratology, which cannot be taken as different but as an extension of the former one, is the relation between narrative forms and culture.

Contextual narrative theories are keen on conceiving narrative in relation to the culture from which it emerges. According to them, unlike what had been commonly believed by structuralist narrative theorists, narrative has no universal features. As cultures differ from place to place and change from time to time with regard to their overall values and interests, so do forms of literary narratives which emerge from these cultures. Müller-Funk (2003: 209) observes this truth and writes “the differences between and the changes within cultures go hand in hand with the shift of

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<sup>6</sup>In this research, the word context is used in its broader sense and as equivalent to the wider meaning of culture.



those symbolic and narrative forms.” Rudrum, (2005: 203) strengthening this idea writes: “It seems that practically all cultures from all the ages from all parts of the globe have produced some form of narrative or other.” At this point, it is worth mentioning that these theories’ conception of the relationship between culture and narrative form is bidirectional. According to Bal (1999:39), what is widely practised in contextual narratology is “narratological analysis of culture” and “a cultural analysis of narratives.” In other words, these theories focus on investigating how one influences the other and how one functions in the context of the other.

With this view in mind, when we look at the overall assumption of the present research to the nature of narrative texts, we can vividly observe its tremendous similarity with what has been discussed so far with respect to contextual narratology. This similarity, then, is a reason for the present research to choose theoretical conceptions of contextual narrative theories as guidelines to investigate the narrative strategies of Amharic novels under study. In addition, the present research chooses contextual narrative theories as guidelines for its discussion on its subject of study because of three reasons. First, they are “applicable to any corpus of literary texts” (Prince, 2008: 117). Second, they are characterized by a “plurality of models for narrative analysis” (Herman: 1999: 28). Third, they are “more ideological than methodological.” (Herman and Vervaeck, 2005: 121).

With this theoretical view, in the present research, narrative form is accepted as a strategy through which the textual and contextual meanings of literary narratives are motivated. It is this research’s assumption that form is textual phenomenon constructed by agents in the narrative world and the narrative strategies writers manipulate in their narratives are the outcomes of their socio- political and cultural contexts. The relationship of the narrative form to the social milieu then motivates the meaning of the text. Keen (2003: X) crystallizes this notion as follows:

Makers of narrative use identifiable tools and techniques to craft stories. Whether they work by inherited traditions, by habit, deliberately, unconsciously, according to formulas, in imitation of admired precursors, or with deliberate aims of experimentation and innovation, they take up tools of language and build fictional worlds in which narrators introduce readers to imaginary persons who move, think, feel and act, in those patterned sequences of events that go by the everyday name of plot. Together, the makers and receivers of narrative construct a matrix in which a story can be realized and interpreted.

Thus, narrative form enables the makers to introduce the story of the narrative to the readers. Keen, quoted above, indicates that though the makers may have different reasons for constructing the form of their narratives in the way it exists in the narrative text, the way they construct it enables them to communicate with the readers. Readers in turn, being part of the social matrix “in which a story can be realized,” derive the meaning of the narratives through these narrative forms.

According to contextualist narratology, the textual and contextual function of form in narrative cannot be realized without relating it with its social context. Hence, in the course of investigating the function of narrative forms in these novels, narrative approaches such as rhetorical approach that enable one to integrate form with context are used as theoretical guidelines. According to Phelan (2007: 203):

Rhetorical approach conceives of narrative as a purposive communicative act. In this view, narrative is not just a representation of events but is also itself an event—one in which someone is doing something with a representation of events. More formally, the rhetorical theorist defines narrative as somebody telling somebody else on some occasion and for some purpose (s) that something happened.

Though the overall notion of rhetorical narratology is acceptable in the research like the present one, for it advocates the importance of understanding narrative from the tellers’ perspective, one

may raise questions that it may fall short to answer: If narrative is an act of telling, as elucidated above, there must be participants in this act. However, who are these participants? Classical narratologists such as Chatman (1990:314) express such a question as a “troubling” one and challenge it by saying, “who are these ‘someones’? Characters? Narrators and Narratees? Implied Authors and Implied Readers? Real Authors and Real Readers?”

Even though for classical narratologists, the inclusion of the author as a narrative element is “beyond the convention of narratology” (Genette, 1988: 73), for postclassical narratology, the author owns an important place as a narrative element (Phelan, 2005:45). Contextual narratology, especially, is more interested in the real author and real reader interaction than the integration of the other participants in the narrative situation (Phelan & Peter, 2012: 6). Since contextualism is the motivating factor for contextualist narrative theories, focusing on these two real world representatives seems appropriate. Nonetheless, it sounds a bit unconvincing to relate everything told in the text only with the real author.

As a point of departure, the present researcher believes that in addition to the real author, classical narratologists’ perception of the narrator as a textual speaker, and their attempt to diverge the narrator and the character(s) as independent entities in the narrative world should be taken into consideration. Consequently, the act of telling should be given for the three narrative agents, i.e. the narrator, the character(s) and the real author, according to their spatio-temporal presence in narrative world. It is my assumption that the roles of the character(s) and the narrator are restricted to the textual world whereas the real author functions as a narrative agent both in the textual and contextual levels. What Ginsburg and Rimmon-Kenan (1999:72) write crystallizes my notion. As they write, “‘author’ is both an agent responsible for the text and a position within it.”

Identifying how these three narrative agents act in their respective spatio-temporal positions in the narrative world, and specifying their contribution in the making of narrative forms, therefore, I contend, one can understand form as a narrative strategy there by unfolding how form motivates textual meaning that is pertaining to the social milieu and how social milieu reciprocally influences the textual existence of form. But how can one achieve this? The role of each of these three participants in the narrative situation, and how their role motivates the text-context relationship will be explicated in detail in the forthcoming chapters as per the narrative forms investigated as narrative strategies in the selected Amharic Novels.

## **2. 4. Methodology**

The above attempt to frame the theoretical conception within which the present research constructs its edifice, paves the way to reveal its overall intent to contribute to the theoretical debate on the relationship amongst form, content and social milieu by taking present day Amharic novels as its subject of study. Despite the fact that it focuses on studying the narrative strategies of Amharic novels from the point of view of post-classical narratology, it is not merely interested in analysis but it aspires to deal with hitherto debatable theoretical questions related to its point of discussion by intertwining them with analysing and interpreting the selected novels. To this end, it is important to formulate the blue-print on how the research is going to be carried out and what things will be done to come up with the desired out come. The forthcoming sections deal with the methodological issues considered in this research.

### **2.4.1. Assumptions**

The present research intends to investigate the narrative strategies of selected Amharic novels published from 2000 until 2010 in the wider view of unfolding the tripartite relationship amongst form, content and social milieu in constructing the overall textual and contextual features of Amharic novels. It also attempts to propose an alternative approach to Amharic novels through an intertwined approach to form and context which is not well introduced in the country yet to

study Amharic novels in particular and Amharic literature at large (cf. chapter one). With this end in view, the research is designed in a way that theory and analysis are entwined to each other.

The function of theory in the present research is not to set criteria to analyse the selected Amharic novels. Quite differently, it is taken as a subject of discussion in which the researcher aspires to question, advocate and/or exemplify the existing narratological knowledge by taking the selected novels as examples. The analysis of the novels, on the other hand, helps not only to answer the specific research questions this research asks right from the outset but also to depict the validity of theoretical discussions that are held throughout the research. This aspiration to focus on theory and analysis in an intertwined manner provides principles that guide the methodological assumptions of this research.

#### **2.4.2. Analysis Procedure**

Being a narrative study which pursues to analyse narrative texts intertwining analysis with theoretical discussions, this research is purely narratological. In the course of exploring the textual as well as the social features of the selected Amharic novels, it “argues for the need to inquire into the intentions, motivations, interests, and social circumstances of real authors and audiences” (Chatman, 1990:314).

Hence, as the theoretical perspective of the present research is highly influenced by post-classical narratology, so do the inquiry method employed in it. Since post-classical narratology “adopt[s] a Posteriori instead of an a priori stance” (Phelan & Peter, 2012:5) while dealing with narrative interpretation, the same procedure is applied in the present research. A narrative form is investigated in a given novel starting from understanding its existence in the text. Then, after investigating the textual meaning motivated through it, an attempt is made to relate the textual

findings with the contextual factors. This approach makes the analysis procedure from inside-out one.

While analyzing the selected novels in this procedure, my endeavour is not to evaluate them with set criteria. As Phelan & Peter (Ibid) write, in post-classical narrative interpretation, “rather than declaring what narratives invariably do or how they invariably do it, we seek to understand and assess the variety of things narratives have done and the variety of ways they have done it.” In the course of interpreting form as narrative strategy in the selected Amharic novels, the analysis is made with this methodological outlook.

Having this methodological principle of post-classical narratology as a backdrop, the narrative strategies of the selected novels are analysed chapter by chapter. As indicated in the above section, each of the three narrative forms, i.e. Story, Focalization and Characterization, is investigated as a narrative strategy in a selected Amharic novel. Thus, story is discussed in a chapter as it is employed as a narrative strategy in *Burka's Silence*, whereas, focalization and characterization are discussed in two different chapters in relation to *Grey Bells* and *Dèrtogada* respectively. While dealing with a narrative form in a novel, each chapter begins with a theoretical discussion about the specified narrative form, and based on the theoretical insights obtained from the discussion, analysis of that narrative form in the selected Amharic novel follows. The advantage of starting from the theoretical discussion is twofold: One, it helps us to meet the aim of this research that fosters to add to the theoretical knowledge on the relation between form, meaning and social milieu. And two, it delivers us an appropriate theoretical insight that is of a great help to investigate the specified narrative form in a given Amharic novel.

After the analysis of narrative forms in the selected novels, the findings are brought together in the conclusion chapter and the communality of the selected novels explicated through the analysis

of form as a narrative strategy will be treated. From this communal treatment, a conclusion is drawn pertaining to textual and social features of present day Amharic novels.

#### 2.4.3. Trustworthiness

In any research, the question of validity must receive consideration though the way this question is answered may differ from one field of research to another. In narrative based research, as Webster and Mertova (2007:90) elucidate, “validity is more concerned with the research being well grounded and supportable by the data that has been collected.” They add that “the result of narrative research cannot claim to correspond exactly to what has actually occurred. In that sense, we cannot claim that narrative research results as ‘true,’ if ‘truth’ is taken to mean exact correspondence to reality.” Therefore, the question of validity in narrative research is not answered in relation to the truthfulness of the analysis; instead, it relies on its trustworthiness. The former “assumes an objective reality” whereas, the latter “moves the process into the social world” (Riessman, 2002:259-260). In narrative research, validity is achieved when four basic criteria are met in the analysis, namely, “persuasiveness”, “correspondence”, “coherence” and “pragmatic use” (Ibid: 258-260).

To meet these criteria and to achieve validity in the present research, I bring a method of reading narrative texts called “transcategorical reading” into play. Transcategorical reading, proposed by Ryan (2007:25), refers to the way of reading narrative texts as “propositions”. As he writes,

if texts, like propositions, lend themselves to various games depending on the rules selected by their users, it should be possible to read them against the grain, that is, use the texts in games for which they were not necessarily intended. I call this transcategorical reading.

He further indicates “transcategorical reading requires the addition and subtraction of so many features [of the text] that it becomes a demonstration *ad absurdum* of the resistance of content.”

Cognizant of the importance of this type of reading in the course of analyzing the selected Amharic novels, an attempt is made to create textual and social context in which the intended relationship of form, text and social milieu is investigated. To create this context, making use of the chance transcategorical reading gives to add to the features of a novel to understand it in a desired way, other works of the authors, historical documents, political records, and so on are utilized as additional sources of information. This utilization of secondary sources is of assistance to exemplify, question and/or extrapolate what is investigated in the novel. Consequently, the analysis achieves trustworthiness as it attempts to meet the aforementioned validity criteria within the context created.



## Chapter 3: Functions at Story Level: Exploring Story as Narrative

### Strategy in *Burka's Silence*

#### 3.1. Introduction

In the foundational works of narratologists such as Bal (1985), Genette (1980, 1988), and Rimmon-Kenan (1983), three fundamental concepts- story, plot and narration- have got a special place to typify “the overarching category narrative” (Abbott, 2007:40). According to Abbott (Ibid: 41), of these three basic concepts “story is the sturdiest.” Story is the most important one because without it there is no narrative at all. As Rimmon-Kenan (1983:15) asserts, “[t]he presence or absence of a story is what distinguishes narrative from non-narrative texts”. There is no dispute among narratologists on the very importance of story for the existence of narrative as narrative; its ontology, however, is not out of dispute.

From a structuralist point of view, Rimmon-Kenan (Ibid) elucidates story as a component that “designates the narrated events abstracted from their disposition in the text and reconstructed in their chronological order, together with the participants in these events.” According to this definition, story is what readers construct based on what is given in the text. However, this definition, according to Shen (2002:228), who is one of the advocates of post-classical narratology, is not capable enough to explain story, for it is “reader oriented and focuses on story’s synthetic component neglecting to a certain extent the mimetic component.” For him “[t]o gain a fuller picture [about story], we need to take into full account both the mimetic and synthetic component [...] and both the reader as the interpreter and the author as a creator of the story facts.” Shen’s comment on Rimmon-Kenan’s definition elucidates the existing difference between classical and post-classical narratologists on the nature of this fundamental component of narrative.

These two approaches of narratology converge in their conception of story as a construct, but they diverge in how it is constructed. Whereas classical ones say it is a textual given, post-

classical narratologists contend that it should be taken as non-textual given. As Shen (Ibid) echoes, “because the story has a mimetic component it is taken to be non-textual given independent of the presentation in discourse.”

From this, we construe that to investigate how story is used as a narrative strategy in a given literary text, it is essential to know, first, the concrete story narrated in it. To depict the story concealed in a given literary text then, we need to construct it. The above two exemplars from the two categories of narrative theory give us an insight about how to construct the story from a given literary text. Since the overall conception of the present research is formulated under contextualist narratology that “puts the analytical tools provided by narratology to the service of a cultural analysis of narrative fictions” (Nünning, 2009:60), paying equal attention to both the poetic and the contextual constructions of story helps us to unfold how it serves as a narrative strategy in a given literary text.

Moreover, from the vantage point of the intention of this research, the textual and non-textual constructions of story are taken not as separate activities but interrelated ones. Therefore, in this chapter, by taking one of the selected Amharic novels, *Burka's Silence*, as an example, story will be investigated both as a textual and non-textual given in the following two consecutive sections. In the first one, an attempt is made to construct and unfold the story concealed in the deep structure of the text, and in the second section an endeavour is made to contextualize the constructed story with in the social milieu in which the novel is produced.

### **3.2. Story as a Textual Construct: Functional analysis**

When we examine Rimmon-Kenan's explanation for story quoted in the previous section (Cf. Page 39), we get three fundamental issues concealed in it: the narrated events, participants in these events and the sequence of events. These three components are interdependent to each other in that one determines the existence of the other. Citing Cohan and Shires (1988:69) here helps clarify this idea:

Story consists of events placed in a sequence to delineate a process of change, the transformation of one event into another. An *event* depicts some sort of physical or mental activity, an occurrence in time (an action performed by or upon a human agent) or a state of existing in time( such as thinking, feeling, being , or having). The events constituting a story do not occur in isolation but belong to *a sequence (Italics original)*.

The above quotation, in addition to surfacing the relationship among the three important components of story, explicates the act of the character in a story, which is designated by Vladimir Propp (1968:9) as “function”. Propp (Ibid) defines function as “an act of a character, defined from the point of view of its significance for the course of the action.” Applying this conception of function as “ the basic unit, the narrative atom [...] to actions and events which, when grouped in sequences, generate the narrative” (Bremond,1980:387), Propp (1968:10) explores 31 “stable”, “limited” and “always identical” functions that characterize the narrative structure of Russian fairy tales.

Propp’s method of exploring the characteristics of the Russian fairy tales, apart from the criticisms, inspires the syntagmatic analysis of narrative texts in the field of narratology. Though Propp uses the method to study fairy tales, narratologists have found it useful especially to functionally construct the story of fictional narratives.

The venture to apply Propp’s method to study fictional narratives was instigated by structuralist narratologists such as Bremond (1980) and Greimas (1983). Their attempt to minimize Propp’s 31 functions to three and six levels respectively, help simplify functional analysis of story in narrative texts. However, they have been criticised for, as Herman and Vervaeck (2005:54) write, “[their] simplicity and general applicability” that makes the application of these models for long narratives often difficult. Observing such a shortcoming of the models developed by former

narratologists, recent ones attempt to propose function models that are more serviceable for long narratives. Emma Kafalenos (1995, 1997, & 1999) is one of them.

Kafalenos (1995:18) “adopts Propp’s concept of function as an interpreted event, and his discovery that an ordered set of functions provides a vocabulary to talk about how the events in a specific narrative are interpreted” and she comes up with her “eleven –function model” that helps construct the story of a given text. This model is sketched as follows:

- Initial equilibrium [not a function]
- A (*or a*) disruptive event (or re-evaluation of a situation)
- B request that someone alleviate A (*or a*)
- C decision by C-actant to attempt to alleviate A (*or a*)
- C’ C-actant’s initial act to alleviate A (*or a*)
- D C-actant is tested
- E C-actant responds to test
- F C-actant acquires empowerment
- G C-actant arrives at the place, or time, for H
- H C-actant’s primary action to alleviate A (*or a*)
- I (or I<sub>neg</sub>) success (or failure) of H
- K equilibrium

According to Kafalenos (1997:470), her “smaller and more serviceable” model,

represents the fundamental stages in the narrative sequence [...] [and] provides a vocabulary to analyze [...] provisional *fabulas* and parts of *fabulas* readers construct from the set of events discernible at any moment in the process of reading, and to document the shifting interpretations of the consequences of

events that readers formulate as they move through the *sjuzhet*, page by page (*Italics original*).

Kafalenos's view about her function model is acceptable in that it enables one to construct the story of a certain narrative text through page-by-page reading. Moreover, it helps to read a narrative against the grain, especially when the natural sequence of the story is different from the way it is presented in the text, as stories interpreted while reading the narrative are, as she puts in the above quotation, provisional in which the consequence of events can be changed in the course of the reading.

Applying Kafalenos's model to the reading venture of *Burka's Silence* is serviceable in that it enables us not only to construct the story and unfold the meaning extrapolated from its construction through page by page reading of the discourse but also to illuminate the function of the constructed story as a narrative strategy.

While adopting this model to our enterprise, it is essential to define some of the important concepts that edify it such as story, event and the C-actant, at the outset. In this research, story is defined adopting Kafalenos's (1999:37) definition for *fabula*, the equivalent word for story, as "a construct that readers make from a *sjuzhet* [discourse]." The meaning of an event is adopted from a definition which states it as "some sort of physical or mental activity, an occurrence in time (an action performed by or up on a human agent) or a state of existing in time (such as thinking, feeling, being, or having)" (Cohan & Shires, 1988: 53). Moreover, Kafalenos's definition for the C-actant, the term widely used in the model, that reads as "the agent for change, the character or characters that perform function C" is accepted in our case as it is.

The procedure employed in this chapter is, first we attempt to read the discourse of the novel in a summarized manner, and having the information from the reading, we will endeavour to

construct its story. As per this procedure, hence, our construction of the story of *Burka's Silence* applying Kafalenos's function model is made as follows.

*Burka's Silence* is a historical novel, which recounts the socio- political incidents in Ethiopia in the early periods of the current government. Most of the characters are real people that are known in the past as well as present political history of the country. Names such as Mengistu Hailemariam, the defunct president of the country, Melese Zenawi, the late prime minister of the country in the current regime, and Hayelom Araya, the heroic figure of EPRDF (Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front) past, are some of them. Most of the incidents found in the novel are also real and historically known. These factual accounts of events are narrated in multiple plot structures. The major plot of the novel, however, is structured on the Amhara Vs Oromo trauma, and most of the textual and social features of the novel are articulated around this issue.

While tracing through the novel, what is found at the beginning is a "pre-story" (P, 5-11) narration in which an "autodiegetic narrator" (Genette, 1980:247) tells us about an incident, that signifies an unexpected death of a man called Hayelom. He tells us that the death of this man is unbelievable because he was the most outstanding hero in the party who had been acclaimed for his contribution to the victory of his party against the then socialist regime. For the narrator, his unexpected death doesn't reduce one to tears rather it is distressing and infuriating (p, 5).

However, without telling us why the death of the person gives him considerable distress, the narrator proceeds to recounting his voyage to Asmara, capital city of Eritrea, with all the mental disturbances he encounters because of the death of that heroic man. When he reaches at Asmara, he learns that the political authorities are worrying about a woman who is disturbed more than anyone else is by Hayelom's death. He finds it unlikely for a woman who lives in Asmara to be

that disturbed by the death of an Ethiopian man. Hence, he curiously keeps on asking who she is and why she gets such attention at the government level. Even though his guide tells the narrator that the woman is not recognized at a government level, the narrator does not stop his enquiry about her. And finally he knows her. She is the woman whom he met before the fall of the defunct military regime. He remembers that she was the woman who wanted to write the biography of Hayelom, the man died before three days.

Confirming that he knows the woman and she knows him too, he asks the officials to meet her. Fortunately, her willingness to see him added, he gets a chance to spend two days with her. In his narrative, the character-narrator describes their stay as follows:

እነሆ ታይቶ በማይጠገበው የቀይ ባህር ዳርቻ ለረጅም ሰዐት ተቀምጫለሁ፡፡  
አይኖቼ ሄዶ ሄዶ ከአድማስ ጋር ከሚዋሃደው ዝምተኛ ባህር ላይ  
አተኩረዋል፡፡አጠገቤ አንዲት ሴት አለች፡፡የአሮሞ ምድር ሴት፡፡ከንፈሮችዋ  
ይንቀሳቀሳሉ፡፡የኔ ጆሮዎች ያዳምጣሉ፡፡ረጅም ታሪክ...ለስለስ ያለ ድምጽ፡፡  
የሚመስጥ ወግ...በውብ ጣፋጭ ዝምታ የታጀበ ትረካ...ተዝቆ የማያልቅ  
ታሪክ፡፡ ተደብቆ ይኖረ ታሪክ፡፡ ከዝምተኛ አንደበት የሚመነጭ፡፡  
ያለማቁዋረጥ -እንደ ቡረቃ ወንዝ የሚፈስ... ታሪክ...

Staring at the silent waves, I am sitting at the stunningly beautiful beach of the red sea. By my side is a woman, a woman from the Oromo land, narrating. My ears are listening... a long story, [narrated with] a resonant voice...an impressive story narrated with a remarkable tune. A narration of a hidden story, which streams from a soft tongue and flows ad infinitum as the river Burka does (P, 11).

With this incident, the narrator ends his<sup>7</sup> narration of the pre-story part and the new chapter with a narration by “extradiegetic narrator” (Genette, 1980:229) follows. If one asks why he stops his autodiegetic narration here, he/she can see his desire to shift the narration from his reports to the

<sup>7</sup> While determining the sex of a narrator, I invoke the sexing convention proposed by Lanser (1981:166): the sex of a narrator may allegedly be equivalent to the sex of the author.

story that the woman tells him. Moreover, with the above narration, the narrator creates a kind of suspense that hooks us to the main story of the novel. Because of this, this part of the novel can be taken as an important introduction to the main story but not as part of it. The main story of the novel which is woven around the Amhara Vs Oromo ethnic trauma is found framed between the pre-and post-story authodiegetic narratives.

Hence, in the course of constructing the story of the novel, one needs to start reading from the chapter of the novel that comes following this section, for the main story of the novel starts from that point.

In the subsequent chapter of the novel, we are introduced with the major character of the novel in a condition where President Mengistu Hailemariam and his Security Minister discuss the security problem that crops up in a small Oromo village called Burka. According to the Minister, the Oromo farmers of this village are revolting against the Amharas who reside five assumed kilometres away from them. He tells the president that the revolt is started following the death of an old man called Waqo, who used to tell a myth about a river known as Burka. Because the Minister does not have time to narrate the myth for the president, he quickly proceeds to ask for official permission “to take any measure” (p, 21) to stop the Oromo farmers from attacking the Amharas. Following the president’s will, he presents two plans to stop the revolt. The first plan is trying to convince the farmers to stop their revolt. If it does not work, he proposes taking a military action against them as a second alternative. To accomplish the first plan the Minister recommends a young man who “has recently come back to Ethiopia from West German with an MA in psychology” (P, 21-22)

**“... ማነፈስ ስሙ?”**

**“አኖሌ ዋቆ”**

**ፕሬዝዳንቱ አይናቸውን ጠባብ ፈታ አደረጉ፡፡**

**“አሮሞ ነዋ! በዚህ ላይ ምዕራብ ጀርመን!”**



“እኔም በመጀመሪያ የዚህ አይነት ስሜት ነበር ያደረብኝ። ልጄን ሳየው ግን ሃሳቤን ለወጥኩ። በጣም ብርቱ ነው... ለፖለቲካ ጉዳዮች ደንታ ያለው ባየመስልም ከሙያው ጋር በተያያዘ የሚቀርባቸው ሀሳቦች ግን መሬት ጠብ አይሉም። በርግጥ በዚህ ልጅ ላይ አንድ አስደንጋጭ ነገር ሰምቶ ነበር። ልጄ ዛሬ አመፅ በተቀሰቀሰበት ቡርቃ ነው የተወለደው። ለአመፁ መቀስቀስ በሰበብነት የሚጠራው ዋቅ የተባለው ሽማግሌ በማደግ ልጅነት ያሳደገው ነው።”

የፕሬዝዳንቱ አይኖች ወዲያ ዎዲህ ይካልቡ ጀመር። ማመን እያቃታቸውም “አብዳችኋል!” ሲሉ ጮሁ።

የደህንነት ሚኒስትሩ ግን መበገር ስሜት አላሳየም።

“አኖሌን ከአመፁ ጋር የሚያገናኘው ምንም ጉዳይ የለም። ይሄን አጣርተናል። ሌላው ቀርቶ ከጀርመን መልስ ቡርቃ ሄዶ አባቱን የጠየቀው አንድ ጊዜ ብቻ ነው። ጨርሶ ጠባብ የሆነ የጎሰኝነት ስሜት አያንፀባርቅም... ይልቁን አኖሌ ራሱ ዛሬ ወደ ቡርቃ ሄዶ አመፁን ለማቆም ጥረት እንዲያደርግ ልንልከው ነው ያሰበነው። ይህም መፈተኛው ይሆናል።”

“...what is his name?” [The president asks the Minister]

“Anole Wako”

“Emm, He is an Oromo. Moreover, he is from West German”

The security Minister smiles [and says],

“At first I felt the same, but when I examined him, I changed my mind. He is a swift hard worker... Though he is not interested in politics, ideas he often forwards in relation to his profession are always valuable. Of course, I heard disconcerting news about this youngster. He was born in the village where the revolt is started today. [Moreover], he was raised in the hands of the old man with whom the revolt is connected.”

The president ogles and screams with incredulity, “Are you crazy?” However, the minister does not recoil from trying to persuade the president [and he says],

“Nothing connects Anole with the revolt. He even did not see his father more than once after he came back to Ethiopia. He is not ethnic-centred... We rather are thinking of sending him to Burka today to stop the revolt. He will be tested by this.”

Finally, convinced of the Minister's idea, the president lets him execute his plans reminding him to trust the youngster only sparingly. Consequently, the Minister's idea is implemented as planned. Jibril, his immediate boss, tests Anole's innocence, and Anole is found unconnected with the revolt. As a result, Jibril asks Anole to go to Burka to stop the revolt. Anole agrees and leaves for Burka.

On his way to Burka, Anole meets with a commander in chief of the military force assigned to take military measure on the farmers if they do not stop their revolt peacefully. Confronting this man for a while and telling him not to order his soldiers to shoot on the farmers before the result of his mission is known, Anole goes to the village where the revolt is about to begin.

When he reaches Burka, he gets his father's compound crammed with lots of people who chant his name holding all sorts of weapons ranging from a rifle to a knife (P, 56). Elderly people are making speeches here and there that aggravate the revolt. They are telling the youngsters that the revolt is decisive to regain the honour and prosperity of the Oromo people which had been seized by the Amharas long time ago (P, 77). They often refer to Anole as the leader of the revolt and they demand the youngsters to follow him.

Nonetheless, some wise elders are aware of the consequences of the revolt. They know that government soldiers are around the village to shoot at everyone if the insurrection continues. Hence, they tell Anole to convince the revolting farmers that the time is not ripe to revolt against the Amharas (P, 79-80). Anole does as he is told to do by the elders. After a long persuasive speech, he succeeds in convincing the farmers and they agree to stop the revolt for a while.

This summarized discourse represents half of the story of the novel. Though we do not finish reading the whole novel, we need to pause here since we get events that can be interpreted according to Kafalenos's model. The purpose of analyzing events concealed in the above discourse functionally is to explicate the importance of interpreting events according to different perspectives to come up with the concrete story of the novel. Hence, at this point, our interpretation can be made from two perspectives that may result in two different constructions of the same story: from the point of view of the government and from the point of view of Burka farmers by taking the main character, Anole, as the C-actant in both cases.

When the given discourse is read from the point of view of the government, the revolt of Burka farmers can be interpreted as a disruptive event (function A (or a)) which disrupts the peaceful life of the villagers (equilibrium). According to our model, as the consequence of the disruptive event, there must be someone who requests someone else's help to alleviate a function A (or a) situation. Thus, the government's invocation to stop the revolt can be taken as function B (request that someone alleviate A (or a)) because, as summarized in the above discourse, the government is seen looking for someone to stop the revolt peacefully. Motivated by the request, Anole is nominated by the government officials to carry out the mission. Therefore, his nomination to go to Burka is function C (decision by C-actant to attempt to alleviate A (or a)). In this particular case, we can see that the C-actant role is given to another actant other than the major character. This happens because of the importance of interpreting the function in this way for the sequence of events that will follow it. In such cases, Kafalenos (1997: 475) indicates a possibility of giving the C-actant role for another actant. According to him,

Function C is the act of the C-actant: the actant who decides to ameliorate A (or a). For the duration of any one sequence, the role of the C-actant is played by a single character (a single group of characters acting together). In

narratives containing more than one sequence, the role of the C-actant in one sequence may be played by a different character from the one playing the C-actant role in a second sequence.

Therefore, since we are dealing with the novel in which a number of sequences of events can be observed when they are interpreted from different perspectives, the C-function, from the perspective we are interpreting the events now, is given to the act of the government not to the main character. The reason for this is that, if the event is interpreted in relation to the main character, as will be explicated bellow, it cannot motivate the sequence of the events that follow it. However, this decision of giving the role of the C-actant to another actant, at this particular point, does not affect our conception of the major character of the novel as the C-actant because still the potential actant to alleviate the disruptive situation is the major character.

In the present case, we don't have C' (C-actant's initial act to alleviate A (or a)) because, from the perspective the events are being interpreted, there is no event indicated in the discourse which signifies such an act. However, what is an important event that motivates the next sequence is the situation in which his boss Jibril tests Anole if he really remains aloof in the revolt. This incident is a test for the major character, so it can be interpreted as function D (the C-actant is tested). The result of the test is positive. Anole defends himself and he convinces his accuser of his innocence. Hence it is function E (C-actant responds to test). After he proves his innocence, Anole decides to go to Burka and the officials provide him with all the necessary services such as car and tent at his disposal to accomplish his mission. With this then, the C-actant gets empowerment and function F is attained. Anole's arrival at Burka village is an event which signifies C-actant's arrival at a place or time for H, which refers to function G. Anole's persuasion of the farmers to stop the revolt is function H (C-actant's primary action to alleviate A (or a)) and the result can be taken as function I (success (or failure) of H). In this particular

case, because the C-actant succeeds in accomplishing his mission, the I-function is positive. The farmers stop their revolt peacefully. At last, equilibrium is maintained (function k). Let us document the functions as follows:

Initial equilibrium: Peaceful life of the farmers

A Burka Oromo farmers' revolt against the Amharas

B Government wants to stop the revolt

[C] Anole is proposed to carry out the mission. Bracketed because the role is performed by another actant.

D Anole is tested: his innocence is investigated by his boss.

E Anole passes test: he proves his innocence

F Anole gets empowerment (when Anole is delivered with all the necessary facilities to execute his mission)

G Anole arrives at Burka where H will occur

H Anole persuades the Oromo farmers to stop the revolt

I Success of the mission: Burka farmers stop the revolt

K Peace regained (equilibrium)

As we attempt to interpret the events in the discourse from the point of view of the government, the above documentation of functions may give us an impression that the order of the story is similar to the ordering of events in the discourse. Reading the same discourse from the point of view of Burka farmers, however, will yield a different construction.

Nonetheless, before constructing the story from the point of view of the farmers, it is crucial to finish reading the novel because of the observable fact that the C-actant's role changes as the

discourse gears to its end. We have to notice this role change of the C-actant to interpret the events according to the intended perspective. When we proceed reading the discourse, we can hardly continue interpreting events from the point of view of the government because most of the events performed by the C-actant are intertwined with the farmers. Thus, to construct the main story of the novel with its full picture of order of events we need to resume reading the discourse from the point where we have stopped earlier.

As seen above, Anole succeeds in stopping the revolt, but he returns to Addis Ababa, the capital city where he resides, with a different personality. The elderly people whom he met at Burka told him that he is their only hope to regain their honour and prosperity. They also told him the secret of his origin and how he was raised by the society. They told him about a revolt which had been held long time ago in an Oromo village called Ogojjo (P, 78-9). The elders have it that:

**ከብዙ አመታት በፊት ኦገልጆ በምትባል መንደር አመፅ ተቀስቅሶ ነበር፡  
 ፡ኦገልጆዎች በደል ሲበዛባቸው ተቆጡና አመፁ፡፡ የንጉሱ ወታደሮችም  
 የመንደሪቱዋን ህዝብ በጥይት ጨፈጨፉዋቸው...ለዎሬ ነጋሪ እንኩዋ  
 የቀረ አልነበረም...ልጆቻቸውን ታቅፈው ሲሸሹ በጥይት ከጀርባቸው  
 የተደበደቡ ሁለት የኦገልጆ እናቶች ብብት ወስጥ እጅግ አምርረው  
 የሚያለቅሱ ሁለት ህፃናትን አገኘን [...] የፈጣሪ ታምር መሆኑን አወቅን፡  
 ፡እነዚያ ህፃናት የዚያ ሁሉ በደል ማስታዎሻ ይሆኑ ዘንድም የቡርቃ ሰው  
 ሁሉ ተንከባክቦ አስተምሮ አሳድጎ ለዎግ ለማረግ ሊያበቃቸው ወሰነ፡፡  
 ልጃችን አኖሌ ...ያንተና የልጅነት እጮኛህ የሃዎኒ ታሪክ ይኸ ነው፡፡**

Before so many years, the Ogojjo people revolted against the Emperor's operation; in return the Emperor's soldiers massacred the whole people in the village. No one was able to escape [except] two babies crying being buried in their dead mothers' breasts [...]. When we found them, we consider them as our gifts from God and we brought them with us. To be a memorial for all the grief we saw at that time, we decided to educate them, and bring them up with all the necessary protection. Our child Anole...this is the story of your childhood fiancée, Hawoni and yours.

At Burka, he also saw people chanting his name and demanding him to be their leader. Their call revives the warning left to him as his father's will, i.e. not to forget the Burka people. All these incidents change his mentality and for the first time he starts to passionately think about the Oromos (P, 92).

Though Anole returns to Addis Ababa with altered psychological makeup, being admired by the government officials for what he achieved at Burka, he is nominated for another important political mission. He is ordered to go to Asmara to conduct a research that may be used as an input to commence psychological warfare against the Shabia, a military force that fights for the independence of Eritrea. With his nagging thought of Burka farmers every day and night, he sets himself in Asmara and starts his job with great enthusiasm.

After a couple of days, however, when he realizes the trespass of the military government on civilians, his enthusiasm wanes. Moreover, he receives a letter from his friend Samuel, an Eritrean who lives in Addis Ababa that explicates his condemnation by the government officials for being a conspirator. Though Anole does not understand how things happen this way, one thing becomes clear to him: he will be either killed or imprisoned for life as a consequence of this false accusation. Hence, he decides to escape from this imminent danger.

The only person he can confidently relay on to this end is Samuel's cousin, Rosa, whom he met the day after he landed in Asmara. He tells her everything, and he asks her to help him save his life. After three days, she introduces him with a man called Adonay. This man, a spy for Shabia, negotiates with Anole over matters and he convinces him to cooperate in a release venture of a prisoner locked in a top-security prison in Asmara. Adonay promises to reciprocate by securing Anole a safe leave out of Ethiopia. Anole agrees with the deal and the plan is accomplished

successfully. Anole escapes the danger, leaves the country safely, and joins the Shabia guerrilla fighters in the red sea islands, miles away from Asmara.

After this incident, we meet Anole in the discourse at a party held in Asmara to celebrate the victory of Shabia over the military regime. He is seen discussing political issues with politicians from different political parties. More importantly, with his conversation with one member of OPDO (Oromo People's Democratic Organization) we are made to know his political conception about the Oromo people. As he reveals it himself, he believes in power than democracy to regain the honour and prosperity of the Oromo people. He asserts it as follows,

**እኔ ዴሞክራሲን የችግር መፍቻ ቁልፍ አድርጌ አላየዉም[...] ዴሞክራሲያዊ መብት ሙሉ በሙሉ በህግ ተከብሮም መብትን መገፈፍና መዋረድ አለ፡፡ የሚንቅህን ክንድህን ጭምር ማቅመስ አለብህ፡፡ ያኔ ዝም ይላል፡፡ ሕግ ብቻዉን የተመዋመዋተዉን የኦሮሞ የብሄርተኝነት ስሜት ወደቀድሞዉ ስፍራዉ አይመልሰዉም፡፡የኦሮሞ ህዝብ መቶ አመት የተገፈፈዉን ኩራትና ክብሩን መልሶ የሚያገኘዉ በህግ ነዉ? [...] መፍትሄዉ መክሰስ ሳይሆን በጥሩ ቡጢ አፍንጫዉን መስበር ነዉ፡፡**

I don't consider democracy as a key to alleviate problems [...]. Even in a condition where all democratic rights are respected, there is disgrace and violation of these rights. You need to punish the one who debases you. It is this that can make him silent. Law by itself cannot revitalize the bulldozed ethnicity of the Oromo people. [Tell me] is this by law that the Oromo people can regain their nobility and courage, which has been seized from them for about hundred years? [...] I do not accept this idea. For me the solution is breaking the seizer's nose with a heavy punch (P, 300).

This mentality persists as his personality throughout the rest of the discourse. Until the end of the novel, Anole is observed hungering to avenge the Amharas. When he returns to Ethiopia after EPRDF seizes power, he secretly organizes a delinquent group and launches attack and robbery



on Amharas residing in the Oromo land. Not only does he venture to arm the Burka farmers to resume their revolt against the Amharas, he also bases himself there to lead the revolt in person. However, the government army, led by Hayelom, subdues him, and he is sent to Asmara in exile where he lives until the end of the story.

The discourse read now and the one read earlier, when connected together, demonstrate the change in the role of the C-actant. At the beginning of the discourse, Anole was a man who took Ethiopia as a motherland deserving his love, and he was not myopically ethnic. He was happy to live as an ordinary Ethiopian leading an ordinary life with his people, Ethiopians at large (P, 25). Nonetheless, with the development of the discourse, his personality changes drastically, and he becomes an extremist, ultra ethnic politician. The basic question here, however, is not what motivates this change of personality of the character; rather it is how this change affects our interpretation of events, and consequently, how it affects the order of events in the story. We can, in so doing, come up with a concrete interpretation of events and depict the story narrated in the deep structure of the novel. Importantly, interpreting the events in the discourse from the point of view of Burka farmers is the way to answer this question.

As seen in the previous reading of the story, the revolt of Burka farmers starts following the death of an old man named Waqo. The death of this man is connected with the revolt because of a prophecy that had been told for years by elderly people of the village. It is prophesised that, when Waqo dies, “የኦሮሞዎች ቁጣ እንደገና ተቀስቅሶ ምድር ትናወጣለች...ያን ግዜ የቡርቃ ዝምታ ያበቃና ጀግናዉ ቡርቃ እንደጥንቱ በኦሮሞ ምድር ደረት ላይ እያፋጩ ሲጓዝ ይታያል፡፡”

“The land will quake as the anger of the Oromos will rouse again... At that time Burka River will get out of the underneath and will be seen flowing on the chest of the Oromo land, whistling with pride” (P, 33).

According to the tale, Burka is a river which is found in the same village and which flows underneath the surface of the earth for about many years as an expression of its ignominy of the defeat of his people-the Oromos (P, 32).

Constructing the story of the novel starting from this tale is essential, for it motivates the subsequent events in the story. The initial incident of the story is, then, the mentality of the farmers cultivated by the tale. This mentality can be expressed as a false belief of Oromos about the Amharas. It is a false belief because what the people used to believe about the silence of the river was not real. As the wise elderly Oromos told Anole: “የቡርቃ ዝምታ ህልም ነው... ተረት ነው...የሚጣፍጥ የሚታ ወግ ነው፡፡” “The Burka river tale is a reverie... just a tale ... fascinating fairy story” (P, 79).

Whatever it is, the death of Waqo, together with the prophecy, initiates the farmers’ desire to revolt against the Amharas. Based on this event, two interrelated functions that disrupt the initial equilibrium can be interpreted. Kafalenos (1997:474) represents them as function A or (or a). According to him:

The two types of A functions mark the distinction between the two potential sources of disruptive change: (1) an event that alters the external world (function A), and (2) a psychological re-evaluation that alters the perception of an otherwise unchanged situation (function a).

We can thus interpret the farmers' act to revolt against the Amharas as function A, since it disrupts the initial situation. However, the desire of the farmers to revolt cannot be taken as the only disruptive event by itself because when we see the event from the farmers' perspective, though it alters the initial situation, it is not the one intended to be eliminated by the C-actant. Rather, as per the prophecy, the fact that Anole should lead the revolt motivates the need to re-evaluate the disruptive event. The farmers' desire to revolt is fulfilled if and only if Anole plays a leading role. That is why, when he arrived at Burka, elders told him about the revolting farmers by saying that, “አንተን ግን ያዉቁሃል፡፡ ታሪክህን ሰምተዋል [...] አንተና ሃዎኒ በአምላክ ተአምር ለመሪነት መመረጣችሁን ገበሬዎች ሁሉ አምነዋል፡፡ ስለዚህ አንተ ካልመራሃቸዉ ኮረብታዉን አይዎርዱም፡፡”

“They know you. They have heard your story [...]; they believe that you and Hawoni are their leaders elected by God. Hence, if you do not lead them, they will never descend the hill” (P, 79).

The event devoid of Anole's leadership should then be taken as a re-evaluated disruptive event (function a) which signifies the perception of the farmers about the revolt. This re-evaluated function motivates the next function, i.e. the farmers request for Anole to lead them. The farmers often refer to him as their leader and they reliantly call for him, “ልጆችን አኖሌ የት ነህ?” “Where are you Anole, our child?” (P, 57) This request thus, can be interpreted as function B.

At this juncture, it is germane to clarify why the death of Waqo cannot be taken as a disruptive event. Though it is obvious that the death of Waqo aggravates the revolt that disrupts the peaceful life of the villagers, since the event is a natural incident, it is unlikely to be alleviated by the C-actant. That is why we cannot take it as a disruptive event.

From the interpretation of the two functions above, one expects that the C-actant is Anole in view of the fact that the disruptive event is likely to be alleviated by no other character than him. This makes his decision to go to Burka to stop the revolt function C. On his way to Burka, he met the commander of the government military force assigned to stop or crush the revolt. Despite the confrontation between them, Anole told and/or warned him not to order his soldiers to shoot on the farmers until the result of his mission is given a try (P, 66-8). This act indicates Anole's desire to protect his people from the eminent attack. A leadership role is played by the C-actant here, and this event can be interpreted as function C'.

The same discourse read from the government's vantage point explicated that an event that can be interpreted as C-actant's initial act to alleviate A (or a), i.e. function C' is missing (Cf. page 50). Though the event exists in the discourse, it hardly relates to events that we ordered in the previous construction of the story. In other words, it had no significance for the sequence of events in the constructed story. According to Kafalenos (1997:470), "[t]o define an event according to its significance, or its consequences, requires interpreting its significance or consequences." Based on this conception, if we see our previous ordering of events, the one that came following function C is Anole's inspection by his boss Jibril that we took as Function D. It would have been of no use, if we interpreted Anole's confrontation with the Commander in chief as function C' (C-actant's initial act to alleviate A (or a)), for the meaning of its function had no relation with the other functions that come before and after it. Now, however, we are referring to the existence of an event that qualifies to this function. Hence, looking at the difference in the nature of the events between our first reading and our current exploration, not having a Function C' in the previous reading remains sound.

To come back to our ongoing interpretation, the next function, function D, can be interpreted from an event that denotes Anole's visit to Burka. When Anole reaches at Burka, he learns a lot about his peoples' anguished cries for his leadership. This event is a test for anole; his capability of playing a leadership role is tested. It thus can be taken as function D. However, rather than live up to their allegedly "prophesied" demand, he pours a cold water on their burning resentment (P, 296) and convinces them to stop the revolt. That means, the C-actant responds to the test negatively, which refers to Function E<sub>neg</sub>.

The next function is revealed through an event that signifies Anole's address to the farmers to show restraint for a while and remain armed until he returns as their leader when the time is ripe. His words got acceptance by the farmers and the C-actant acquires empowerment - function F. After a long time departure, Anole came back to Burka as a delinquent leader and attempted to resume the suspended revolt. This event is Function G, i.e. C-actant arrives at the place, or time, for H. Nonetheless, he was forced to surrender before he accomplished his desire, Function H. Consequently, he could not lead the revolt, Function I<sub>neg</sub>. The function is negative because the C-actant could not accomplish his role as a leader of the Burka farmers, and the C-actant's primary action to alleviate A (or a) is not fulfilled. The farmers are again left with no leader and the equilibrium is restored in a different form, as disillusionment persists on the farmers about their belief. Even after Anole is subdued and their desire to retaliate the Amharas is left unquenched, they keep asking: "የቡርቃ ዝምታ የሚያበቀጥ ታዲያ መቼ ነገ?" "When will Burka's silence end?" (P, 437)

Based on the above functional interpretation of events we can construct the main story of *Burka's Silence* as follows:

Initial equilibrium: the Oromo farmers' false belief that is cultivated by a fairy story about the Amharas

A Burka farmers' Desire to revolt

(a) Anole's absence as a leader of the revolt. Small letter indicates internal disruptive event.

B Farmers call for Anole to lead the revolt

C Anole decides to go to Burka

C' Anole attempts to perform his role as a leader: Anole told the commander not to order his soldiers to shoot on the farmers

D Anole realizes his role as a leader of the farmers

E<sub>neg</sub> Anole responds to the test negatively: He fails to lead the farmers

F Anole gets the farmers' consent when he promises to return as their leader

G Anole returns to Burka as a delinquent leader

H Anole is forced to surrender, and he is exiled

I<sub>neg</sub> Anole fails (again) to perform his role as a leader

K Equilibrium: disillusionment continues

The above documentation depicts the story of *Burka's silence*. As can be seen from its construction, the way events are ordered do not match with the way they appear in the discourse. Bringing our first reading of the story at this juncture, and comparing it with the second construction may help elucidate this idea.

The two constructions exhibit differences in the ordering of events and their interpretations. For instance, in the first case, Anole's act of stopping the revolt is taken as function I, and it is interpreted as C-actant's success in alleviating A(or a). This similar event is taken as function E in the second one, and it is interpreted as the failure of the C-actant to alleviate A (or a), in view of Anole's failure to execute the cherished myth of leadership.

This different interpretation of the same event results from the change of the act of the character as per the development of the discourse. In line with the first reading of the discourse, Anole's interest to go to Burka was to stop the revolt with the view of securing peace between the Amharas and the Oromos. We do not have any indication that this act of stopping the revolt was against his will. Whereas, when the novel nears its end, Anole regrets his did; he accuses himself for not performing his role as the farmers expected him to do. This change of mentality of the C-actant, then forces us to change our interpretation of the same event as a different function. For Kafalenos (1997:470), such nature of functions is called "functional polyvalence".

Perceiving events as functionally polyvalent is helpful to interpret events in a given narrative against the grain. Since, our interpretation of events in the first construction of the story is almost similar to the function of events we get in the discourse, the ordering of events in the discourse match with the ordering of events in the constructed story. In our second reading, however, our interpretation of events is different from the function of events in the discourse; we come up with a story, which has a different meaning from the one we get in the given discourse.

When we look at the story of *Burka's Silence* at the surface level, as we do in our first reading, it seems that the C-actant is successful in accomplishing his role. Nonetheless, the deep structure of the story is almost the opposite. The C-actant often fails to accomplish his role, and his failure, importantly, motivates the change in the interpretation of events. This results in a story that has a different meaning from the one that we get in the discourse.

Generally, in this section we attempt to construct the story of *Burka's Silence* by applying the function model developed by Kafalenos. In the course of constructing the story of the novel, we have seen that events disclosed in the discourse have different meaning when they are interpreted from different perspectives. Our attention, however, was to unfold the story of the novel as

constructed from the point of view of the Burka farmers. Having this view in mind, we constructed a story that explicates one important point: the story of Burka farmers in the novel is the story of failure. We reach at this conclusion based on the following textual facts revealed in the construction. One, the C-actant is seen often failing to perform his role of alleviating the primary disruptive event. Two, the farmers' desire to revolt against the Amharas is not fulfilled and River Burka remains submerged.

After we depict the concrete story concealed in the novel in this way, the remaining task is investigating how this story is used as a narrative strategy in the novel in which we attempt to investigate the textual and contextual factors that contribute for its textual existence. In the following section then an attempt is made to contextualize the story within the social milieu in which the novel is produced.

### **3.3 From Poetics to Politics: Contextualizing the Constructed Story**

Our endeavour in the previous section was to unravel the story concealed in the deep structure of the novel under study. Through a systematic application of structuralist narratology especially that of Kafalenos's eleven-function model, an attempt is made to construct the story of the novel and reached a conclusion that explicates the failure story of Oromo farmers.

We can ask now a series of questions such as the following: Why is the story of the Oromo farmers in *Burka's Silence* portrayed as a failure story? Is the author aware of the existence of such a story in his novel? What "mimetic" and "thematic" (Shen, 2002:222-3) functions does this story have with regard to the social milieu in which the novel is produced? Such questions, consequently, lead us to an investigation of textual and contextual factors that contribute to the existence of such a story in the novel. In due course, we also look in to the features of narrative



constituents; namely, the narrator(s), the characters and the author in view of investigating how these fundamental constituents of narrative determine the reciprocal relationship between the constructed story and its social milieu. In addition to this, we can relate our interpretation of the story (the failure story) with these constituents assuming that the role of these narrative constituents in the story world has a considerable contribution for the textual existence of the story. Let us treat them one by one.

### **3.3.1. The Narrator, Unreliability and the Story**

In Burka's Silence, we get two types of narrators. An autodiegetic narrator narrates the "pre-story" (p, 5-11) and "post-story" (p, 445-461) part of the novel and the heterodiegetic one narrates the main story of the novel. The heterodiegetic is dominant; it narrates the discourse out of which we attempted to construct the main story. Because of this, our focus shall then lie on this narrator though the autodiegetic one is touched in passing.

A close examination of the heterodiegetic narrator in Burka's Silence gives us the impression that he is not a mere observer or reporter. His felt presence in the acts and speeches of the characters exhibits his emotional and/or intentional involvement in the story space.

We can mention one instance to exemplify. From the beginning of the novel up until Anole's voyage to Asmara is narrated (P, 145-53), our knowledge of Anole's relation with females was restricted to only two women. These were his childhood fiancée, named Hawoni, and Zenit, with whom he shared bed on the day he came back from Burka after his mission to stop the revolt of the Oromo farmers.

While he was on his way to Asmara, however, Anole remembered in a flashback a number of females with whom he wanted to get married. According to the narrator:

ሃወኒ የለችም፡፡ ሌላ ማን ሚሮን ዝጋታም ናት፡፡ ሳምራዊት መልክ ብቻ፤  
እንደ ሳሎን ዕቃ፡፡ ሊዲያ...ለወሲብ ብቻ የተፈጠረች ጉድ የጉድ ጉድ፡፡  
ፍሩዝ...ጥሩ ብትሆንም ካልሰለምክ ብላ የምትረብሽ፡፡ አበባ- ዘረኛ፡፡  
ስላማዊት-ትምክህተኛ እያለ ሲያጣጥላቸው ከቆየ በሁዋላ የዲት ላይ  
ሲደርስ ቀጥ አለ፡፡ ይዎዳታል፡፡ ጥሩናት፡፡ በሁሉም ነገርተስማምታው  
ነበር፡፡ አማራ ናት፡፡ ቤትዋ ወስዳው ከአባትዋ ጋር አስተዋውቀው ነበር፡፡  
ጥቂት አወርተው ተጋጩ፡፡ አልተግባቡም፡፡ ስለኦሮሞ ያላቸው አመለካከት  
ጨፈገገው፡፡ ገና ስሙን ሲሰሙ ግንባራቸው ሲቁዋጠር አስተውሎአል  
አዘነባቸው[...]  
ከመጀመሪያው ቀን በሁዋላ ደጃቸው ሳይደርስ ቀረ፡፡  
የዲትን ማግኘቱን ግን ቀጠለ[...]  
አኖሌ እፈቀራት መሆኑን ቢረዳም  
አብሮአት ሊቀጥል አልፈቀደም፡፡ አባትዋን አጥብቆ ጠላ፡፡ ለጉዞ ከመነሳቱ  
በፊት አግኝቷት ነበር፡፡ እንደምታፈቅረው ስትወተውተው የልቡን  
በግልጽ ነግሮ ሊለያት ወሰነ የወጪ እየጠጡ ነበር

When he [Anole] thinks about marriage, he starts to remember females that he knows. Hawoni is not around. Who else? Meron...she is unresponsive. Lidya...she is incredibly sexy. Feruth...she is Islamist. Abeba...she is racist. Selamawit...she is ethnocentric. After he rejects all of these women one by one, he suddenly stops at Yodit. He loves her. She is good...She is Amhara. She took him to her home and introduced him with her father. He could not communicate with her father properly. Her father's attitude towards Oromo people infuriates him. He noticed how her father reacted with distaste even when he heard his name. He disliked her father [...] He never went to her house again. However, he continued getting Yodit [...] though he knew that he started to love her, he did not want to continue with her because of her father. A day before his voyage to Asmara, he met her. They were on a farewell

drink. When she was trying to convince him that they should get married, he decided to tell her the truth and to depart from her [forever] (P, 150).

The narration about Yodit and Anole is not finished here; however, pausing at this point, let us examine the narrator's presence in the mind of the character. We can take more than two indicators.

First, the fact that Anole had a love affair with all these females is just like a surprise for us because until this point the narrator was repeatedly telling us about Anole's indebtedness to his childhood fiancée, Hawoni. There was no any indication that he had such a taste for other females. This discordance indicates that the story told in the above narration is a fabrication of the narrator not the real experience of the character.

The second indicator of the presence of the narrator in the above narration is the way Anole remembers the names of the females. From a psychological point of view, the latest done is remembered better. This complies Anole's mentioning of Hawoni first. However, Yodit, whom Anole loved most next to Hawoni, and with whom he met very recently, is listed fifth. The narrator tells us that he met her before he started his journey to Asmara, i.e. very recently, and he shared unforgettable memories with her, especially in relation to her father. He should have thus remembered her only next to Hawoni. This does not happen because the act of remembering all these females did not originally emanate from the real experience of the character.

We can add one more indicator to substantiate this. When the character remembered the other females, their behaviours accompanied their names. In the case of Yodit, however, ethnicity takes prominence. He says, "She is Amhara". Why does he do this? Why does not he tell us the ethnic identity of the other women? Abeba and Selamawit for instance, are identified as

ethnocentric and racist respectively, but nothing is said as to their ethnic bond. At this point, we can sense an imposition on the character by an external body that attempts to reveal his beliefs or values through the character's mind. Based on our previous knowledge of the character, we can even contend that Anole does not know these women at all. It is an intentional involvement of the narrator behind the character's mind. Shaw (1995: 98) calls such kind of narrator a "loose narrator" that is "characterized by [his] impulse to enter story space" being "personalized, historicized or emotionally engaged in varying degrees"(Shen, 2005:238).

The loose narrator in Burka's Silence is emotionally engaged in the story space to fulfil his desire to inform his readers about some historical records on the Oromo people. That is what we get in the dialogue between Anole and Yodit (p, 151):

**“ልጎዳሽ አልፈልግም”-አላት- “እንደምወድሽ ግን እመኘ”**

**“ከወደድክኝ ለምን ትሸሸኛለህ?”**

**“አባትሽን አጥብቄ እጠላቸዋለሁ”**

[...]

**“አባቴን አምርረህ ምትጠላበት ምክንያት በቂ አይደለም አኖሌ፡፡”**

**“ይገርምሻል የዲት ከባህሬይ የተሸለ ማሰብ አይችሉም”**

**“ማነዉ ባህሬይ?”**

**“ባህሬይን አታዉቂዉም!? ለነገሩ ባታዉቂዉ ይሻላል[...]ሰለ ኦሮሞ በግዕዝ ያሰፈረዉ ፅሁፍ የጋላ ታሪክ የነገዳቸዉ ቁጥር ነፍሳትን ለመግደል ያላቸዉን አራባጅነትና የጭካኔ መጥፎ ልማዳቸዉን ለማሳወቅየጋላን ታሪክ ለመጻፍ ጀምሪያለሁ በሚል የጥላቻ አረፍተ ነገር ነዉ የሚጀምረዉ፡፡ከዚያዲያ ያለዉን ተይዉ፡፡ ምንም አያደርግልሽም፡፡አባትሽ ከዚያ ባህር የተቀዱ ሰዉ ናቸዉ፡፡”**

“I do not want to hurt you”, he told her, “but you have to believe me- I love you.”

“If you love me, why then you leave me?”

“I hate your father”

[...]

“The reason you hate my father is not convincing”

“To your surprise, he cannot think more than Bahrey”

“Who is Bahrey?”

“Don’t you know Bahrey? ...You better not know him, for that matter. His Ge’ez writing about the Oromo people starts with resentment, which says, ‘[hereby] begin to write about the Galla<sup>8</sup> in order that I may know the number of their tribes, their zeal to kill people, and the brutality of their demeanour’. Let us leave aside the rest [of his writing]. It’s no use for you. Obviously, your father is fetched from the same river.”

As per our argument on the emotional involvement of the narrator in the story space, we cannot easily take these words as the idea of the major character. On the contrary, by these words, the loose narrator is attempting to fulfil his desire of imposing his beliefs and thoughts on readers. In bringing a number of names of females, that we contend the major character doesn’t know, in the story space and in mentioning the ‘Amharaness’ of Yodit, unlike the other ones, he is setting a bridge to jump to his discussion of Bahrey.

Nonetheless, what the narrator tells us about Bahrey is only scanty. Bahrey is a real person. We know who he is and what he has done in his writing about the Oromo people. The way Bahrey is represented in the above dialogue, however, does not go along with our knowledge. As we can see from the above dialogue, he does not even have the interest to tell us why Bahrey has begun his writing the way he did and what historical facts about the Oromo are concealed in his work apart from his loathsome words. However, in reality Bahrey’s writing is not mere abhorrence; it rather is “an anthropological research [...] in which one can get whatever he/she expects from a 16<sup>th</sup> c research work written in any country” (Getachew, 2002:56-57). According to Getachew(ibid) “no one could not have known about an astonishing social structure of the Galla

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<sup>8</sup> Galla is an alternative name for Oromo. Currently using this name is banned because of its “offensive” connotation.

if it were not written by this scholar[...]For this reason, *Ethnography of the Galla* is a grand research work, a basic historical source, and a priceless heritage.”

In cognizance of this fact, one may ask why Bahrey starts his *Ethnography* with those repulsive words. According to Tamrat (2002:8) “Most of the early historic records about the Oromo people have one similarity. Because they were written in the war periods, they hold a number of grating and humiliating words.” Therefore, Bahrey’s writing cannot be different from the others. More importantly, because Bahrey was the victim of this war, he might have been forced to use such a language to express his resentment towards his enemy. Bahrey (2002:199-200) writes how the Oromo attacked him as follows:

Fasil attacked them [the Oromo], but they killed him. At that time, the Dawee began to attack the Christians. And at that time the writer of this story prophesied thus: ‘I fear the killers of Fasil<sup>9</sup>, for they have tasted Christian blood.’[...] It happened according to his words, for the spirit of prophecy is not far from the clergy. The Dawee<sup>10</sup> chased this prophet, devastated his country of Gamo, and looted all that he possessed.

However, the loose narrator in *Burka’s Silence* does not refer even to one of these historical facts, and we can guess why he does not. First, maybe he intentionally overlooks these facts for he only wants to present a sanitized history that portrays the Oromos as disadvantaged. Second, his knowledge about Bahrey may be shallow. Either way, since the narrator’s representation of this historical person is not complete, we cannot rely on him. Shaw (1995:99) says, “Loose narrators are interesting because of the effect their looseness creates and transmits.” In our case, the effect the loose narrator creates on us is sense of unreliability.

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<sup>9</sup> Fasil was a governor of a province called Damot in the reign of King Sertse Dingil (Getachew 2002: 199 ).

<sup>10</sup> Bahrey used this name to refer to one tribe of the Oromo.

Taking the above-discussed incident as just one example out of the many other similar cases in which the emotional involvement of the narrator is observed, we fairly suspect unreliability in his narration throughout the novel. However, before we commence on treating how unreliability is observed in the novel, it is essential to discuss the narratological conception of unreliability and how amenable it is to our case.

Unreliability as a narratological concept is introduced to the field by Booth (1983) being connected to the narrator and the implied author. Booth (Ibid: 158-9) takes “a narrator as reliable when he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say, the implied author's norms), [and] unreliable when he does not.” Since its inception, this concept has been one of “the basic and indispensable categories of textual analysis” (Nünning, 2005:89). Nonetheless, there have been incessant debates and incongruities among narratologists on whether it should be connected with first person or third person narrator, and on what textual and/or contextual basis unreliability of a narrator should be decided.

In the particular case of our enterprise, explicating how the concept applies is essential as it decides our way of analyzing unreliability in the novel under study. Therefore, with the view that the dominant narrator in *Burka's Silence* is heterodiegetic, one may ask how unreliability can be treated with such a narrator where the theoretical conception of unreliability is connected with a first person (homodiegetic) one (Booth, 1983; Chatman, 1978:157; Fludernik, 2009:162). It is true that unreliability is widely associated with first person (homodiegetic) narrator; third person narrator (heterodiegetic) is not, however, totally divorced from this conception. As Fludernik (2009:162), for instance, asserts “there is disagreement among researchers as to whether there is such a thing as unreliable [...] third person (heterodiegetic) narrator.”

Adding to the debate, I attempt to slightly deviate from the norm contending that unreliability can also be treated in relation to *narration*, in the sense of defining the term as: “the telling of a story by a narrator [either homodiegetic or heterodiegetic], who may address a narratee” (Fludernik, 2009:157), than that of the condition of a homodiegetic narrator where “his values diverge strikingly from that of the implied author’s” (Chatman, 1978:149). In line with this, as Shen (2002: 229) writes, “we say narration is unreliable precisely because we have come to the conclusion that things are not as the narrator represents them.” As he further contemplates, “in the case of unreliable narration, we believe that the author knows the story facts, facts that could be or could have been revealed by a reliable narrator.”

Because of his conception of unreliability, Shen exhibits terminological and conceptual difference from the other narratologists such as Booth (1983), Chatman (1978) and Fludernik (2009). As per his definition, unreliability is connected not with a single narrator either homodiegetic or heterodiegetic, but with the narration, thereby leaving the possibility of unreliability open to both types of narrators. Moreover, it is the author, not the “implied author” (Chatman 1978; Booth, 1983) who is taken as a counterpart with whom the reliability of the narration is compared. This shift from the single homodiegetic narrator to the narration and from the implied author to the “blood and flesh author” (Booth, 2005) is of great help for my venture here as it enables me to connect the text with its social milieu.

Therefore, while unfolding the unreliability of the narrator in *Burka’s Silence*, the novel in which historical facts and real incidents are found in a considerable manner, I intend to evaluate how he narrates (represents) these factual events and real incidents in the story world as compared to their existence in the reality in which the real author exists. Observing the novel with this insight, most of the historical facts presented by the narrator in the story world are found to be



distorted, scanty or different from the reality on the ground. To substantiate, in addition to the example investigated above, i.e. the representation of Bahrey, I can also refer to one major event that shapes the overall narration of the novel –the cause of the revolt of Oromo farmers against the Amharas.

In the above venture of constructing the story of the novel, the revolt of Burka farmers is already interpreted as the disruptive event (function A), which initiates the other events in the story. Now, let us dig into the cause of this revolt. What is given in the narration as a root cause of the revolt is the Burka river myth upheld by the elders, which dislodges the Amharas from the Oromo land in reprisal for a defeat incurred long ago. The narrator repeatedly tells us about the poignant feeling of the Oromo farmers about their land and their feeling of resentment on the Amharas who “snatched” their “beautiful” land by force.

Oromos in the novel believe that they own the best land in the world. That is what an eighty years old man was pronouncing when he was urging youngsters to revolt:

**ወጣቶች አድምጡኝ!...እንደ ቅቤ ከለሰለሰው የአርሲ ምድር ላይ ከበቀለው ሰርዶ ከብቶች አንድ እፍኝ ቢነጩ ጠግበው ይወላሉ[...]የኦሮሞን ምድር ሄዶ ሄዶ ማን ያዳርሰዋል የኦሮምያ ሰማይ ከዘመን ዘመን ከእለት እለት ውሃ ይታለባል::ከኦሮሞዎች ከርሰ ምድር ያለው ውሃ ለሚሊዮን ዘመናት ቢመጠጥም አይደርቅም:: ሃብታም ነን:**

Listen to me, youngsters! ... If cattle munch a mouthful of grass from Arsi land, which is as soft as butter, only for once, they do not need any more for the rest of the day [...] who can finish measuring the field of the Oromo land? The Oromo sky is the water-laden breast milked day to day and year after year. The underground water of the Oromo land would not desiccate even if it were sucked for millions of years. We are a wealthy people (p, 77).

Nonetheless, who gives this “best land of the earth” to the Oromos? Why do the Oromos in the novel consider themselves as the sole owners of the land? Is this really true that, as it is narrated

in the novel, the wealth of the land is what the Oromo land itself gives for its children, but not implored from any one or not a souvenir from anybody?(P, 77).

The narrator does not give us satisfactory answer for these questions in his narration. On the contrary, whenever he mentions them, he often magnifies this sentiment of the Oromos. The narrator compares the softness of the land with “የጥጥ ፍራሽ” “cotton made mattress” (p.55). He lavishly admires it as “በልምላሜ የሞከሞከ መሬት” “the land moistened with water and new growth” (P.55). But, what is the significance of magnifying the beauty of the land to this extent?

In the words of the characters and by his own, the loose narrator exaggerates the beauty of the land to achieve one goal: he wants to convince us that the Amharas have come to the Oromo land charmed by its beauty and riches. If we closely examine in what condition he uses these fascinating and picturesque expressions, we can observe that he uses them whenever he talks about the Oromos. He does not intend to use such words in relation to the Amharas. This intention of the narrator, therefore, gives us an impression that he wants to tell us that the Oromos are the rightful owners of the land whereas the Amharas are outright invaders.

History tells the contrary. Ethiopia being the homeland of all her children, there is no Ethiopian land exclusively given for the Oromo or for any other Ethiopian ethnic group. Authorities such as Getachew (2002:166) referring to the tradition of exogamy that has been widely practised throughout the country until today, argue that differentiating Ethiopians by their ethnic group is an uphill task if not impossible. As he writes, “the blood of today’s Ethiopians, starting from the ordinary people up to the royal families is the outcome of the relations of different tribes and clans [that are found in the country].” Therefore, unlike what the loose narrator in Burka’s

Silence tells us, the history of the country asserts the existence of a country built out of an age old intermix of many sharing a lot through thick and thin.

On the other hand, the history of the country has dominantly been that of civil wars. Even the Oromos, when they came to the central part of the country, fought “extensive and intensive” (Asefa, 2005:19) wars with other Ethiopians to conquer most of the lands where Oromo speaking people reside today. It is a truism that nation building and rebuilding entails struggles among different groups; Ethiopia could in no way be immune from such an experience, be it destructive or constructive, depending on the favoured line of discourse each party champions.

To this end, for better or worse, the Amhara (?) ruling class shouldered the nation rebuilding historical assignment and succeeded in unifying the country once again. In this regard, of the many other Ethiopian kings, the role of Emperor Menelik II has a huge place in history. According to Getachew (2002:164) “searching for the lost, rebuilding the crumbled was started in the Manlike II era.” His aspiration to unify his country, which has given Ethiopia its present shape, has both positive and negative impacts in defining his political stature. In *Burka’s Silence* for instance, the Oromos often mention his name with hatred and odium. They generalize that Emperor Manlike II is the archenemy of the Oromo people. Anole’s words reflect this:

**ታሪኩን በትክክል ያወቀ አሮሞ የሚኒልክን ሃወልት ላለማየት ሲል ጊዮርጊስን  
አንደማይረግጥ ታወቃለህ? ያቃጥለዋል! በገዛ መሬቱ ላይ ቅጥለለውን ያን  
አሳማ መሰል ጭራቅ አይቶ ስሜቱ የማይነካ አሮሞ በድን ነው፤ አልያም  
ታሪኩን አያወቅም፤ ወይ ደግሞ አሮሞነት አይሰማውም።**

Do you know that an Oromo who knows his history very well does not go to St. George’s Church<sup>11</sup>? He does not go there because it hurts him. Looking at the statue of that pig erected on his own land, if an Oromo does not become angry, he must be a corpse or he is not an Oromo at all. (P, 449-50)

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<sup>11</sup> It is a church found in Addis Ababa. The statue of Minilek II is erected in front of this church.

Though these words of Anole are repeatedly pronounced by the other Oromo characters such as Hawoni (p, 285-86), the narrator does not want to tell us, even through the speeches of the Amhara characters, what the Emperor contributed for the betterment of the Oromo's themselves and the whole nation at large. This shows that he shares the Oromos' conception about the Emperor. In fact, this seems to be the core reason that motivates him to forge the tale of the Burka River, round which the entire revolt scheme is synthesized.

In reality, Menelik II was not the enemy of the Oromo people. He was rather a king with the due respect and affection for the Oromo language, culture and people at large. Let us mention historical evidence that explicates this truth.

The name Onesimos is one of the famous names in the modern history of Ethiopia known for his translation of the Bible in to the Oromo language. Interestingly, the first person who gave official recognition for his work was Emperor Menelik II. As Bahru (2002:50) states:

In 1903, he [Onesimos] set out with his wife and three children and two of his new recruits from Asmara. In Addis Ababa [...] Onesimos had an audience with both Emperor Menelik, to whom he presented a copy of his Oromo Bible, and Abunä Mattèwos, and the mission was favourably received.

This historical incident, apart from the debate among historians, as to whether Menelik is Oromo himself or not (Getachew 2002:166), shows us that the Emperor is not as racist as the Oromo characters and the loose narrator in *Burka's Silence* portray him. The war between his military force and the Oromo people was just an incident in the track toward nation rebuilding, knowing that such cases happened not only against the Oromos but also throughout the country including against the Amharas though the torch-bearers were different. It is after those wars and struggles

that the present Ethiopia in which people from whatever ethnic group or tribe or clan are claimed to be living together with mutual respect and tolerance was established.

We can even bring the experience of the author of *Burka's Silence* as evidence here. In his non-fictional work, *The Journalist's Memoir* (2009:5) in which he records his personal experiences, he tells us that he was born and raised in a town called Beshoftu, a town in the Oromo region. Though his parents were from Eritrea, he repeatedly expresses himself as “a citizen from Beshoftu” who has a huge love and affection for Oromo people, their language and culture. When he is telling us about his attitude towards ethnic politics, he writes, “ከኦሮሞዎችና ከአማራዎች ጋር ያደግሁ እንደመሆኔ የዘርን ጉዳይ ልዩነቱን በፍጹም አናፈቀውም ነበር። እናቶቻችን እሳትና እንጀራ እየተበዳደሩ አሳድገዋል።” “As I was raised between the Amharas and the Oromos, we did not have any experience about ethnic difference. Our mothers raised us together sharing Injera [a staple food made from a crop called Tef] and fire to each other” (Ibid: 62).

Evidence that shows the mutual respect of the people is also attested by Getachew (2002:19). Like the author of *Burka's Silence*, Getachew was also raised in an area where Oromos and Amharas live together. As he writes, in the area where he grew up “the Amhara and the Galla [...] settled together. At his home everyone speaks his own language, when they meet outside (including in the market place) they communicate in the language of the person who starts the dialogue.” That means, unlike the forged portrayal in *Burka's Silence*, after those wars and struggles made in the course of nation rebuilding, there was no any grudge amongst Ethiopian people including the Amharas and the Oromos.

Therefore, taking the established facts into account, the alleged cause given by the narrator for the revolt is unconvincing. The tale purported on Menelik has no factual power to convince us.

Having this conclusion in mind, when we come to the unreliable narrator of our novel, we can say that he relates the reason for the revolt with the death of that old man Wago with the desire to escape from the reality. In the condition where people were living in peace and mutual respect, the narrator could not bring a real incident of revolt in to his narration. Knowing that the reality does not support him, he brings the fairytale in to play and constructs the story of the novel around that fairy tale. This unreliable act of the narrator, consequently leads us to examine the present status of the Amhara- Oromo relationship from which we suspect the narrator brings his story.

Unlike the previous times, ethnicity dominates the present politics of the country. It is now common to get a number of ethnic based political parties in and out of the country. According to National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (2010), under the name of Oromo people alone, there are around ten legally registered political parties. The ruling party itself is a composition of four ethnic based parties.

It is certain that ethnic based political culture has its own vices and virtues. On the one hand, it helps to protect the political, economical and socio-cultural rights of ethnic minorities, but on the other hand, in a country like Ethiopia where more than eighty ethnic groups live together, such ethnic politics may create incredulity and enmity among the people. It might be to prevent the latter that previous governments used to preach about an assimilated Ethiopia (Bahru, 2002:140-141). In the present condition, however, the custom of ethnicity is making Ethiopians pay a

price. In 1992, for instance, there was a terrible conflict between the Amharas and Oromos in a province called Arsi, where the Burka village is found.

In *Burka's Silence* this real incident is presented as part of the story. However, surprisingly, while presenting this incident, the narrator distances himself and gives the task of narrating that irritating event for a third party by saying, “የእግዚር አገልጋይ ከሆኑት አማልክቶች አንዱ የጋዜጠኝነት ሚና ወስዶ ሁኔታውን ቢዘግብ ኖሮ መቸም እነዚህ ባለ ነበር፡፡” “If one of the Engels took the role of a journalist and reported the incident, he would say the following” (P, 391), and he leaves the floor to the ‘Engle narrator’. The loose narrator that we were blaming for his emotional involvement in the speeches and acts of the characters now changes his personality and becomes an outside observer of another narrator, but why?

It may be because the narrator does not have the courage to face the reality, or it may be because he wants to hide something from his readers.

Though the narrator does not want to face it, it is possible to say that in reality, the devastating conflict between the Amharas and the Oromos that took place in that time was aggravated by those ethnic based political parties. In the course of competing to get the acceptance of the people, political parties preached the Oromo about racism, invented their own ethnic history that magnifies the disparaging parts of the Oromo relation with other people of the country, and sowed hatred in the hearts of the Oromos injecting their venomous principles in to the green minds of the ordinary people.

Most of these things are also found in the narration of *Burka's Silence*. If we take what a character called Hawoni presents in a public conference facilitated by OPDO for Oromo people

who reside in a sub-region called Wollega, for instance, we can get all we said above in her presentation (P, 277-88). In her presentation, she discourses on the vices of the Amhara people. She repeatedly mentions Menelik II and his military force and tells the Oromos that he is the one who should be accountable for destroying the social and cultural system of the Oromo people. She even talks about how the Amharas humiliate the Oromo by calling them with an offensive name such as Galla. Generally, what she presents to her Oromo audience is all hate and revenge.

Considering the length of the presentation (it is around ten pages) and the depth of the ideas incorporated in the paper, we can suspect the involvement of the narrator in its preparation. Otherwise, it is unbelievable to say that Hawoni, who lives in a war front with EPRDF military force, can write such a paper with a considerable coherence of ideas. Moreover, how can one believe that she writes it by substantiating her ideas with citations from other writings such as religious books, within a short period? As we can infer from the narration, Hawoni prepares the paper with in a night (p, 275). Therefore, we can say that the loose narrator deliberately incorporates these venomous teachings of political parties in the story space through the words of an Oromo character. What is his intention in doing this? Does he want to show us how those parties led the people in to conflict through these teachings? After realizing the unreliability of the loose narrator, we cannot answer these questions positively. For us, he incorporates these teachings in his narration because of his desire to inform his readers about them. It is what we suspect that he wants to hide from us by distancing himself from narrating the real conflict between the Amharas and the Oromos.

The thread of our argument on the unreliability of the narrator takes us to the real source of the revolt. In the real sense, the Oromo-Amhara conflict happened following the false teachings of those ethnic based political parties whereas, in *Burka's Silence*, the revolt is an eventuality of a



prophecy in a tale by an old man. Here we can see the difference between the reality and the falsehood. The reality tells us that there was a conflict between the two. Whereas, the narrator in *Burka's Silence* tells us that there was revolution by one party, with the connotation one was an oppressor of the other. From the point of historical evidences we saw earlier, the later is not true. We can say that the narrator is lying to his readers.

Since he is a narrator in a historical novel in which a number of historical facts and events are incorporated, the narrator should have told us the truth about those historical facts and incidents. But, because he is unreliable, he presented them in a distorted and/or in an incomplete manner.

One of the main reasons for the difference in the meaning of the story we get in the discourse and the story we constructed through functional analysis in *Burka's Silence* is this unreliability of the narrator. Depending on the presentations, comments, discussions and emotional involvements of the unreliable narrator, if we see the story we get at the surface structure of the novel at face value, it gives us the impression that the Oromos have done the right thing when they revolt against the Amharas, but the deep structure shows the contrary. They fail to accomplish their desire. Because what the unreliable narrator tells us is against what we get in reality, the Oromo farmers in the novel could not succeed in returning their prosperity and freedom that “the Amharas snatched from them” (P, 93). The unreliability of the loose narrator in *Burka's Silence* then contributes for the failure story of the Oromo farmers.

### **3.3.2. The hoaxed Character(s) and the story**

Following Kafalenos's conception of actants as a change agent that determine the order and sequence of events, when we constructed the story of *Burka's Silence* in the first section of this chapter, the role of the major character had been our focus of discussion. In our particular case,

we took Anole (the main character) as an actant and we attempted to construct the main story of the novel following his role in changing the events.

In this section, my endeavour is to investigate the main character as “the story world participant” (Margolin, 2007:66), that contributes for the failure story of Oromo farmers. My premise is that one of the reasons that contributes for the interpretation of the main story of the novel as a failure story is the portrayal of the major character as a hoaxed one in the story world. I also contend that the development of the story from one event to the other is achieved through the change of behaviour of the main character, but his reason to change his behaviour is the consequence of the tricks played by other characters on him. Let us see how the trickery is made on this character by following the story line once again.

As we read the novel, though Anole came back to Ethiopia from Germany with the hope of leading a cheerful life while serving his people with his expertise, his motive to come back was the promise his friend Jibril made to him. As the narrator tells us, When Anole was in West German, Jibril, who was the special advisor for the Security Minister, convinced him to come back to Ethiopia. Jibril promised Anole that he would facilitate everything he wanted if he decided to return to his country. However, his friends in West German advised him not to go back to Ethiopia. They warned him having informed him about the problems he might face if he decided to go back to Ethiopia. But, he ignored them. (P. 25)

Hence, believing his friend Jibril, Anole came back to Ethiopia. Nonetheless, when the Burka Oromo farmers revolt against the Amharas, and when Jibril accuses him for being involved in the revolt, we see Anole regretting his decision (p, 25).

Though Jibril was not hoaxing Anole when he asked him to come back to his country, Anole was not able to consider the condition his country was in at that time of civil war, thereby indicating his susceptibility to trickery. And, this is what we see happening on him throughout the story.

To mention an incident, after Anole accomplishes his mission of halting the revolt of the Burka Oromo farmers and goes to Asmara for another mission, he meets Rosa, Samuel's cousin. It was Samuel who told him about Rosa when he was in Addis Ababa. On their first day meeting, Rosa asks Anole how he gets Asmara:

“አስመራን አንዴት አገኘሃት?” ስትል ጠየቀችው  
“የቀድሞ ወብቱዋን የምታንጎራጉር የሃብታም ግቢ ትመስላልች” ሲላት ሮዛ  
ከልቡዋ ሳቀች:: ሥቃ ስታብቃም “ለማደግ ግን ተስፋ ያላት ከተማ ናት::  
አስመራ ያለ ብዙ ድካም ታላቅ ከተማ መሆን ትችላለች:: የናንተው ፍንፍኔ  
ግን የከተማ ቅርጽ ለመያዝ አያሌ ወጭ ትጠይቃለች :: በርግጥ አየሩዋ  
ቀረጥ ቢከፈልበትም አያስቆጭ::”  
አኖሌ በድንጋጤ ጨዋ ሆነ:: ቃል ልተነፈሰም:: ግራ በመጋት ሮዛ ላይ  
አፈጠጠ:: ያስደነገጠው ፊንፊኔ የሚለው ቃል ነበር:: ይህን ቃል ለመጨረሻ  
ጊዜ አዲስ አበባን ወክሎ ሲጠራ የሰማው ጀርመን ሳለ ነበር-ከአነግ አባላት  
አንደበት:: ሮዛ ቃሉን ከሄት አመጣችው ሲል ራሱን ጠየቀ::  
“ምን ሆንክ አለችው?”  
“ምንም!”  
“ዝም ስትል ግራ አጋባክኝ:: መፀፎ ተናገርኩ?”  
“በጭራሽ”  
[...]  
“ፊንፊኔ የሚለውን ስም የት ሰማሽው?”  
“እንጂ” አለች ሮዛ “...ግን ያዲስአባ የቀድሞ ስም ፊንፊኔ እንደነበር፤ ቃሉ  
የኦሮሞኛ ስለሆነ ለዋና ከተማነት አይመጥንም ተብሎ እንደተለወጠ አንድ  
ሰው ነግሮኛል:: ከዚያዲያ ብዙ ጊዜ ፊንፊኔ ሚለውን ስም መጠቀም  
የስደስተኛል ግን ለምንድነው ፊንፊኔ የሚለው ስም ለዋና ከተማነት  
አይመጠንም የተባለው መጠፎ ትርጉም አለው?” ስትል ጠየቀችው::

አኖሌ ሳያስበው ስሜታዊ ሆነ፡፡

“የስርዓቱ ሰዎች ዘረኞች ስለሆኑ እንጅ ችግሩ ቃሉ ላይ አይደለም ያለው[...] የከተሞችን ስም ለመለዎት በቂ ምክንያት አልነበራቸውም፡፡አሳማዎች ስለሆኑ ነው ያን የፈጸሙት፡፡”

“How do you get Asmara?” She asks him

When he said, “she resembles a rich man’s compound that laments its old time beauty,”

Rosa laughed from the bottom of her heart and says, “But she has a good hope to develop. Asmara can be a great city without much difficulty. However, your Finfinie will cost a lot to have a structure of a good city. Of course, one does not regret to pay tax for its pleasant weather.”

Anole looks astounded [by Rosa’s words]. He does not say a word. He stares at Rosa with uncertainty. What astonishes him is the word Finfinie. He heard this word representing Addis Ababa when he was in Germany when OLF [Oromo Liberation Front] members used it. He wonders from where Rosa brings this word.

[...]

“Where do you hear the name Finfinie?” He asked her carelessly.

“I don’t know, but somebody told me that Finfinie was the previous name of Addis Ababa, and it is changed because the word doesn’t fit to be a name for the capital city. Since the first time I heard this name, I have enjoyed using it. But why did people want to change the name? Does it have a negative connotation?” She asked Anole.

At this time, Anole becomes emotional

“The problem is the racist attitude of the ruling class, not the word. They have changed the name of many towns... They do not have a convincing reason to change the previous names of towns. It is only because they are pigs that they did it.”

Observing the emotional effect the word Finfinie creates on the major character, one can see that Rosa uses this name intentionally. To understand her intention, it is essential to discuss the friendship between Anole and Samuel.

According to the narrator, the friendship between Anole and Samuel started in Germany. Though Samuel came to Addis Ababa very recently, they meet frequently. It is Samuel, who always covers their leisure time expenses since he tells Anole that he earns money running family business. They understand to each other in everything (P, 95).

However, contrary to the narrator's claim of their rapport, based on what we observe from how they used to meet in different conditions, we can sense that Samuel was always after Anole. For instance, when Anole was in Nazareth, a city found near Addis Ababa, for entertainment, looking for someone who can join him, he called for Samuel, but he could not get him. However, after a while, when he came back to the hotel where he rented a bedroom, he learnt that Samuel had come to that hotel looking for him. What astonished Anole at that time was how Samuel could locate the hotel: "how could he know that I rent a room here?"(P, 101)

Similarly, when Anole was in Asmara, Rosa invited him to her parents' house. While he was in Rosa's home, Samuel telephoned from Addis Ababa and asked for Anole (P, 189). Anole was astonished as to how Samuel could know where he was as nobody had informed Samuel of the invitation.

From these incidents, we can construe that the relation between these two characters is not a pure friendship of meekness. Rather we realize that one is hounded by the other. Samuel is chasing after Anole, but why? The reason is that Samuel is a spy for Shabia. Let us look at the following extract (P, 129-30).

**“እንደምን ከረምክ ልጄ”**

**“ጤና ስጠልኝ አባቴ”**

**“ተመልሰህ መጣህ ማለት ነው? ችግር ገጠመህ?”**

**“ችግር አልገጠመኝም አቦይ” አለ ወጣቱ ሰው።**

**“አንድ የሚያስተላልፋልኝ አስቸኩዋይ መልዕክት አለ። የታሰረው ዎዳጃችን ከእስር ቤት ያመልጥ ዘንድ መሞከር ያለብን የመስለኛል። ምናልባት ለዚያ የምታገለግል እጅግ ጠባብ ቀዳዳ ታይታኛለች። ይህንኑ ልጠቁማቸው ፈልጌ ነው”**

**“መልካም። በል መልዕክቱን ግለጽልኝ”**

**ለግማሽ ሰዐት ያህል ረጋ ብሎ ተናገረ**

**“አቦይ ይዘውታል የተናገርኩትን?”**

**“አንዲት ቃል አትጎድልም ልጄ! እንዳለች ነገ ተሲያት አስመራ ትደርሳለች”**

**“አመሰግኖታለሁ”**

**“ለሃገራችን ነው ልጄ!”**

“How are you my son?”

“How are you my father?”

“Why do you come again? Is there any problem?”

“There is no problem, father,” said the young man, “I have one urgent message for my bosses. I think we need to try to free our friend from jail [in Asmara]. I have seen a small window of opportunity. I want to inform it to them.”

“Good, then tell me the message.”

After speaking for half an hour, the young man asks, “have you got everything I told you father?”

“I do not miss a word. Everything you told me will be in Asmara by tomorrow.”

“Thank you”

“It is for our country, son!”

The names of these two men are not disclosed in this dialogue. Yet, we know who the old man is because he was introduced to us previously when the narrator told us about the first meeting of these two men (P, 48-50). The narrator calls him Father Girma Tsion. He lives in a town called

Debrezeit owning a small electronics shop (p, 48). We do not have any direct information about the identity of the young man since his name is not mentioned in both of their meetings. Relating the events in the story, however, we can identify him.

As to the above dialogue, the young man is trying to help a man imprisoned in Asmara to escape. However, because he was in Addis Ababa, quite far away from Asmara, we do not expect him to be involved in the operation physically. If he cannot do it by himself, then he must be thinking of someone else who is going to go to Asmara. In line with the narration, the only person going is Anole. Hence, we insinuate that the young man is attempting to use Anole to accomplish his mission, and he should have some kind of relation with Anole.

The two individuals that have information about Anole's voyage to Asmara are Jibril and Samuel. The man who wants to make use of Anole to free his imprisoned colleague in Asmara should be one of these men. We cannot suspect Jibril in relation to this case because of the fact that he is a member of top government officials. He cannot have considerable relation with Shabia (at list the narrator does not give us any clue to suspect that). If we do not have any basis to suspect Jibril in this venture then, we are left with Samuel. Except that he is from Eritrea, the information given by the narrator about him is limited. Yet, Samuel was always after Anole as we have indicated above, and we can suspect him of being that young spy man. Taking Samuel as that spy then, let us look into the message he delivers to father Girma Tsion.

ፊንፊኔ የሚባል አንድ ሰው በቅርቡ ወደ አስመራ ይጓዛል፡፡ይህ ሰው በአስመራ ቆይታው ከከፍተኛ ባለስልጣኖችና የሻቦብያ አባላት ከሆኑ እስረኞች ጋር መገናኘቱ ከቶ የማይቀር ነው፡፡ስለዚህ ቦሎኛ 99 ከእስር እንዲያመልጥ ይህን ሰው መጠቀም ይቻላል[...]

ፊንፊኔ ታማኝ የመንግስት ሰው አይደለም [...] ይህ ሰው ውጭ የነበረና

**በራሱ ፍላጎት ወደ ኢትዮጵያ የተመለሰ ቢሆንም አሁን በፀፀት ላይ ይገኛል፡**

**:**

A person who has got a code name ‘Finfinie’ will go to Asmara in the near future. In his stay in Asmara, it is obvious that he will meet top officials of the government and Shabia members who are imprisoned in Asmara. Therefore, [...] we have to exploit this man for the release of our friend ‘Bologna 99’. He has a good basis for this proposal. “Finfinie” is not committed to the government [...] though this man was living abroad and returned to his country by his own will, he is now regretting his decision”(p,135).

Here, we can infer that the person coded as *Finfinie* is Anole Waqo. Setting the trap for him before Anole goes to Asmara, Samuel tells Anole about Rosa claiming she is his cousin. When he reaches Asmara, Rosa receives Anole as an honoured guest of her family. To his shock, she uses the word Finfinie at the middle of their first day dialogue. As she tells Anole latter when they see to each other off after Eritrea is liberated and he is on his way to Ethiopia after EPRDF took power, her reason to use that word was to examine his reaction and determine whether he was fit to their plot (p, 309).

**“አኖሌ በቃ ወሰንክ?”**

**“ምኑን?”**

**“ወደ አዲስ አበባ መመለሱን?” አለች ትክዝ ብላ**

**የማይለዎጥ ሃሳብ መሆኑን ከገለጸላት በሁዋላ ድንገት አንድ የቆየ ነገር አስታወሰ**

**“ ፊንፊኔ የሚለውን ስም ተዉሽዉ ማለት ነዉ?”**

**ሮዛ ፈገግ አለች**

**“በመጀመሪያ የተገናኘን ቀን ፊንፊኔ የሚለውን ስም መጠቀሜ ትዝ ብሎህ ነዉ?”**

**“እህ!”**

**“ይገርምሃል በወቅቱ የአዲስ አበባን ስም በፊንፊኔ ተክቸ የተናገርኩት በአዶናይ ታዝዠ ነበር፡፡እኔ ቃሉንም ሰምቸዉ አላዉቅም ነበር፡፡”**



**“ለምን አላማ?”**

**“ያንተን የብሄርተኝነት ስሜት ለመመዘን የተሰነዘረኸ የፍተሻ ተኩስ ነበረኸ፡፡ ወጤቱ ታዲያ ጥሩ ነበር የሆነልን፡፡ ታስታዉስ እንደሆነ ስሜታዊ ሆነህ ነበር፡፡በእለቱ ለአዶናይ ሪፖርት ሳደርግለት ከጠበቅነዉ በላይ አሮሞ ነዉ ነበር ያለኝ፡፡”**

“So you decided, Anole”

“What?”

“To go to Addis Ababa”

After he tells her that he already decided, he suddenly remembers one thing

“Does it mean that you forget the name Finfinie?”

Rosa smiles [and says]

“Is this because you remember my usage of the term on our first meeting?”

“Aha!”

“To your surprise I used that term at that time because I was ordered by Adonay. I didn’t even know the term.”

“For what purpose?”

“It was the first bullet fired on you to judge your ethnic sentiment. The outcome was very nice. If you remember, you were very emotional. When I reported it to Adonay at that same day, he said, ‘He is more Oromo than we have expected’.”

This way, Anole was ensnared in Samuel’s trap. Samuel’s group prepared a false letter that accused Anole of being a defector of the government and delivered its copy to him as if they got it from a government office. Rosa pretended to help him to escape safely from the danger. She brought Adonay as a helper. Adonay tabled two alternatives for Anole, either to pay a great deal of money or to cooperate with them. Knowing that he could not bring that amount of money, Anole agreed to cooperate with them. When he duly accomplished his duty, he exiled from Ethiopia.

Throughout the story, Anole was not a man of his own. From the beginning to the end of the story, we see him being hoaxed by other people. His longing to fight for the freedom and prosperity of the Oromo people, his hatred towards the Amhara people, and his ambition to avenge them are all the results of these trickeries. This condition then affects his role as a C-actant in the story. Because his personality was the outcome of the deception of the other characters, he was not able to comprehend the reality. He was expected to lead the Oromo farmers' revolt to success but he failed to do that because his knowledge about the revolt was not more than a false belief. Consequently, the main story of the novel becomes the failure story of the Oromo farmers.

### **3.3.3. The Real Author and the Constructed Story**

When we investigate the social and textual features of a narrative text, according to Contextualist narratology that guides the theoretical orientation of the present research, we need to consider the “intentions, motivations, interests and social circumstances of real authors” (Chatman, 1990: 314). Following this theoretical viewpoint, in this section we are going to examine how these psychological and social personalities of the real author affect the overall meaning of the novel manifested at its story level.

In the above discussions, we concluded that the narrator is unreliable because he lacks proper knowledge of the real events and incidents that he narrates in the story. Similarly, in relation to the character we contend that the personality of the major character is the outcome of the tricks he is played upon by the other characters; consequently, he could not comprehend the reality around him as he lacks appropriate knowledge.

Having this convergence of the narrator and the major character, therefore, one may question the real author's knowledge of the events and incidents found in his novel and his intention of portraying the narrator as well as the major character in the way they exist in the novel. Probing into the anecdote of the real author is essential, for it helps to address this appropriately. Luckily, we get this information from his two memoirs entitled, *The Journalist's Memoir* (2009) and *The Writer's Memoir* (2010). Hence, our discussion of the personal knowledge, interest and intention of the author in relation to the novel under study is subject to the facts stated in these two books. Having this as a premise, when we see the social and political condition in which the author writes *Burka's Silence*, we learn that at that time he was a key member of EPRDF; he was a manager of the press department of the party. We may now wonder why he wanted to write *Burka's Silence* that contends with ethnic politics. The answer Tesfaye (2009:140) gives us is a bit unclear. We get this answer in the middle of his writing about the first president of Ethiopia in the present regime, i.e. Negaso Gidada. After stating that the presidency of Negaso Gidada was not better than being a hostage, as he had no considerable right to exercise his presidential power freely, Tesfaye writes about himself as follows,

**ዶክተር ነጋሶ በዚያ ጃንሆይ ግቢ እንደ አንበሳዉ እስረኛ ስለመሆናቸዉ ብዙ ጊዜ አሰብ ነበር [...] የእራሴን እስረኛነት ግን አከራካሪ እንደሆነ በማሰብ ላለማመን እጣጣራለሁ፡፡ እኔ በግሌ እስረኛ ከሆንኩ ከእስር ቤት መወጣት ይኖርብኛል የሚል ሙግት ከራሴ ጋር በመግጠሜ ሙሉ በሙሉ የማምንበትን አሳብ የያዘዉን የቡርቃ ዝምታ የተባለዉን መጽሃፍ ጻፍኩ፡፡**

I used to take Dr. Negaso Gidada for a prisoner [...], but I was not certain whether I was a prisoner too. While arguing with myself, I convinced myself that if I am a prisoner I should get out of that prison, and I wrote a book called *Burka's Silence* that contains the idea that I completely believed in.

From this, we infer two points. One, the writer wrote *Burka's Silence* because he wanted to free himself from the bondage he was in. Two, the ideas in the novel are the personal beliefs of the

author. However, what does he mean when he says, “I should get out of the prison?” What kind of imprisonment is he referring to?

Since he was then the head of the press department of the ruling party (Tesfaye, 2009:74), one would not think of his physical imprisonment. However, it is easy to comprehend the writer’s abhorrence to his party engagement. And this is repeatedly stated in his memoirs. That is why he expresses the periods he spent with this political party as “the periods of enslavement” (Tesfaye, 2010:13). When he considered himself as a prisoner, therefore, he might be referring to the condition in which he was detained by his political responsibilities not to express his personal feelings and opinions freely, even though it is not clear how writing *Burka’s Silence* helped him gain the freedom he longed.

Though a great deal of historical report about EPRDF is found in *Burka’s Silence*, the main story of the novel is about Amhara Vs Oromo trauma. How can, in effect, writing about ethnic trauma liberates someone from the kind of imprisonment that the present author was in? Though he doesn’t give us an answer, Tesfaye (2009:323-326) tells us that what he believes in is written in his novel. As he writes,

**እኔ ኦሮሞ ባልሆንም በኦሮሞ ህብረተሰብ መካከል ያደኩ ሰው ነኝ፡፡ ደጋጎቼ እና ድንቅ አእምሮ ያላቸው ፣ ቅንነት መለያቸው የሆኑት ኦሮሞዎች ጎለቤቶቼ ነበሩ፡፡ ከወደዱህ የራሳቸው የሚደርጉህ ከጠሉህ ደግሞ ስሜታቸውን መደበቅ የማይቻላቸው የኦሮሞ ገበሬዎችን በቅርብ አወቃቸዋለሁ[...] የቡርቃ ዝምታን ስጽፍ እነዚህ ኦሮሞ ገበሬዎች አእምሮዬና ልቤ ወስጥ ነበሩ፡፡**

Even though I am not an Oromo, I was raised in the Oromo society. Those brilliant, kind and cordial Oromos were my neighbours. I know those Oromo farmers who accept you as one of them if they love you, and cannot hide their feeling if they hate you. I know them very well [...] Therefore, when I write *Burka’s Silence*, these Oromo farmers were in my heart and mind.

Still the puzzle lingers, in fact, with more complication. The Oromo farmers found in the novel are much more different from the ones that the author describes in the above quotation. In the novel, we get revolting Oromos that desire to evacuate their Amhara neighbours with whom they used to live together for a long time. Where are those generous and affectionate Oromo farmers in the novel? In our discussion so far, we have not seen such Oromos. In the contrary, the Oromos in the novel are aggressive, hateful and egotistic. What a contradiction! If the author was thinking about the kind ones, why do we get the unkind in the novel? If he was meant to write about the affectionate Oromos, who, then, brought the brutal ones in the story?

Two assumptions can be given for this contradiction. One, since the memoir is written after the novel is published, and after he received a number of frosty feedbacks from the reading public (Tesfaye, 2009:293-97), he may be sympathizing with his audiences, or, two, he might be influenced by some external force not to reveal that virtuous Oromos in his novel. Though we do not have any ground to disregard the first assumption, it is difficult to substantiate with concrete evidences. Therefore, let us stick to the second one and attempt to see what external forces might have influenced the author while writing his novel.

As indicated in the above sections, Oromo people are not different from the other Ethiopians. They love to live with their Ethiopian brothers with love, peace and mutual respect. Unlike the revolting Oromos that the author of *Burka's Silence* portrays in his novel, they used to live together with their Amhara brothers in peace and love. There was no feeling of resentment between these two people until recently. However, following the emergence of a number of ethnic based political parties, conflicts started to emerge between these two. Therefore, if the author was really thinking about those virtuous Oromos while writing his novel, he should have

written about how these political parties have poisoned the good relationship of these people. The author, however, could not do it because at the time he was writing his novel, he was not in a condition in which he can reveal such kind of truths that might have political consequences. In effect, he was very careful of protecting himself. The self-distancing of the narrator from narrating the real conflict between Oromos and Amharas that we discussed in relation to the narrator in the previous section (Cf. Page 77) can be taken as one manifestation of this act of the author.

Another issue that deserve a mention at this point is the knowledge of the author about the historical and real events and incidents he incorporates in the novel. Based on what we have said so far, we doubt if the author wrote the novel with sufficient knowledge of the history of the country in general and the Oromo people in particular. Our investigations in the above sections assert that lack of knowledge on the real incidents incorporated in the story world is observed on the narrator and the major character. Since these narrative components are the outcomes of the imagination of the real author, it is evident that the observed lack of knowledge on them is also the characteristics of the real author. Therefore, we can contemplate that the author of *Burka's Silence* is not only politically influenced, but also an ill-informed one. Actually, in his memoir, Tesfaye (2010:351) admits that he wrote the novel with limited knowledge of the Oromo people. According to him, after he tells us about a book entitled GADA, which is written by a person called Asmerom Legesse, he regrets for writing *Burka's Silence* without reading this book.

**እንዴት ያለሁ ደፋር ኖሪያለሁ! ገዳን ሳላነብ ነገር የቡርቃ ዝምታን  
የጻፍኩት? ካነበብኩት በኋላ የኦሮሞ ህዝብ ማነጪያ ምን ነበር ለሚሉት ዋርካ  
ጥያቄዎች ጥልቅና ጥናታዊ መልስ የሰጡን ቀዳማዊ ሰጤ እኒሁ አንጋፋ  
አንትፖሎጂስት መሆናቸውን ለመገንዘብ ችያለሁ፡፡**

After reading it [GADA], I recognize that this prominent anthropologist is the one who gives us profound and scientific answers for a number of basic questions such as, who is the Oromo people and what is [the history of] this people? What a ridiculous man I am writing *Burka's Silence* without reading GADA?"

Generally, lack of knowledge and political influence prevent the author from depicting the virtuous Oromos that he held in his heart and mind while writing the novel. He, rather, writes about the revolting ones and comes up with a novel that deals with a failure story of these people.

### 3.4. Conclusion

In this chapter, an attempt is made to elucidate how story is used as a narrative strategy in one of the selected Amharic novels, entitled *Burka's Silence*. The investigation has been done under two sections. In the first section, an endeavour is made to construct the concrete story concealed in the deep structure of the novel. Following functional analysis principle of classical narratology and applying Kafalenos's eleven-function model, I have come up with a story at the deep structure that has a different meaning with the story on the surface structure. At the surface structure, the story seems to have a meaning that favours the Oromo farmers; however, the deep structure illuminates the failure story of these farmers.

In the subsequent section, taking the meaning of the story at the deep structure as a hub of my discussion, I have attempted to investigate the textual and contextual factors that contribute for this meaning. In the course of doing this I have investigated the role of the narrator, the major character and the real author at the story level.

Throughout my investigation, what is made clear is the similarity between these narrative agents. The unreliability of the narrator is the outcome of his lack of knowledge about the real incidents and historical events incorporated in his narration. The narrator presents these real incidents in a distorted and/or incomplete manner as compared to their real happenings. Similarly, the major character is the hoaxed one. His personality is not his true self rather it is the product of those trickeries played up on him by other characters that make him not to comprehend the reality he lives in. The same also goes to the real author. Though he wanted to write about the innocent and virtuous Oromo people, he comes up with the novel about the revolting ones. This appears because he writes the novel under a political influence. In addition to that, as he witnesses for himself, his knowledge about the socio-cultural history of the Oromo people was not sufficient at the time he was writing the novel. Generally, the insufficient knowledge observed on the narrator, the major character and the real author, makes the story of the Oromo farmers depicted in the deep structure of the novel the failure story.

This reveals one basic issue magnified through the manipulation of story as a narrative strategy in *Burka's Silence*, which is related to the general objective of the present research that attempts to address the relationship among form, content and social milieu in a narrative text. In my particular case, the form is the constructed story. The content refers to the general meaning that revolves around the failure story of the Oromo farmers. And the context, the political situation in which the real author was in when he was writing the novel. In *Burka's Silence*, these three components of a narrative text are found interrelated to each other: the form reflects the reality and the reality influences the form.



## Chapter 4: Focalization as a Narrative Strategy: Perspective in *Grey Bells*

### 4.1. Introduction

Even though focalization has been introduced to narratology a considerable years ago, controversies recurring on its ontology and epistemology are still unsettled. Starting from Gérard Genette (1980), who takes credit for bringing the term in to the field, focalization has been the focus of discussion for narratologists both in the classical and post- classical phase of the theory. Consequently, the endeavour to (re) define and (re) conceptualize this concept by theoreticians “has caused much ink to flow” (Genette, 1988:65).

Given the debatable nature of the concept, investigating focalization as a narrative strategy in a novel without explicating its meaning and scope as per the intended goal of the investigation can be a difficult venture that may result in conceptual wobbling. Therefore, in the course of investigating focalization as a narrative strategy, it is essential for the investigator to first identify his/her working definition of the term itself and the conceptual framework he/she is to apply to his/her undertaking.

Taking cognizance of this stipulation, in the present chapter an attempt is made to investigate focalization as a narrative strategy in one of the selected Amharic novels, namely *Grey Bells*. Our venture has a wider view of illuminating how this narrative form motivates the textual and contextual meaning of the novel and reciprocally, how the social context in which the novel is produced influences the textual appearance of focalization as a narrative form. In the course of achieving this goal, an attempt is made to treat focalization within the frame of the theoretical orientation of the present research, i.e. contextualist narratology.

The chapter comprises six sections. The first section presents the story line in which the story of the novel is recapitulated. The second section discusses focalization and illuminates our conceptualization of the issue as per the overall goal of the present research in general and the nature of the novel under investigation in particular. Derived from the discussion in this section,

the three successive sections deal with analyzing the meaning of the novel achieved through three facets of focalization such as perceptual, psychological and ideological facets. In the last section, a discussion of the relation between reality and focalization is carried out in view of depicting whose perspective is focalized in *Grey Bells*.

#### 4.2. Story Line

*Grey Bells*, the novel written by Adam Reta, who is well known as a short story writer than a novelist, for he publishes five anthologies so far, is a realist novel with 462 pages. The story of the novel that is narrated by the protagonist named Mezgebu Dubale is all about the life experiences and observations of this protagonist as a child, as an adolescent and as an adult.

As a child, Mezgebu, whose mother died when he was three and was brought up in the hands of his father and a stepmother, had no opportunity to be treated well by his family. Nobody used to pay a loving attention due to him. His father needed him only when he wanted to send him on errands to buy *Tella* (traditional malt). His brutal stepmother (P, 28) would not even care if he spent the night outside the house. Being a reclusive child, he used to spend the whole day and most of the night sitting at a hillside found at the center of his village, the place that he used to consider as his territory. Sitting on a moist stone, watching and observing around him, he used to record incidents and people's activities. Though he was not fond of his name Mezgebu, which literally means 'the record', he believed that his pursuit coincided with his name. He claimed that he was God's record (P, 10). Most of his records were about the evil conducts of the inhabitants in his village. His critical comments about social issues are what we see in most of his narrations.

When he grew up to adolescence, the socio-political condition of the country was changed from monarchy to military system. Following the political change in the country, his territory, the hillside that he used to sit at, started to serve as a venue for the meeting of the villagers and political cadres, and he was forced to leave it. Meanwhile he got a friend named Elias who was involved in a political party that used to struggle against the then military regime. Though

Mezgebu formerly did not have any interest to interact with people, even with children of his age, he became particularly interested in Elias, for Elias introduced him with new practices such as swimming, smoking cigarette, drinking alcohol and even coupling. Importantly, Elias made Mezgebu participate in antigovernment political activities. Though Mezgebu was doing it without enough knowledge and understanding but as a favour for his friend, he started to participate in antigovernment movements by distributing propaganda papers of the party in which Elias was participating.

Mezgebu and Elias also tried to extend their political mission to the nearby cities. One day, however, while they were in the capital city of their administration, their political activity was exposed and the government cadres detained Elias. Fortunately, Mezgebu escaped from the danger and returned to his village safely. As soon as he got back to his village, he went to the government bureau and applied for a job as a police officer with the objective of diverting the attention of government spies sniffing around him. With no difficulty, he got the job. He was trained for a year, and was assigned as a police constable in Addis Ababa, capital city of the country. His job was to control the security of the city by strolling through its thoroughfares.

Life for Mezgebu as a police constable was neither good nor bad. Because his monthly salary was meagre, he was forced to live with other four colleagues sharing a room and its rent. On the other hand, his job gave him the opportunity to get some of the things that he desired to have when he was a child such as eating three times a day, and getting rid of the brutality of his stepmother. His job was also conducive to resume his obsession- observing and recording incidents around him. He was happy to get this opportunity again though at a different scene. In Addis Ababa, observing minute details clearly was not as simple as that of his childhood at Nefas Mewucha. Because of the reflection of the asphalt roads, glasses and cements of buildings around him, he could not see things clearly (P, 251). Moreover, the things that attracted his attention in Addis were different from those that charmed him as a child. At the hillside of his

village, in Nefas Mewucha, he had been interested in observing everything that came to his sight, including the secret love affairs of the inhabitants of the village and even the nature of little creatures such as flies and insects. However, later as a city police constable, he was very much attracted to females than any other things (P, 313). He started to experience strange feeling towards them such as sexual lust.

After considerable years of experiencing such a life, he met a young woman called Genet whom he married and started to live with, departing himself from his colleagues. He became a matured adult and a responsible father. Consequently, unlike his childhood and adolescence experiences of spending almost all of the day time out of home, after he married Genete and got a child, he started to spend most of his spare time in his home with his family in a compound.

#### **4.3. Focalization: Conceptual Proviso**

The need to specify the definition and conceptualisation of focalization while attempting to deal with it in a novel is indicated in the introduction part of this chapter. In this section, therefore, an endeavour is made to depict in what manner focalization is conceived in the case of the present research to investigate it as a narrative strategy in *Grey Bells*.

According to Jahn (2007:102), while attempting to investigate focalization in a fictional narrative, “one of the questions that every narratologist has to decide for himself or herself is whether to stick to Genette’s or Bal’s model, and whether to use a broad or a narrow conception of facets of focalization.”

However, to decide whose model I need to stick myself to, and in what scope I need to conceive focalization, it is essential to start from the novel itself by identifying its literary features and by attempting to harmonize the concept of focalization along with these features of the novel for it is in this way that I can attain my view of investigating focalization as a narrative strategy in the novel under study.

This said, looking into the literary features of *Grey Bells*, one can observe some peculiarities related to its narrator, consciousness representation and act of narration. Let us see them one by one.

The narrator in *Gery Bells* is Mezgebu, the protagonist. Since the protagonist is narrating his own story, he is an authodiegetic narrator. While narrating events and incidents that he did as a child or some time before the period of the narration, this protagonist is often seen asking for clarifications and information from his past self. The following monologue, for instance, vividly shows how retrospection is used by the narrator.

**አልጋ በሚያክል እጁ ፊቴ ላይ በጥፊ መታኝ...ለረጅም ጊዜ ስንጎራደድ ቆይቼ  
ዉሃ የተጣደበት የክሰል ምድጃ ላይ በቁመቴ ወደቅኩ...**

**“ዉሃዉ የፈላ ነበር?”**

**አዎ:: እሳት ሆኗል::**

**“ምን ሆነኩ?”**

**የትክኻዬና በከፊል የአንገቴ ቆዳ ተገፈፈ::**

**“ምን አደረኩ?”**

**ጮህኩ::**

He [My father] slapped me with his bed-size hand on my face... walking unsteadily for a while, I lost my balance and fell over a charcoal grill on which a kettle of water was boiling.

“Was the water boiling?”

‘Yes! It was as hot as a fire.’

“What happened to me?”

‘My shoulder and my neck got burnt.’

“What did I do?”

‘I shouted’ (P, 74).

Such an act of asking oneself in a retrospect, hence, indicates that there are two “spatio-temporally divorced but biographically connected coordinate systems” (Jahn, 2007: 100) in the narrative world. Narratologists such as Stanzel (1984) differentiate these two personalities of an autodiegetic narrator as “experiencing self” and “narrating self”. The existence of these two selves of a narrator indicates, according to Phelan (2001:61), that the narrator “contains a high degree of self consciousness.” And as he further says, “determining the degree of narratorial self-consciousness has many consequences for our understanding of narrator/implicit author relationships.” Since *Grey Bells* is characterized by its manoeuvring of a self conscious narrator, therefore, in the course of investigating how focalization is used as a narrative strategy in it, dealing with these two identities of the character-narrator is essential, for it helps not only to demarcate our conception of focalization but also to identify whether the character’s, the narrator’s or the author’s perspective is focalized in the novel.

Another peculiarity of *Grey Bells* is observed in its consciousness representation, in which the consciousness of the character-narrator is represented through stream of consciousness, a type of mental representation defined as “[t]he simulation of associative mental processes in the representation of consciousness using interior monologue, free indirect thought and psycho-narration” (Fludernik,2009:150). In the novel, the character-narrator is often seen presenting his thoughts and feelings in a stream of consciousness manner. This mode of consciousness representation is of interest for our discussion on focalization in the novel under study, for it helps us to reveal what is focalized or “the object of focalization” (Bal, 1985:146) in the novel.

Understanding it to mean “the telling of a story by a narrator” (Fludernik,2009:157), narrative act in *Grey Bells* that is made through personal symbols and uncommonly used clarifications of

ideas and expansion of narrated incidents through endnotes is the third peculiar feature of the novel. In the novel, the narration is dominantly made through personal symbols. If we take the hillside that Mezgebu, the protagonist, used to sit at when he was a child, for instance, we can sense its symbolic function in the novel. In addition, the endnotes given for the readers to elaborate names of characters or as extra narratives about incidents in the main story are manifestations of unconventionality of the narrative act in the novel.

Whose responsibility is it to use personal symbols in a narrative world? And who is accountable for the given endnotes in fictional narratives, anyway? Is this the narrator or the author? Though sufficient narratological discussions are not found on these issues, dealing with personal symbols and avant-garde narrative acts such as endnotes, assist our endeavour to investigate focalization in the novel by helping us to decide who has what agency in focalization.

From the above three main characteristics of the novel under study, one can observe the close relationship between the character, the narrator and the author. In the case of the self-consciousness of the character-narrator, for instance, the similarity between the character and the narrator or the experiencing self and the narrating self is apparently lucid. The presence of the author is also felt in such a situation because “it is [...] of course possible for an author to shift the focalization from the narrating-I to an experiencing-I for the purpose of showing that the narrating-I still perceives himself and the events as the character did” (Phelan, 2001:61).

Having these literary features of *Grey Bells* in view, and considering their contribution for the overall meaning of the novel, the model of focalization we need to stick to should treat narrative agents both in the narrative and story levels, i.e. the character, the narrator and the real author. In this regard the mere choice amongst Genette’s model and Bal’s model may not help, for each of them takes focalization particularly as a subject at the narrative level and the story level

respectively. Though focalization is conceived as a visual activity in both cases, for Genette (1988:74), it is found in the narrative level, and it is characterized by “a restriction of field [...] selection of narrative information with respect to what was traditionally called *omniscience*” (Italics original). Whereas, for Bal (1985:146), “[f]ocalization is the relationship between the ‘vision’, the agent that sees and that which is seen” at a story level.

To meet the intended goal of our investigation of focalization as a narrative form through which the textual and contextual meaning of the novel is motivated, I believe focalization need to be conceived in its wider sense. In this view sticking to Rimmon-Kenan’s (1983) conception of the term will help not to be affected by the specificity of the above two models of focalization. For Rimmon-Kenan (Ibid:75-85), because “visual sense of ‘focalization’ is too narrow”, she regards focalization as “a phenomenon” of different facets such as “the perceptual facet” which is determined by “space” and “time”, “the psychological facet” under which she includes “the cognitive” and “emotive” components, and “the ideological facet” which refers to “the norms of the text.”

Focusing on these three facets of focalization is essential for our venture because of two main reasons. First, because Rimmon-Kenan proposes these facets considering focalization in Mieke Bal’s way that gives privilege for the focalizer and the focalized, focusing on them provides an opportunity to investigate the subject and object of focalization in a novel under study. Moreover, because it assists us to integrate the three narrative agents, namely, the character(s), the narrator and the author that we identified as determining factors for the meaning of the novel under study and as participants in focalization, accepting the focalizer and focalized concept is important for our venture. Second, these facets, for me, are not merely textual phenomena. Though it was not Rimmon-Kenan’s intention to bring the out-of-text world in to her discussion, these three facets give us an opportunity to treat focalization as a textual and contextual phenomenon. However, Rimmon-Kenan’s elucidation of these facets of focalization from the



point of view of classical narratology necessitates possible conceptual modification to make them fit for the contextualist view of narratology of the present research.

To this end, it would be fruitful to make a discussion of classical and post-classical divergence in relation to focalization. The main difference is as to who focalizes in a narrative text? Bal (1985) and other classical narratologists such as Chatman (1986) and Rimmon-Kenan (1983) contend that the task should be given to the character since focalization needs the presence of the character as a perceiver. Post-classical narratologists disagree; they assert that not only characters but also narrators can be taken as focalizers. According to Phelan (2001:58), who strongly supports this idea, “narrators can- and do- perceive, can and do act as our lenses on the story world, without being physically present in it [...] In short, narrators can be focalizers.”

The debate is then on the agent who perceives the object of focalization- whether it is the character or the narrator. However, and as a point of departure, I do not believe that the debate should be restricted to these two agents only. With special reference to a homodiegetic novel like *Grey Bells* in which a conscious character-narrator is found, I contend that the question, who focalizes in a narrative? should be answered in relation to the three facets we discussed above.

In the perceptual facet, because it is determined by space and time, no doubt that it necessitates the physical presence of the character. Hence, the focalizer that fits in to this facet is the character because, as Chatman (1986:198) asserts, “[a] character can literary see (perceive, conceive, etc) what is happening in a story because he is in the story.” Whereas, in the cognitive facet that refers to the mental activity of the focalizer, the self conscious narrator-character who realizes his narrating self and experiencing self should be taken as a focalizer because in cases such as this one, according to Phelan (2001:57):

If narrators are, in effect, blind to the story world, and then audiences must be too.  
Or, more formally, if narrators cannot perceive the story world, then narratees,

implied readers, who get much of their access to that world through the narrator, cannot also perceive that world-or can do so only through a focalizing character darkly.

The usage of the word “perceive” in the above quotation may lead one to raise a question: is there any similarity between what the character-focalizer perceives and the narrator-focalizer perceives? For me, since I take the cognitive facet of focalization as the task of the narrator-focalizer, the meaning of the word ‘perceive’ is different when related to the two focalizers. In relation to the character-focalizer, it apprehends with the senses, i.e. seeing, touching, hearing etc. That is why perceptual facet, which is achieved through the sense organs, necessitates the physical presence of the focalizer in the story space. In this case, the focalizer should be present at the place and time where the events and incidents happen. Whereas when we use this term in relation to the narrator-focalizer, it should refer to the mind: how the character-narrator comprehends the story world in which he lived, for the character-narrator, especially in homodiegetic novels such as *Grey Bells*, narrates his own story dominantly through retrospection and cannot be always present in the space and time where events and incidents happen in the story world. The spatio-temporal position of the narrating self is in the past of the spatio-temporal position of the experiencing self. Hence, while using the term *perceive* in relation to the character-narrator, it should refer to the character-narrator’s understanding of his milieu, his thoughts and philosophies of life, as well as his emotions towards what he sees, hears etc. in the story world. As the narrating self of the character-narrator is responsible to such kind of cognitive aspects, the task of focalization in the psychological facet of focalization, thus, should be given to this agent.

In relation to the ideological facet, that “consists of ‘a general system of viewing the world conceptually’” (Rimmon-Kenan, 1983:81), the task of focalization should be given to the author. As to me, unlike Rimmon-Kenan (Ibid), the focalizer in accordance with this facet does not only

evaluate “the events and characters of the story” but also appraise the wider world out of the text that serves as a social milieu. Therefore, accepting the meaning of ideology in its wider sense as “a body of norms, and ideas that appear natural as a result of their continuous and mostly tacit promotion by the dominant forces in society” (Herman & Vervaeck, 2007:217), I contend that in the ideological facet of focalization the agency should be given to the one who has a conventional right to access both the textual and contextual worlds of the text. In this case, the author is the right agent to perform the task.

With the above discussion in view, one may comprehend the three focalizers as three independent agents in a text. However, since the validity of our discussion manifests itself in a homodiegetic novel like *Grey Bells* in which, from the vantage point of contextualist narratology, the difference between the character, narrator and author is slippery, our independent discussion on the three focalizers has a methodological rather than epistemological advantage.

Typologically speaking, the focalization we get in *Grey Bells* is an internal one, for the focalizer is participant in the story world. This internal focalization, however, cannot be taken as the mere act of the character. In an authodiegetic novel, the agency of the narrator and the real author in focalization is evident. Hence, when I propose the agency of three different focalizers in relation to the three facets of focalization, my premise is that the perceptual facet which is carried out by the experiencing self is affected by the cognitive and ideological facets that are achieved through the act of the narrating self and the real author respectively.

#### **4.3.1. The Perceptual Facet of Focalization in *Grey Bells*: The Character as Focalizer**

In this section, I am going to analyse the perceptual facet of focalization in the novel under study. As explicated in the above section, the perceptual facet of focalization is the task of the experiencing self of the character-narrator. Through his senses, he achieves this facet.

In *Grey Bells*, of all sensory perceptions, seeing is what the character-narrator loves very much. He even refers to himself as a professional watcher (P, 7). When we use the term perception in the present section, therefore, we are referring to the way the protagonist (the character-narrator) sees his surroundings.

In *Grey Bells*, one can observe that the angle of perception of the experiencing self changes as his physical development changes from one stage to another. To put differently, the way the character perceives events and incidents in the story world in his childhood is different from how he does in his adolescence and adulthood. It seems that his angle of perception becomes more specific to personal matters as he grows older. This proposition can be elucidated by discussing his perceptions in three different stages: as a child, as an adolescent and as an adult.

When he was a child, Mezgebu used to sit on a hillside found amidst his village and perceive everything that falls into the realm of his eyes. He was indeed a professional watcher in that he used to watch a number of things such the sunset and sunrise regularly that would not normally charm children at his age. Astonishingly, he used to love watching things that are trivial for other people. When he saw flies, for instance, he used to stare at those crippled because of their broken wings (p, 13). In occasions such as a wedding ceremony where people chant and dance together, his eyes were interested in scrutinizing how the people dress and act rather than observing their dances and chats. In the following extract, for example, Mezgebu described a bridegroom from a perspective that may be overlooked by most casual viewers.

**የሙሽራው ቁመና አጭር ነበር፡፡(...) ጠቅላላ ቁመናውን ሳል ቆየሁ፡፡ ጥቁር ኮትና ሱሪ ለብሱዋል፡፡እና ነጭ ሸሚዝ፡፡ ጫማዎቹ ደግሞ ረጅም ወፍራም ተረከዝ ነበራቸው፡፡ እየተንገዳገደ የሚራመድ ይመስላል፡፡ ዐይኖቹ አቁዋሙን ሲያበጥሩት ቆዩና ክርሻቱ ላይ አረፉ፡፡ ክርሻቱ ረጅማና ሰፊ ነበር፡፡ እንደቀለጠ ላስቲክ የተኮመታተረ፡፡ ከሸምቆቆዉ ጀምራ ትንሽ አረንጉዋዴ ዝንብ በከረሻቱ ሰረሰር ላይ ያለፍሃት**

**ትመላለሳለች፡፡ ይሄን የከረሻት ጨምዳዳ ሳይ፤ አረፋ የመሰለው ሹሎ፤ መኪናዎቹ፤ ጠቁሩ ሱፍ ዋጋ አጡብኝ፡፡ በፒካፕ መዳር በገጠር ከተማ እጅግ ክቡር ነው፡፡ ለመሆኑ ለሙሽራው ፒካፑ ይበልጠበታል ወይስ አንገቱ ዙሪያ የሚያጠልቀው ንጹህ ክርሻት?**

The bridegroom was short [...] I scrutinized his appearance. He wore a black suit with a white shirt. His shoes had long chunky heel. After examining his physique, my eyes rested at his tie. Though it was long kipper tie, it shrunk as a burned plastic. An intrepid green fly was walking up and down the edge of the tie. When I looked at this shrunk dirty tie then, all the pickup cars, the bright white gown [of the bride] and the black suit [of the bridegroom] became valueless for me. In a small rural village a wedding escorted with pickups is a respectable one. Incidentally, which one was more important for the bridegroom- pickup cars or a clean tie? (P, 18)

This extract gives us an insight into the critical eyes of the protagonist. He was a child who did not see things, incidents and people merely but examined them critically. His interest in scrutinizing things taken as trivial, like a fly on a dirty tie, also shows his natural aptitude for perceiving his environment from the vantage point of its shortcomings. He used to perceive his village and its inhabitants day and night so that he knew a lot about their vices. That is why he says, “እግዜር ወደዚህ ምድር ሲመጣ የንፋስ መውጫያ ህዝብ ለፍርድ ሲቀርብ መስካሪነት የምጠራው እኔ ነኝ፡፡” “When God comes to this world [on the judgment day] and the inhabitants of Nifas Mewucha are called to judgment, it is me who will be called as a witness. I am God’s record” (P, 11).

Nonetheless, when Mezgebu grew to adolescence, he lost all his enthusiasm to watch his environment critically. Because his hillside started to serve as a meeting place for the villagers and political cadres following the political change in the country, he had no stable place where he could spend his time sitting and watching as he used to do then. Moreover, the new fancies of life that his friend Elias had started to familiarize him with such as cigarette, alcohol and even

politics were absorbing him. He was demoted to just a blurred observer of his environment. At this particular age we hardly identify his angle of perception of events and incidents in the story world. Incidentally, that stage of his life did not last long. Because of his political affiliation, his friend, Elias, was detained by the government militia, and Mezgebu almost believed that his friend was executed. His friend's arrest leaves him for ushering in his adulthood.

Mezgebu knew that his fate would be the same as his friend's if he could not take an action immediately. Consequently, he went to a police station found in his village, applied to get a job as a police officer in the view of proving his support for the ruling party and hence dissuading suspecting eyes of state agents. Fortunately, he was enrolled as cadet and after a year, he was assigned as a police constable in Addis Ababa. His new job gave him a chance to resume his childhood obsession, i.e. sitting and watching.

However, his perceptions were not clear and critical as they were in his childhood. The people and incidents that he set his eyes on while executing his duty appeared to his eyes as unappealing in their physical appearances and behaviour. For instance, according to the character he often saw people he called "Mogians" that were slay-footed because of the ginger that they willingly put in the nails of their feet (P, 227). When he reported about these people for the district police office, the officer on duty told him that it was his nightmare not a reality, and he even called him mad. *“መዝገቡ እብድ ነፈ የሚባለው ያለ ነገር አይደለም፡፡”* “I did not believe when people told me that Mezgebu was a mad man” (P, 284). Indeed, it seems that Mezgebu's perception was getting blurred.

Sometimes he attempted to grasp the reality around him and tried to perceive the people and incidents as he used to do when he was a child. However, his eyes could not perceive events and incidents as succinctly as they once did. They shrunk their boundary just to scrutinizing females sexually.

ነጋ መሽ እንዲህ ስንሸራሸር በአይኖቼ ከሚሰለሉት ነገሮች አንደኛው ሴቶች ሆነዋል። በፊት እንደተለየ ፍጡር የማይታዩኝ ከመንገደኝ ጎርፍ መሃል፤ ከሰልፉ ከትርምሱ መሃል በብሌኖቼ አዉጠቼ እገመግማቸው ጀመርኩ። በፊት የባልና የሚስት ልዩነት የማይታዩኝ ያን ሰሞን ጎን ለጎን ወንድና ሴት ሲያጋጥሙኝ ዐይኖቼ ለሴቱዋ ያደሉና ከወንዱ ጎን ይወስዷታል። አካሄዱዋን ያያሉ፤ የጸጉሩዋን ነገር ያያሉ፤ የፊቱዋን ቅርጥና አቀማመጥ፤ የአይኖቹዋን አገላለጥ ያያሉ። የከንፈሮቹዋን አሰራር የጀሮዎቹዋን ነገር ያጤናሉ። ዐይኖቼ በርቀት ሲሸነፉ ወይም አብጠልጥለው ጨርሰው ሴቱዋን በጥቂት ቃላት መጥነው ሲያበቁ ወደሌላ ይዞራሉ።

When I walk on the streets every day and night [doing my job], females become the hot favourites for my eyes. Though I did not give due attention for them previously, I start to examine females as different creatures. Unlike previous times, when I see couples walking together, my eyes mostly focus on the female and scrutinize her sexually, forgetting the existence of the male. My eyes see how she walks, how her hair dressed, how her face is structured, how she opens her eyes, and how her lips are made and how her ears are placed. When my eyes are overwhelmed by distance or when they finish examining her, they would turn to another female for another scrutiny (P: 313).

Mezgebu's distorted perceptions and his interest to focus on females only, show us the change in the angle of his perception. When he was in Nifas Mewucha he used to perceive his world from the vantage point of its weakness, unmistakably and critically. His eyes were like an efficient camera that could record everything around it. However, as an adolescent, he started to perceive things and people that really did not exist. Moreover, his perception became only limited to females.

More importantly, after Mezgebu got married to a girl named Genet, he separated himself from his roommates and started to live with his wife in a compound. Because he started to spend most of his spare time in his home, most of his perceptions were confined to events and incidents in his compound that he often perceived relating them with the beauty of his wife. At this stage,

therefore, shift in angle of perception is observed on the character. When he became a mature adult, unlike he used to do in his childhood, he started perceiving things from the vantage point of his private life. When he was a child, he was not interested in his family life. He often took his family as one part of the corrupt society he used to condemn. Whereas when he became a mature adult, everything he tells us in the story world is about the beauty of his wife and the goodness of his family. This shows us how the angle of perception of the experiencing character is changed from being critical of the society at large to flattering appraisal of personal issues.

Generally, the structure of the perceptual facet of focalization in *Grey Bells* gives us an impression that there is a shift in the angle of perception as the character focalizer develops physically. Moreover, it reveals that there is no natural relationship between the character-focalizer's physical development and the range of his perception. Under normal circumstances the older a person gets, with tacit agreement, the wider and deeper his perception gets. *Grey Bells* contravenes this: the older the character-focalizer got, the thinner his perceptions grew. However, why does this kind of oddity exist between the focalizer and the focalized in the perceptual facet? An examination of the psychological facet of focalization in the novel may help us get an answer.

#### **4.3.2. The Psychological Facet of Focalization in *Grey Bells*: The Narrator as an agent**

As an authodiegetic novel, the whole narrative of *Grey Bells* can be taken as a mental activity of the narrating character. Since this character- narrator or the narrating self of the protagonist, reports the events and incidents in the story by remembering his experiencing self, his act of narrating is a mental activity. However, as Margolin (2009:48) asserts: "All focalization is a mental activity, but not all mental activity is focalization. Focalization concerns only specific kinds of mental activity and limited kinds of content." Margolin further attempts to give details about these specific kinds of mental activities, relating most of them with the character-focalizer. Nonetheless, in my case, where I take the narrator as a focalizer that shapes the psychological



facet of focalization in the novel under study, the mental activity that we need to focus on is the knowledge of the narrator about the story world. The way the narrator-focalizer comprehends events, incidents and people in the story and his emotion towards them is conceived as a mental activity of the narrator.

I have already concluded that the angle of perception of the character-focalizer changes from broader criticism of the society to narrower appraisal of personal issues as he gets older. Role reversal is also observed in that as the story line develops and the experiencing character gets older, the character-narrator's comprehension of his story world and his emotions and evaluations thereto becomes limited. Let me try to substantiate this with examples.

On page 54-58 of the novel, where Mezgebu's childhood is narrated, we get an incident about a burned rabbit in a market place. People there were surprised as to how a rabbit could crop up and got burnt. Whereas only some tried to give their own assumptions, most of them resigned into accepting it as an inexplicable work of God. However, for Mezgebu, the incident was more than that. It made him to think of the genesis of his village. He thought that, before the people of Nifas Mewuch were created, this village might have been first owned by rabbits. He even imagined how the rabbits were created in Nifas Mewucha prior to the people who latter claimed the village.

**እግዚአብሔር በመጀመሪያ የፈጠረው መሬትን ነው። ጉና ተራራ ላይ ሆኖ ንፋስ መውጫን ሲያይ ተደሰተ [...] ለምን አንድ በዚህ መሃል የሚሸሎከሎክ በሲሳዬ የሚደሰት ፍጡር አልሰራም ብሎ ጭቃ አድቦለቦለና እኛ ሲለው ጥንቸል ሆነ። ሰውን የሰራው በመጨረሻ ነው። ደክሞት ዞር እንዳለበት። የነበረበትን ሁኔታ ረስቶ ጭቃ አድቦለቦለና አምሳሌ ሁን አለው። የዞረበት ሰው ተፈጠረ።**

God created the land first. Standing on top of Guna [a mountain found in the village], when He [God] saw Nifas Mewucha and its beauties, He was

fascinated by His own wisdom [...], and He thought to create a creature that could rejoice in this beautiful land. Then he forged a rabbit out of mud and breathed life into it. The first creature in Nifas Mewucha was thus a rabbit. God created man at the end when He [God] was tired and confused. Forgetting his condition, God brought dust of the ground and breathed on it saying 'be my image'; so was the confused man created (P: 56-57).

Delving into the philosophy enshrined in here, one can comprehend how matured and philosophical the narrating self was. In his mythological philosophy, he reflected his thinking of his fellow residents. He judged them as confused. His incessant observation told him that they did not know what they were doing. Since he used to spend most of his time sitting and observing the villagers from the hillside located at the center of his village, he knew what they used to do at daytime and at night time. For him, most of them who looked innocent at daytime were rather nocturnally errant ones at night. The protagonist perceived the secrets of most of these people. This perception of the experiencing self of the protagonist is then, exposed philosophically through the cognitive words of his narrating self. Therefore, the cognitive component of focalization observed in the above extract gives an impression that though the incident was perceived by the child experiencing-I, mentally and physically developed narrating-I remembered that incident and used it as a means to criticize the society that he used to live with when he was a child. In addition, it depicts the concern of the narrator-character in social rather than individual issues.

However, after Mezgebu quitted the hill and whiled away most of his time with his friend, Samuel, the narrator's knowledge of the story world got limited. The narrating self narrates the events and incidents without significant cognitive depth regarding the world the adolescent experiencing self was involved in. What we get in the part of the novel where this stage of the protagonist is discussed is the report of the narrator-character about the blurred perceptions of the

experiencing character. We do not see the usual depth in the thought of the narrating self of the protagonist or the effort to conceive his surroundings critically. The rather mere report implies that the narrating-I of the protagonist lost his natural intent of comprehending his surrounding critically and philosophically. While narrating this stage of the protagonist's life, it seems that the narrating self was in a mental state of bewilderment because, for him, most of the things that the people around him, including his friend Samuel did were incomprehensible. He said, **“የማይገቡኝ ስሞች እየጠቀሱ የማይገባኝ ነገር መነጋገር ጀመሩ፡፡”** “they start talking about things I could not comprehend mentioning names that I could not understand” (P, 185).

This mental state of the narrator-focalizer lingered until the protagonist became a police constable. Even narrating this stage of the protagonist, the character-narrator's knowledge of his world was not as deep and broad as he was narrating his childhood times. His enthusiasm to criticize the society and to evaluate his environment critically petered out and his knowledge became limited mostly to females. Whenever he was strolling in the thoroughfare, he thought of them childishly: **“እንደጫቅላ አስባለሁ፡፡”** “I think as a child” (P: 424), he said. His zeal for deep philosophical thoughts became a thing of the past. **“ፍልስፍና የመረረኝ ነገር ነጩ፡፡”** “I am tired of philosophy” (P: 336), he declared.

Nonetheless, where did those childhood flairs go? What made him reluctant to think about societal issues in a critical and philosophical manner as he used to do in his childhood times? As the narrator told us in the following narration, the people and things around him contributed for his reluctance:

**ከጠዋት እስከማታ እለፋለሁ፡፡ እምለፋውም በቸልታ፡፡ ነገስታቶቼ ምቹ ላይ  
ይተኛሉ፡፡ የሚንቀጠቀጥ ማለፊያ እንጀራ ሰሃኖቻቸው ላይ ዘርግተው የኔ  
የደንባራው ነገር ገርሟቸው በሳቅ ይፈርሳሉ፡፡ በንቀት የመጣ አለመግባባት  
እንጅ ሌላ ምንድን ነው? ይሄ ቸል ያደርገኝ ነበር፡፡ ቀኑን ሙሉ በቆዳ ቦት**

የታሰሩትን እግሮቼን ማታ ላይ አወልቄ ሳያቸወ ያበጡና የቀረኩ ናቸወ።  
ይሄም ቸል ያደርገኛል። ስለእኔ ስለደሃወ እያወሩ በቅቅል ባህር ላይ በበሬ  
ጎድን ጀልባ ወስጥ የክትፎ አሳ ያጠምዳሉ። እኔ እህቴ ጫልቴ ቤት ነጭ  
ሽንኩረቱ ያልሞተ ሽሮ በቅራሪ አምጌ አድራለሁ (ምነ ብል ስንት ሺህ ህዝብ  
በድርቅ ተጎድቶ የሉኛል) ደሃ ብትሞት ደሃ ትቁሰል እንደ ማለት። ይሄም  
ቸል ያደርገኛል።እኔ መማሪያ መጽሃፍ ሳይኖረኝ እነሱ ልጆቻቸወን  
አወግዙት እያሉ ወደሚያጣሉን ምዕራብ አገር ይልካሉ።ይሄም ቸል  
ያደርገኛል።[...] እያንዳንዱን ዜጋ እንደ መሪዬ ልጠብቀወ እፈልጋለሁ።  
እሱ ግን ይንቀኛል ሀሳቤን ሲሰማ ‘የጠገበ ወታደር’ ይለኛል...ይሄም ቸል  
ደርገኛል።

I go all-out from morning to evening [set on my job]. However, I strive with reluctance. The disheartenment I see on my bosses who laugh at my startling deeds while eating well-baked ‘*enjera*’ (staple food of Ethiopia made up of a cereal crop called ‘*teff*’) and sleep comfortably, make me reluctant. Whenever I see my feet that get stinky and swelled because they spend the whole day confined in my leather boot, I become reluctant. They [my bosses] fill their dishes with soups escorted with roasted and raw meat of different kind. However, I sleep after eating *shero* (a soup made of bean powder which is used as a companion to eat *enjera*) moistening it with a cup of *tella* (when I ask why [we differ in dishes], they tell me about people who are starved because of drought in a sense of saying that let the poor be ill with the death of the poor). It then makes me reluctant. I did not have a book to learn with, but they send their children to western countries [for education] that they told us to condemn. This also makes me reluctant [...] I want to guard every citizen as my leader, but everybody deprecates my desire and says ‘what an arrogant soldier’ ... This too makes me reluctant (P: 387-388).

We can construe from this how the world the character-narrator used to live in at his adolescence turned out so uncomfortable to approach it critically and philosophically. The People’s take of their world, which was at odds with his, and the immorality of his bosses

(political leaders) made him hopeless on his society; consequently, he got restricted to his private life pleasing himself in matters that could give him personal ephemeral pleasure such as thinking of females.

While the story gets closer to its end, the protagonist married Genet, got a child and started to spend most of his time in his private compound, as a result of which, the knowledge of the narrating self of the protagonist about the story world becomes restricted to that compound and his family. We do not see the narrator comprehending his environment other than comparing whatever he perceives with the beauty of his wife and the solemnity of his family life.

With this cognitive shrinkage of the narrator-focalizer passing through different stages of life of the protagonist one can observe the similarity between the structure of the perceptual and psychological facets of focalization in the novel under study. When we were discussing the perceptual facet in the previous section, we concluded that the spectrum of the character-focalizer becomes narrower while he gets older. Similarly, the scope of understanding of the story world by the narrator-focalizer gets narrower while his narration progresses from the child to the adult experiencing self. In view of this similarity in structure between the two facets of focalization, we, consequently, think of a conscious involvement of a third party in the design venture of these facets in the novel. This third party would be the author. Hence, what does the author attempt to tell us through the structure of these facets of focalization? In what follows the ideological facet of focalization in *Grey Bells* will be investigated in the view of addressing this question.

#### **4.3.3. Ideological Facet of Focalization in *Grey Bells*: The Agency of the Real Author in Focalization**

In the previous two consecutive sections, an investigation has been made on the perceptual and psychological facets of focalization, related to the character-focalizer and the narrator-focalizer respectively. In this section, I probe into the ideological facet of focalization that will give me a

chance to relate the above-disclosed textual features of focalization with the social context of the novel.

Sketching the story line of the novel in the previous section (Cf. Page 96-98), I have already indicted how the story line starts from the childhood of the protagonist and it progresses to his adolescence and ends after he becomes an adult. Hence, I can say that the story line of *Grey Bells* gets its development along with the physical development of the protagonist, and the transition is captivating.

His transition from one stage of physical development to another was motivated by the changes in the political systems of the country. When Mezgebu was a child, for instance, the political system in the story world was the monarchical one. However, when the military junta overthrew the system, he had to leave the hillside, the scene of his childhood probing obsession, as it became of a political rendezvous of his villagers. He would fill the lacunae by joining a friend Samuel, by experiencing juvenile frivolity such as smoking, alcoholism and politics thereby manifesting his growth to adolescence. After he started experiencing his adolescence, the red terror movement that was instigated by the then ruling military government in view of eliminating the opposition political parties in the country was started. The reason for Mezgebu to realize his adulthood is then this political movement. He applied for a police recruitment to shelter himself from the government's all-out attack, by luring himself to the state premise as a matter of tactic. That would bring him to Addis Ababa as a police constable.

With of the downward slide in the protagonist's perceptual and cognitive development that we investigated in the above two sections in view, one cannot take the way the political changes that took place in the country are associated with the change in the physical growth of the protagonist in the story line as mere coincidence. Rather speculates conscious involvement of the author in this venture, for such "textual clues are a result of the author's writing the text in a certain way

[...] with the relevant reading strategies in view” (Shen, 2005:159). At this point, therefore, it is germane to solicit for the author’s intention of designing the story line of his novel concocting the physical growth of the protagonist with the political changes in the story world. Moreover, it is crucial to inquire the influence of the author’s ideology in his making of the perceptual and psychological development of the character-narrator get taper while the political condition changes from one system to another. Investigating these two matters helps us to achieve two things: First, since the ideological facet of focalization in our particular case is related to the author, dealing with the issues aforementioned helps us to unfurl the author’s evaluation of the different political periods of the country that are used as a setting of the story. This in turn helps us to unfold the socio-political meaning manifested through the ideological facet of focalization in the novel under study.

When we look at the political periods in the story world of *Grey Bells*, we get two clearly indicated ones: the monarchical period and the Derge regime. Mezgebu, the protagonist, was a child during the monarchy, whereas, his adolescence and early adulthood falls into a period of a socialist military junta. Most of the events and incidents in the novel fall into these two political periods and one may fairly take the socio-political setting of the story as restricted to them. Though clear indication is not found in the story, I can, contend that the present political period of the country is a part of the setting of the novel too. Especially, the events and incidents narrated around the end of the novel, i.e. after Mezgebu’s engagement to Genet, are situated in the political condition of the current political system of Ethiopia. I can refer to at least two textual issues that motivate our contention.

When we look at the character-narrator’s narration of his life after he married Genet, unlike what he did before, we do not get any information on the socio-political condition of the country in the story world. Whether the socialist political system persisted or a new system came in, he never tells us and it is difficult to specify the socio-political setting of the story of the protagonist

after he became a matured adult. Yet, there are still some textual clues to say his late adulthood story is set in the post-socialist incumbent. One of these clues to dig into is the chapter before the last two chapters of the novel (P, 424-433).

Entitled as *čeqa ena enequ* (*Mud and Gem*) the chapter which comes immediately after the chapter in which the protagonist's engagement with Genet is narrated, comprises the dialogue between Mezgebu and a man called Zufan, a man considered barmy by the society because of his deviant grooming and communication. They knew each other before, and met several times since Mezgebu started his police career. In the chapter under discussion, they are seen conversing on a shoe like thing in Zufan's duffel bag. In the middle of their conversation, Zufan told Mezgebu that that shoe like thing was the footprint of an Ethiopian patriot called Belay Zeleke<sup>12</sup>. Mezgebu knew of a legend ascribed to Belay Zeleke by people of Nifas Mewucha, he asked Zufan whether that thing was the mud shoe in the legend:

**“የጭቃ ጫማ...” አልኩት**

**“ታወቀዋለህ...”**

**“ንፋስ መጠጫ ይወራል”**

**ወደ ጆሮዬ ጠጋ አለ**

**“የዕንቁ ጫማ ሊሆን አይችልም ለማን ነው የምታደላው? ለዕንቁው ነው ለጭቃ?”**

**“ለዕንቁ”**

**“ለሃብት፡፡ ዕንቁ ከጭቃ ነው የሚወጣው፡፡ ዕንቁ ጭቃ ነበር አሉ፤፤ እና እኩል ናቸው፡፡ አይመስልህም?”**

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<sup>12</sup> Belay Zeleke (1896-1942) was renowned for his heroism during the Italian invasion of Ethiopia from 1935-41. He was one of the famous patriots, if not the most, whose vigorous resistance compelled Italians to leave the country, defeated.



**“ምን አገባኝ አቦ! ወሬህን ጨረስክ?”**

**“ወሬ አልከዉ።። ዓለም ጭቃና ዕንቁ ያለባት ናት።። ጫማ ናት።። ኑሮ መንገድ ነዉ የየራሳችንን ጫማ አጥልቀን የምንጉዋዝበት።።”**

“[Is this] the mud shoe...?” I said

“Do you know about it?”

“It was talked about in Nifas Mewucha”

He came closer to my ears [and said]

“Can’t it be a jewel shoe? Which one do you prefer, the mud or the gem?”

“I prefer the gem”

“Is this for wealth?! Gem is found in the mud [...] they are the same. Don’t you think so?”

“I don’t care. You finished your talk?”

“You call it talk, huh? This world contains mud and jewel. It [the world] is a shoe. Life is a road on which we walk wearing our own shoes”

From the above extract, one may not get information that relevant to substantiate my earlier contention on the representation of the current socio-political system in the novel. As the chapter nears its end, however, we get a clue pertaining to the symbolic function of the above extract. In their discussion of that mud and gem made shoe-shaped thing, Zufan said to Mezgebu, **“ጭቃ አይተሃል።። ዕንቁ ማየት መጀመርህ ነዉ።። ዕንቁዉ ወደ ጭቃ ሲለወጥ ፈልገኝ።።”** “You are accustomed to the mud, but you are only starting to see the gem. Seek me when the gem is changed to mud” (P, 431) and departed him by saying, **“በል ደህና እንተያይ...ከሆነ ከሆነ ከዕንቁህ በኋላ... በዘመነ ጭቃ...ከከረምን መቼ ይቀራል።። አይቀርም።።”** “Let us see each other in peace ...may be after the gem [era]... in the mud era ... It [the mud era] will not be late. It will come” (P, 432). Zufan’s speech, when read metaphorically, apparently relates the gem and

the mud with a certain epoch. What is this epoch then? At the end of the chapter, we get an essential textual clue that may help us to answer this question.

At the end of the chapter, the author gives clear indication on the inclusion of the chapter in the novel. He writes, “ይሄ ምዕራፍ በ1984 ዓ/ም የተጨመረ ነጻ።” “[t]his chapter is included in the novel in 1984 [Ethiopian calendar]” (p, 433). This authorial remark can mean two things: 1) it can indicate that the chapter is included in the novel after some time the writing venture of the novel is completed, or 2) the author wants his readers to realize that the events and incidents in this chapter has some kind of relation with the socio-political condition of the period indicated. On top of these two possible explanations, there are questions still: what motivated the author to add this chapter after he completed the novel? Why does he want to tell us when this chapter is added to the novel? More importantly, why does he treat the mud and gem metaphor in this particular chapter that he particularly indicates when it is incorporated in the novel?

It is most likely because the author wants us to relate the time with the metaphor treated in the chapter that he gives us the information about when the chapter is included in the novel. Otherwise, the author has no any professional obligation to do it. The year mentioned was the second year since the incumbent ruling political party took power. Thus, we can say that the events and incidents narrated in this and subsequent chapters are situated in the current socio-political system of the country. The consistency between this chapter and the chapters that follow it may show that they share the same socio-political setting though their authoring date may differ.

With this inference in mind, we see that the monarchical, military and current political systems are both treated in the novel as socio-political settings of its story. Importantly, these political systems appear in the novel in the way they happen in the political history of the country. This conformity between reality and novelistic representation indicates the author’s conscious

participation in the story world. The ideological facet of focalization in the novel under study is, thus, revealed through this intentional involvement of the author in the story world.

According to Rimmon-Kenan (1983:82), the ideological facet of focalization may correspond with the perceptual and psychological facets of focalization. However, in our case, where the author, “whose messages to the reader are drawn out of the text” (Jesch & Stein, 2009:61), is taken as a participant in focalization, the perceptual and psychological facets do not only concur with the ideological facet but also serve as textual construct through which the author’s view of the world is revealed. Our contention is that, since the author partakes in the real world from which the story of his novel is derived, the perceptual and psychological facets are influenced by his own worldview. It is essential to associate the textual structures of the perceptual and psychological facets with personal symbols the author has used as representational devices in the novel to better check the cogency of our claim.

Adam Reta, the author of the present novel, is characterized by his enthusiasm for his personal symbols. In most of his short stories and in the present novel, he often uses personal symbols as a means to reveal meanings. Of his many personal symbols, sweet, grey colour and bells are dominantly used in most of his writings. If we take sweet for instance, it recurs in most of his short stories and in the novel under study. Especially, in this novel, the symbolic function of sweet is very important for the overall understanding of the worldview of the author.

Sweet, as observed in most of his works, is dominantly used as his personal symbol to represent two things. In his short story entitled as *Terengo Ena Gebregundan (Terengo and Tremites)* (2010:107-124), for example it represents love. In another short story called *Keremilawochu (The Sweets)* (2010: 201-206), sweet represents life. In both of these works, the symbolic function of sweet is related in one way or another to personal freedom: freedom to love someone,

and freedom to live in a way one desires. In *Grey Bells* also, it is used as a symbol to represent personal freedom, specifically, the freedom of a person to perform duties freely.

Mezgebu as a child, whenever he sat on the hillside and watched his surrounding, he used to eat Nana (a type of sweet which has white colour and sugary test). He had no problem getting nana sweet because it was very cheap in his village. For him this sweet was his source of energy. As he says,

**እነዚህን ነጭጭ በሆነ ቅመም ውስጥ የተነከሩ የስኩዋር ብስኩቶች ስቆረጥም፤  
ስመጥ ዐይኖቼ ይከፈታሉ፤ መከፈት ብቻ ሳይሆን ጥራታቸው የጨመረ  
ይመስለኛል፡፡ የሰራ ገላየም ይረጋጋል፤ ይዝናናል፡፡ የሆነ ሚስጢራዊ ሃይል  
በደም ስሮቼና በጡንቻዎቼ ውስጥ የወራጫል፡፡**

Whenever I eat these sugary biscuits that are immersed with white spices, my eyes not only get wider but also become perfect in their vision. I often get a sense of tranquillity and serenity. Some kind of mysterious energy runs through my veins and muscles (P, 22).

It seems because of these nanas that the character-narrator had had wider view of perception and higher level of understanding of his environment when he was a child. However, symbolically speaking, the sweets represent his personal freedom to observe and evaluate his environment. He was free to sit on his hillside as long as he wanted. No one asked him why he sat on the hillside, and no one cares about what he was doing the whole day and most of the night there. Nobody even knew what he was doing. “**ግን ደስ የሚለኝ ነገር ደግሞ፡-እዚያ ዳገት ላይ ማንም እኔ ምን እንደምሰራ አልማወቁ ነበር፡፡**” “What pleased me was nobody knew what I was doing” (P, 3), he said. This personal freedom, therefore, enabled him to invest his time and will for a wider perception and deeper understanding of his environment.

Nonetheless, when the protagonist became a police constable and came to Addis Ababa, he could not get nana sweet. He unsuccessfully looked for it in different shops right on his first day of work.

**የመጀመሪያ የጥበቃ ዕለት ታዲያ ሱቅ ጠጋ ብዬ ለአፌ ስራ ማስያዣ  
የጠየኩት ናና ከረሚላ ነበር**

**“ናና ከረሚላ አለህ?”**

**“ሃ!ሃ!ሃ! የለም” አለኝ**

**ምን ያስቃል? አብሬጤ እነደ ቂል ፈገግ አልኩና ተቼጤ ሄድኩ፡፡ እንደገና  
ሌላ ሱቅ ጠየቅሁ፡፡ ናና ከረሚላ የለም፡፡ [...] ፈራሁ፡፡**

**ምን ያስፈራኛል?**

[...]

**ናና ከረሚላስ? አልኩ**

**የለም፡፡ ስለዚህ ፈራሁ፡፡ ናና ድሮም ለኔ የሚስጠር ከረሚላ ናት፡፡ ሁሌ  
ትጠልቅብኛለች፡፡ አዲስ አበባ የሄን ሁሉ አግኝታ ናና ከረሚላን ካጣች የሆነ  
ያልተረዳችጤ ያመለጣት ሚስጠር አለ፡፡**

On my first working day as a police constable, I got into a shop and asked for a nana sweet

“Do you have nana?” I asked the shopkeeper

“Ha! Ha! Ha! No” he said

Why was he laughing? I giggled and leaved the shop. I asked in three shops. No nana sweet at all. When I knew that it was not possible to get nana [in Addis Ababa] [...] I became scared.

Why was I scared?

[...]

I became scared [because] there was no nana sweet. Nana for me was a symbol of a secret. It had a deep meaning. If Addis Ababa does not have nana sweet while cramming all these things, this city lacks and does not realize the secret (P, 219-220).

So, the protagonist could not get the nana sweet he craved for in Addis Ababa, and this lacuna symbolically represents the absence of personal freedom in the capital city. This lack of personal freedom can be seen in the protagonist's life.

At Nifas Mewucha, he had his own bedroom to enjoy privacy though it was not really up to its name. Later as a police constable, though salaried and better fed, he had to share a room with other people because his salary was so meagre. Consequently, his personal freedom was eroded. He often mentions in his narration that he was not comfortable with his roommates. He was forced to listen to music all night long that one of his roommates named Alemayehu used to play on his tape recorder without asking his permission (p, 222). Because some of his friends such as Bekure often retorted against his opinions maliciously, he preferred reticence. He often quarrelled with this man while Mezgebu was trying to smoke cigarette in the room (P, 307). Bekure was even trying to accuse Mezgebu for being the member of an opposition party called EPRP (Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party). In his working place also, the same mood ruled; he had no interest to chat with fellow constables that patrolled streets with him. Most of the time, not to talk to them, he spent his working hours alone sitting under a building or strolling along the roads. These examples show how much the personal freedom and rapture of the protagonist were intruded both in and out of home.

This restriction of personal freedom, consequently, compelled the character- focalizer to limit his perception on things that had no political consequences such as scrutinizing females. Similarly, the cognitive view of the narrator character, which was much engaged in societal and philosophical issues while narrating the child experiencing self, narrowed to quenching short term personal whim, especially his sexual lust, when narrating the adolescent self. Hence, the

absence of nana sweet in Addis Ababa symbolizes this lack of personal freedom that subsequently affects the perceptual and cognitive development of the character-narrator.

Nana sweet appears in the story again in the chapter that we explored as the one that aims to portray the current political system. In that chapter, we see Zufan giving nana sweet for Mezgebu:

“...ልጠይቅህ ናና ከረሚላ ትወዳለህ?”

[...]

“አንድ ይበቃሃል ሁለት?”

“አንድ ስጠኝ”

አንድ ለራሱ በላና ሁለተኛውን በአጠራጣቱ ና በሌላ ጣቱ ይዞ ቁጢጥ ካለበት እጁን ዘርግቶ ሰጠኝ። ተቀበልኩ። ናና ከረሚላ ላይ ጋዜጣው ረጥቦ የተዋቸውን ጥቂት ፊደላት አያለሁ። ፊደላቱ እንደ መስታወታዊ ምስል ናቸው። እንደገናም ስለ ጥቂር ቅሬተ-ቀለም የከረሚላዎቹን ጠርዞች ሸፍኖአቸዋል።

“Let me ask you, do you like nana sweet?”

[...]

“Do you want one or two?” [It is Zufan Asking]

“Give me one”

He took one for himself and gave the other for me. I accepted that. I could see few letters that the wet gazette [the nana sweet was wrapped with] has sealed on it. The letters were like mirror reflections. Moreover, black remnant colour covered the edges of the nana sweet. (P, 426)

The nana sweet, being a symbol for personal freedom, its resurfacing in the story world represents the return of the freedom that the protagonist used to experience in his childhood times. The nana just mentioned, however, is not as clean as the ones he used to eat in Nifas

Mewucha. It is wet and tainted by the marks of the gazette, but why? Based on what we have concluded about the perceptual and psychological facets of focalization, it seems that the author is presenting the protagonist with only a marred freedom, and what we observe in the story line conforms to this.

As we follow the story line, at this stage of physical development, Mezgebu detached himself from his friends marrying the girl he loved and started to lead a peaceful and happy life with his family in a separate compound. This way, he regained his freedom to live to his wishes. But, his curiosity for societal and philosophical issues was not retrieved. As a matured adult, we fairly expect him to be evaluative of the political and social issues, as we are cognizant of his critical and philosophical outlooks as a child. His perceptions and understandings of the story world at this stage of his physical development were, however, restricted to his family life contravening our expectation. He lacked his ability and interest to perceive and ponder over the socio-political issues out of his compound. The symbolic effect of the nana sweet is magnified through the gazette remnants; for me, they represent the socio-political effects of the past on the present. It seems because of these effects that the protagonist could not regain his childhood vigour in full. The lingering effects of the past might make the protagonist reluctant to societal issues. Anyways, even after the tainted nana sweet, the protagonist remained an egocentric adult.

To recapitulate, the nana sweet as one manifestation of personal symbol as a case of authorial focalization has been investigated thoroughly in view of revealing how the ideological facet of focalization in the novel under study is manifested through the author's intentional involvement in the story world through symbolism. Through his symbolic representation, the author reveals his outlook towards the socio-political features of the three political systems in which the story is set. In relation to personal freedom of the protagonist and his interest in societal issues, it seems that the author has a sort of, to express it idiomatically, 'out of the frying pan into the fire' outlook to the political changes represented in his novel. That is probably why protagonist's



perceptual and psychological development is retarded following the change of the political systems.

Therefore, the downward development of focalization we observed in the perceptual and psychological facets replicates itself in the ideological facet, for the worldview of the author revealed through his personal symbol changes from optimist criticism to pessimist reluctance following the changes of the political systems. This similarity, therefore, reveals the influence of the ideological facet on the perceptual and psychological facets. Moreover, in view of this similarity among the three facets of focalization, in accordance with the three political systems that are used as the setting of the story, we could ask the influence of social milieu on novelistic representation.

#### **4.4. Reality in Focalization and Vice Versa: A Conclusion**

While discussing the three facets of focalization in *Grey Bells*, our concern was on their-the facets'- structure following the chronology of the political periods. The descending feature of the facets motivates us conjecture the relationship between reality and focalization claiming that the reason for the author to employ focalization in his novel in the way we portrayed above is that he wants to reflect the socio-political realities of the three political systems that happened in the recent history of the country. In so doing, we can say that the author has adopted a comparative tone to evaluate the state of personal freedom and personal intent of the protagonist towards the socio-political issues in each of the three political periods.

Through his depiction of focalization as a narrative form in his novel, the author seems to say that the state of the two issues aforementioned became worse and worse as regimes changed. As to the monarchical and the military systems for instance, it seems that he favours the former. Apart from the social issues he criticizes through the eyes of the protagonist, the textual structure of the perceptual, psychological and ideological facets serve as a clue to guess the author's belief in the better state of personal freedom in the monarchical system than what existed in its

successor. In this regard, it seems that he shares the view of some Ethiopian politicians towards these periods. Teshale Tibebu is one of these politicians. In his article '*Modernity, Eurocentrism, and Radical Politics in Ethiopia, 1961-1991*', (2008:351) he writes:

Quite ironically, the old system that the revolution overthrew does not have the paradigm of irreconcilable differences [...] There was the belief in being accountable to a higher power. There was also power of reconciliation symbolized by the dewel (bell). Ringing a church bell is a critical component of conflict resolution with the authorities[...] It was ethically unacceptable for the secular-temporal power to go to the church and fetch out by force the person who rang the bell [...] The Derge failed to be magnanimous in whatever victory it claimed to have achieved. Most of the Derge killed Ethiopian's children and boasted about it [...] over the national radio.

Teshale's remark on the two political systems that consecutively reigned preceding the incumbent one corroborates what is revealed through focalization in *Grey Bells*. When the author depicts the perceptual, psychological and ideological facets of focalization regressively while changing the socio-political setting of the story from the monarchical system to the military one, his intention, we can say, was to encode the reality that Teshale echoes in the above quotation.

The Derge was often infamous for its dictatorship. In its seventeen years of governance, it killed, tortured and imprisoned thousands of civilians for intangible political reasons. According to Nebiyu (2011: 186), "since the socialist period was the political period in which fear of God and reconciliation were derided, it brought national depravity, as a result of which, Ethiopians started to be reluctant on societal issues and ran after profiteering."

This socio-political reality of the said regime, therefore, is reflected in *Grey Bells* through focalization. The protagonist's shift of obsession to females after he became police constable, for instance, is one manifestation. The character was interested in scrutinizing females sexually because he wanted to fulfil his personal desire putting aside the dictates of social norm. The

vices and traumas such as the red terror that happened in that political system made him reluctant in societal and political concerns.

The red terror trauma on Ethiopians did not end with the toppling of the sponsoring military regime; it still lingers and manifests itself in the present political and social life of the citizens. Observing this fact Nebiyu (Ibid: 188) says: “the adverse psychological effect of this irritating phenomenon [red terror] on Ethiopians is visible even today. Fear of politics, impenetrability, and saying ‘politics and electricity from afar are its eventualities.’”

As Nebiyu has rightly observed, because of the grating experience of the red terror, most Ethiopians are apprehensive of politics. Even though the current government has a written constitution that pledges full democratic rights for its citizens (Ethiopian constitution, 1995, Art. 29), most Ethiopians are still sceptical and impenetrable towards politics. If they should speak or write politics, most of them, the author of the present novel included, labour to harbour it in their puns and/or symbols.

When we were discussing about the existence of the current political system as a setting in *Grey Bells* (Cf. page 119-120), we said that the author does not table it on surface. It is only our investigation of his metaphor of the mud and gem epochs that reveals how the events and incidents narrated after the protagonist got married to Genet are pertinent to the current socio-political condition of the country. This act of symbolic representation of the current political system as opposed to his bold mention of the former two smacks the author’s state of being under the red terror influence. Whatever he told us about this political time, is presented in a symbolic code inviting labour to decipher. Because of this, we can label him as one of the many Ethiopians that chant the ‘politics and electricity from afar’ cliché.

However, the author was keen enough to reflect this political reality through his symbolic representations. To elucidate, let us bring the nana sweet issue here once again. In our

discussion on the ideological facet in the above section, we took the nana sweet that was wet and tainted by the remnants of the gazette it was wrapped with as a symbolic representation of the protagonist's imperfect personal freedom. Nonetheless, its symbolic value becomes concrete when it is related to the chilling effects of the political traumas of the Derge regime echoing on the present psychological makeup of Ethiopians. In the course of this relation, we can see the author's attempt to express these effects symbolically through the remnants of the gazette on the nana sweet, i.e. the effects of the past regime that taint the purity of personal freedom and individual's interest in socio-political issues in the present time.

Generally, the downward structure of the three facets of focalization in *Grey Bells* discloses the author's intent to expose the socio-political realities of the country in the three regimes that appear consecutively. We also see the influence of this reality on the author that consequently affects his textual architecture. We can thus perceive the relationship among form, content and social milieu in the novel that goes along with the overall view of the present research.

## Chapter 5: Individuals in the Text: Characterization as a Narrative Strategy in *Dertogada*

### 5.1. Introduction

In the present chapter, characters are accepted as “individuals” (Margolin, 1990:846) created by authors possessing personal qualities just like real people. Though it is obvious that they are fictional constructs, characters are persons in their own right and have personal traits such as fears, wishes and desires. Endorsing this “humanistic approach” (Frow, 1986:228) to characters, in this chapter, we are going to examine characterization (their manner of representation in the text) in view of unfolding how this narrative form is used as a narrative strategy in a selected Amharic novel named *Dertogada*. In the course of this venture, our present discussion primarily “acknowledges that it artificially separates characters from the plot that couldn’t function without them” (Keen, 2003:55), and it conceives characterization as “a complex and elusive art [...] [that] cannot be reduced to exact rules or to a comprehensive statement” (Surmelian, 1968:39). Therefore, under intertwined theoretical conceptions of characterization taken from both the classical and post classical narrative theories, our present venture starts from within, by scrutinizing the individuals and their representation in the text and extends to the exterior in view of relating what exists in the text with the social milieu out of which the novel emerges.

The present chapter consists of three major sections. In the first section, the story of the novel is recapitulated. In the second one, characters are discussed as individuals focusing on their traits and socio-cultural backgrounds in the story world. In this section, classification and description of characters in the novel is made to identify their textual personhood. After unfolding the personal features of individuals in the novel, their textual representation is scrutinized in the third section under the general heading, characterization. Under this section, we take the characters, the narrator and the author as participants in the characterization process and attempt to investigate the personal trait of the individuals motivated through the “characterization act” (Margolin, 1986:222), of these narrative agents independently. Lastly, a conclusion that reveals

how characterization as a narrative form motivates the textual and contextual meaning of the novel under study and reciprocally, how this narrative form is influenced by the social context out of which the novel emerges is offered.

## 5.2. Story Line

*Dertogada*, the novel with 272 pages, is about ambitious characters that are fervent admirers of Ethiopian indigenous knowledge and history. Of these characters, Sippara and Miraje are the main ones. These two rose together as adopted children in a female's monastery called Entos, one of the ancient monasteries found in Lake Tana, which is the biggest lake in Ethiopia situated in the Amhara region, and very well known for its age-old island monasteries. Sippara, three at that time, was brought to the females monastery found in an ice land called Entos by a monk named Abba Finhas, who latter revealed himself as her real father. In the monastery, she met a child named Miraje, who was almost two years older than her age and also brought to that place by another monk called Aba Jemberu to be raised by the hands of the nuns.

When they were children, Sippara and Miraje used to play together, study traditional church lessons together, and pray together. However, when they grew up to adolescence nuns and pilgrims realized the physical and emotional changes observed on both of the two. Consequently, they decided to separate them in the view of preventing all of them from transgressing the laws of the monastery. Especially to protect Miraje from losing his covenant, for the members of the monastery used to expect him to reach at the highest rank of sainthood. Following this decision Miraje was taken to the nearby male's monastery called Keberan that is a few kilometres away from Entos; whereas, Sippara stayed where she was.

Although these two youngsters started living in different monasteries, they did not stop longing to each other. Particularly Sippara could not stop thinking about Miraje and desiring his love. The irresistible feeling she started to experience towards Miraje could not stop even though she tackled it by punishing herself through long prayer and confession. Being unable to avoid this

feeling, she decided to tell Miraje about it; she wrote a letter and gave it to him when he came to the church in her monastery to carry out Sunday prayer service, as he became a deacon at that time. Miraje became excited after reading her letter, for he had been feeling the same towards her. From that day on, they started to meet secretly, though Miraje had to swim a number of kilometres at the middle of the night to come to Sippara.

Nonetheless, their surreptitious love affair could not last for long. One day as they were enjoying their love hiding themselves in a dark grave house, unexpectedly, Abba Finhas and a few other elderly monks came to the grave house. Though they came to dig a grave, for the head nun Reverend mother named Wolete Kirose had passed away at that night, they caught the two lovers in a dark room hugged each other. The elderly monks could not believe their eyes. They had never seen such a sin committed in the holy place like Entos. They cursed them and felt sorry for them for not being loyal to their religious obligations. Especially they condemned Miraje for losing his covenant, and they considered him as a dead man.

The two lovers had no alternative than admitting their culpability. They had left the grave house with a huge sense of embarrassment and ignominy but with their love in their hearts. After this incident, they had no chance to meet to each other. Sippara was taken to Israel by her father following his plan to participate in the 'operation Moses', an operation illegally carried out by MOSAD to help Ethiopian Jews migrate to Jerusalem through the Sudanese border. Miraje became a soldier following his detention by the government police after he escaped from the monastery and came to the nearby city called Bahirdar to look for Sippara.

In the military camp Miraje met a person called Xangida who graduated in medicine but arrested by the government people and brought to the military camp on the day he was celebrating his graduation. Dr. Xangida and Miraje became intimate friends who helped to each other. Miraje helped Dr. Xangida to know Ge'ez language and religious traditions, whereas Dr. Xangida

helped Miraje to learn how to read and write in English. Since both of them became soldiers against their will, they planned to escape from the military camp. Fortunately, with the help of a woman called Meroda, who was a CIA agent but employed as a cook in the camp, they escaped and managed to flee to USA. In USA, Dr. Xangida helped Miraje to go to school and to graduate in medicine. Within few years, Miraje became a renowned medical doctor in America.

Miraje's professional status gave him a chance to meet with the famous Ethiopian NASA scientist and Engineer named Shagiz. He first met the Scientist as his patient when the scientist was having a complicated heart surgery in the hospital Miraje was working as a senior surgeon. Miraje was astonished discovering that the Engineer had been taking similar surgeries for a number of consecutive times. Moreover, he learnt that the heart surgery of Engineer Shagiz was not normal and not related to real heart disease. In the view of knowing why this was happening on this scientist, he tried to discuss his concern with the chief Medical doctor of the Clinic, but he got an answer that rather can be taken as a warning for him not to involve in the matter. Ignoring the warning, he impatiently dug deep into the case and he uncovered a secret that even the scientist was not able to know. The scientist was purposely made to have a heart attack that can only be treated in America in view of preventing him from fleeing to other countries, especially to the ones that compete in space science with America such as Russia, China, Japan, Iran, India, Pakistan and South Korea.

In addition to the secret about the heart disease of the scientist, Dr. Miraje also learnt that the scientist had a tattoo on his back that was similar to the tattoo he had on his own back. A word read as DERTOGADA adorned in Amharic letters together with a set of numbers was tattooed on their backs. This similarity then made Dr. Miraje to think a lot about the secret he shared with the scientist.



Since Dr. Miraje and Engineer Shagiz shared the same blood and unrevealed secret tattooed on their skin, they kept on meeting to each other and started discussing a number of personal as well as national issues even after the Engineer left the clinic. Nonetheless, Dr. Miraje fell at risk. Because of his frequent meeting with the scientist, he was targeted by the CIA and MOSAD: the former suspecting him as a spy hired by one of the countries that compete with USA in space science, the later attempting to use him as a means to abduct the scientist and take Engineer to Israel. Fortunately, Meroda helped him to know what was being plotted against him as she was serving as a CIA agent in the country after she escaped from the Ethiopian military camp with Miraje and his friend. Consequently, his meeting with the scientist became a clandestine one. In the meantime, he received a message from an old man whose where about was not known. The message demanded him to get back to his country as soon as possible. Since Dr. Miraje had been thinking about getting back to his country following the long discussions with Engineer Shagiz, who urged him to decide, he did not hesitate to react. As soon as he received the message, he packed and left to his country following the direction given to him with the message.

His journey took him to an island situated in Lake Tana called Kibran. In the island, he got a science center named DERTOGADA, which was built beneath the lake by Ethiopians with financial and material support from Engineer Shagiz. In the center, he met with a number of Ethiopian scientists who gathered from different parts of the world including his saviour Abba Jemberu. He even met his friend Dr. Xangida who had been lost from his eyes for a long time.

After he reached at the center, he was assigned to accomplish a mission to bring Engineer Shagiz to Ethiopia. Consequently, with the help of special flying object named DER 33 a vehicle that can serve as a car on land and as a plane in the sky with a tremendous speed, made by the scientists in the center, Miraje and two of his friends flew to USA to bring the scientist to his country. However, at the time of their arrival, the scientist was in the hospital having the usual heart surgery. Knowing that it was difficult to take the scientist out of the hospital by their own,

they asked Meroda for a help. Though she was against their idea at the beginning, after a long discussion and explanation, they persuaded her to cooperate with them. As a result, they managed to get the scientist out of the hospital and they took him to Ethiopia. At this time, Meroda was a member of the group as she decided to come back to her country once and for all. However after they brought the scientist to the science center, they learnt that the person that they brought was not the real Shagiz; the man himself admitted that he was the exact replica of the scientist constructed to mislead the ones who were after the real Engineer. Though the mistake was annoying, the replica of the scientist was allowed to stay in the science center, with no one noticing the ticking bomb inside his head.

While accomplishing its mission of bringing Engineer Shagiz to his homeland, Miraje's group was secretly spied by two MOSAD agents. These two followed Miraje and his group until they reached at the monastery where the secret science center was found. When they learnt that Miraje's group took the scientist to the men's monastery in Lake Tana, they went back to Israel and informed their observation to the MOSAD officials. Consequently, one of the two agents was assigned to go to the monastery masquerading as a monk. Accepting the assignment, the pretending monk left for Ethiopia and managed to get in to the monastery. However, he was not able to get the secret place where the scientist was hidden. After a number of vicissitudes, the monk managed to get in to the underground science center in which the Engineer was hidden. Nonetheless, before he managed to get in to the place where the scientist was found, gunmen who were guarding the center subdued him.

Convicted of robbery, the pretending monk was taken to trial where two men stood as judges. One of the judges was Miraje. Realizing that the man stood in front of him was Miraje, the monk started to cry. He started explaining the fact that he was not a real monk. Moreover, he started telling them that he was not even a man. He even tried to persuade them that he was Sippara.

Indeed, she was Sippara who was trained as a MOSAD agent after she went to Israel, assigned to accomplish a mission to abduct the Ethiopian scientist, and came to the monastery masquerading as her father Aba Finhas, who had died in the deserts of Sudan while travelling to Israel. Learning that the monk was really Sippara, Miraje and Aba Jemberu treated her with love and affection. She even received a facial surgery and she got her real face back. Consequently, she decided to stay in her country with her sweat heart Miraje whom she had been searching for throughout her life.

As soon as Sippara had the facial surgery and regained her real face, the unexpected happened in the science center. A bomb blast from the head of the replica of the scientist set the entire cave of the science center on fire. No one succeeded as a survivor except Dr. Miraje, Sippara, Dr. Xangida, Meroda, and Gera including the antagonist Diolla. Consequently, Dertogada that was the hope and the future of the characters to bring their country to civilization doomed to ashes.

### 5.3. Individuals in *Dertogada*: Their Textual Personhood

*Dertogada*, an unusual name for an Amharic novel because of its unfamiliarity for both Amharic and Ge'ez languages from which most Amharic novels take their names, is a title given for the novel written by Yesmake Worku, a new broom for the Ethiopian literary arena. Enjoying the warm welcome of the reading public, it has managed to be reprinted for at least eight times within two years<sup>13</sup>; *Dertogada* is thus reputed as one of the representative, if not epoch-making, novels of the contemporary Ethiopia. This novel is a difficult one to determine its type, for it synthesizes features of scientific, romantic and historical fiction. It is scientific novel because the centrifuge of the story is constructed around the dreams and ambitions of the characters to transform their country scientifically and technologically by participating in a clandestine

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<sup>13</sup> The frequency of publication of the novel mentioned here refers to the information given in the 8<sup>th</sup> edition of the novel; otherwise, it is obvious that the novel may have editions more than this number.

science center by Ethiopian innovators underneath Lake Tana. The novel's romantic aspect is manifested in the love story of the characters. Especially the love traded between the two protagonists called Sippara and Miraje makes it romantic. We can also say that *Dertogada* has features of a historical fiction as it embodies characters and incidents that are drawn from established historical facts. The interplay of these features, therefore, makes the novel hard to brand its belonging to a particular genre. However, these mosaic features furnish it with its own artistic and thematic marks.

According to Keen (2003:55) narratives differ in thier emphasis. Some narratives emphasize character and some narratives emphasize plot. If an example is needed for the one that emphasizes character, *Dertogada* is one, for its textual and contextual features are revealed more through the characters than the plot, which is more of a trailer. The author's preface as to the drive for his fiction reinforces this impression:

**ከላይኛው ደራሲ ዘንድ የተላከ ታላቅ መልአክ በመንፈቀ ሌሊት በሬን በርግዶ ገብቶ ከእንቅልፌ አባነነኝ[...]በታላቅ ሰሌዳ ለይም <ማሔር ሻላል ሐሽ ባዝ> ብለህ ጻፍ አለኝ[...]የነገረኝን ቃል የሚናገሩ ገፀባህሪያት (አምሳለ ሰብዓት) ከዘመኔ ጨለፍኩ[...]ሰብዓት ግን የተጨለፉት ከሰው ላይ ነው፡፡ ከኔና ከመሰሎቼ ግዘፍ ነስተው ፣ ከሰው ስጋ ስጋን፣ ከሰው ምኞት ምኞትን፣ ከሰው ህልም ህልምን...ወስደው ፍፁም ሰው ፍፁም እነሱን ሆነው ተፈጠሩ፡፡**

Half way in the darkness of the night, a mighty angel sent from the Celestial Author, flung open my door and woke me up...then he told me to scribe the words, *Mahar Shalala Hash Baz* [...]I summoned the characters who will be speaking his words that I was listening right now...The characters of my imagination captured images of me and my kind inherited a flesh from human

flesh, a desire from the human desire, and a dream from the human dream, and manifested with a perfect human nature, at the same time keeping their true natures unperturbed<sup>14</sup>(P: 5).

With this declaration of the author concerning his characters in *Dertogada*, let us raise questions regarding their textual personhood: Who are they? How do they resemble in flesh and soul with the people outside the story world? Though we may not succinctly answer these questions just in this particular section, we shall endeavour to unfold the textual personhood of individuals in the novel beginning with some basic theoretical insights on characters.

In discussing characters, classical narratologists are interested in classifications and they have come up with different distinctions of characters such as “round and flat” (Forster, 1963) and “open and closed” (Chatman, 1978). It would not have decisive significance to lean on these classifications in a research such as the present one that holds contextualist narratology as a tenet for its undertakings; yet, it is logical to take a classical springboard to intrude our text systematically. The way we use them, however, needs to be harnessed to the theoretical orientation of the present research; it needs be apposite to our investigation of using characterization as a narrative strategy in *Dertogada*. In this regard, character classification first proposed by Ewen and later developed by Rimmon-Kenan fits our purpose here.

Unlike Forster and Chatman, Ewen takes “classification of characters as points along a continuum rather than according to exhaustive categories” (Rimmon-Kenan, 1983:41). Therefore, he tends to classify characters based on three “continua or axes: complexity, development, [and] penetration into the inner life” (Ibid). According to his notion, characters

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<sup>14</sup> Unless stated otherwise, translations of quotations from *Dertogada* are taken from its English version published in 2012.

that are not complex in their personal traits and that do not develop are labelled as minor, whereas the ones that stand at the opposite pole of these characters are major.

*Dertogada*, seen in view of Ewen's notion of character classification, offers both: there are the complex such as Shagiz and Aba Jemberu, and developing such as Miraje, Sippara, Meroda and Diolla. These can be taken as major characters. Others such as Aba Finhas are minor.

Regardless of their way of characterization that we will deal with later, we can make distinctions between major and minor characters in *Dertogada* based on their socio-cultural background in the story world. First, most major characters are individuals who are not only ardent admirers of western civilization but also activists in scientifically advancing their country. A case in point is Aba Jemberu.

Aba Jemberu, who instigated *Dertogada*, the envisaged science center, was an ordinary Ethiopian who used to win his bread by ordinary labour work. Nonetheless, when Italy invaded Ethiopia, he got a chance to go to Italy and was trained as a captain. Becoming so zealous to institute that civilization he saw in Italy in his country, after he came back to Ethiopia, he started digging a secret cave later developed to a sophisticated science center named *Dertogada*.

Most of the minor characters in the novel are, however, local people of limited knowledge of the world outside of their country. Most of them are negligent of their nation and often they craved their personal comforts. We can take a character named Aba Finhas for instance who was an ordinary Ethiopian who used to work with Aba Jemberu in the Italian company.

Aba Finhas and Aba Jemberu including a person named Aba Ayalew, another minor character, shared a secret regarding a ship deliberately sunk with plenty of invaluable treasures in it deep into Lake Tana by Italians as they evacuated the country. These three Ethiopians knew where in the lake that ship was buried and the amount and worth of the treasure in it, as they were made to

involve in the diabolic capsizing act. With their common knowledge of the treasure, they had to agree on how to drag the ship out and on exploiting it. They agreed to share the treasure equally, but Aba Ayalew and Aba Finhas changed their minds after a while and each of them tended to own the treasure exclusively. Aba Ayalew, in the meanwhile, would disappear with the map that indicates the whereabouts of the ship. Aba Finhas, though he cropped up to the monasteries of Lake Tana as a monk later, he pursued Aba Ayalew until he confirmed that Aba Ayalew was no more in the world. The egocentric behaviour of this character, however, lingered even in the monastery and he remained unfaithful to his friend, Aba Jemberu, and his nation at large until he died.

The second difference between major and minor characters in *Dertogada* lays on their exposure to the western world. As we can see from the story world, most, if not all, major characters are returnees; each of them had been to different western countries before they come back to their country. Aba Jemberu was in Italy before thinking of instituting Dertogada underneath Lake Tana. Miraje and Sippara were in America and Israel accordingly before they decided to come back to Ethiopia and participated in the process of advancing their country technologically. Minor characters such as Aba Finhas are, however, individuals who do not have any exposure to the overseas. They are just local people with no or limited knowledge of the outside civilization.

The two differences of the major and minor characters discussed above do not only give us a glimpse of the kind of characters found in the story world. They also lead us to looking into an association between the social background of the characters in the story world and their personal traits. Most major characters, such as Aba Jemberu and Miraje, are individuals who sacrificed themselves for the betterment of their nation; whereas, minor characters, such as Aba Finhas, strived until death to fulfil their personal desire. What evokes a patriotic feeling on the former and why do the later remain disloyal to their country? Their experience to the western world seems to explain this difference. Based on the textual facts, we can speculate an association

between altruism with experience to western civilization and egotism with locality. However, is this association reliable? This calls for a wider discussion of the representation of characters in the text, i.e. characterization.

#### 5.4. Characterization in *Dertogada*

Characterization, according to Herman and Vervaeck (2005:67), “concerns the way in which a character is represented in narrative.” For Rimmon-Kenan (1983:59), the representation of characters in narrative is made through three methods: direct definition, indirect presentation and reinforcement by analogy. While analyzing characterization in a narrative text, dealing with these three modes of representation of characters is important to unfold their textual traits. However, this venture may not be of an assistance to unfold the contextual meaning of a text motivated through characterization, since it tends to be more descriptive and falls under strict rules that we tend to avoid from the outset (Cf. the introduction part of the present chapter). Especially, in the present research that aspires to inquire the reciprocal relationship among text and context motivated through a narrative form, the mere description of modes of characterization employed in the selected novel may leave our task unaccomplished. Therefore, our attempt to analyse characterization as a narrative form through which the textual and contextual meaning of the selected novel is motivated necessitates a different approach to the aforementioned modes of characters representation. This said, how should we approach them is a basic question entails some ink to flow.

In Rimmon-Kenan’s modes of character representation, there are two agents responsible for the making: character(s) and authoritative narrator. Though accepted indubitably, the agency of these two participants is not enough to fully understand characterization as a narrative strategy in the sense of contextualist narratology since one important agent that in our case is accepted as the one who is “responsible for bringing a fictional individual into existence” (Goodman, 2005:200) in a narrative text is missed, i.e. the author. To bring the author in to discussion as a



participant in character definition then, we need to determine the perspective we conceive the modes of characterization aforementioned. To this end, it is of a remedy to focus on the participants in the characterization process and inquire the textual and contextual meanings motivated through their acts of characterization. In what follows, we take the character(s), the narrator and the real author as participants in the act of characterization and we attempt to investigate the personal trait of the characters defined through the making of characterization of these narrative agents independently.

#### **5.4.1. Individualism as a Trait: Character Definition by Character(s)**

Existing in a story world as individuals, characters participate in different activities of which one is serving as a defining agent. Though not taken as reliable (Rimmon-Kenan, 1983: 60), characters can define themselves or other characters through their characterization statements. The following section discusses characters in *Dertogada* as characterization makers thereby explicating their personal traits revealed concomitantly.

In *Dertogada* characters are not isolated individuals. Most of them are members of different groups found in the story world. Miraje, for instance, though rarely exists alone, in most occasions, he exists as a member of different groups: in a monastery, in a military camp, in the science center, and among escapees of the fire blast. The same is true for many major and minor characters. And it seems why the narratorial voice in the novel is dominated by “they narrative” (Palmer, 2011:217).

Cognizant of the collective existence of individuals in the story world, one may speculate that characters in *Dertogada* are well acquainted with each other and there is a possibility of getting many characterization statements by characters about themselves and/or other characters. However, quit ironically, individuals in *Dertogada* seem sceptical to each other; we do not get sufficient definitions by characters about themselves and/or about other characters in the story

world. Especially, in relation to defining the personal traits, we rarely get characters involve in the task. At this juncture, then, one tends to ask a major question: why do not we get sufficient character definitions by characters in *Dertogada* while they often participate in the story world as a group? The enquiry pertaining this pushes us to look into the formations of the groups and the degree of familiarity among the characters there in.

In fictional narratives, there are groups in which each character involves as a member. We at times find isolated ones, but in most cases, characters are members of a certain group formed in a story world in which, according to Palmer (Ibid: 169) “intermental thought, which is joint, group, shared, or collective thought as opposed to internal, or private, individual thought” (Ibid:169) exists. He refers to such groups as “intermental units” (Ibid: 213). The involvement of characters in these groups, therefore, enables them to know each other and this reciprocal acquaintance offers definition by and of characters.

Nonetheless, *Dertogada* does not seem amenable to the above notion. The characters often exist in groups, yet most of them do not involve in the act of character definition, but why? Is it because they do not know each other? If so, does it mean the groups are not intermental units? Focusing on a character and examining the groups he/she involves in may help to explain this. Taking Miraje as a hub is of great value in this case, for he involves in almost all significant groups in the novel.

Let us begin with Miraje as a member in the group of individuals in the monasteries in Lake Tana, i.e. Entos and Kibran, as his story starts from there. According to the narrator, individuals in the monastery live together and perform most of their activities, such as praying, in group. Miraje had been the member of this monastic community since his childhood. He was raised and educated there until ordained a deacon. Though he spent most of his life time in that circle, we do not get any definition of his personal traits made by any member of that group except what

the narrator tells us. He says, “በአሮጌቶቹ አፍ ብዙ ይዎራለታል፡፡” “The old women [the nuns] talked a lot about him” (P: 37). What were they talking of him? Though from the tone of the narrator we suspect that they were talking something positive of him, since their talk made Sippara burn inside of her heart with more flames (Ibid), we do not see them defining Miraje by their own words. Reciprocally, Miraje is not seen defining anyone in this group. We even do not see him defining his beloved Sippara regardless of his love and affection to her.

Miraje’s monastic membership in Lake Tana did not end up in his childhood. After having left the monastery called Kibran following the disappearance of Sippara, and having spent years abroad, he happened to come back to the monasteries of Lake Tana while sojourning from his voyage to Dertogada, the science center. Whereas he returned as an educated adult with enormous experience of the western world, in the monasteries life was as it had been. The monks kept performing their duties communally with the usual disinterest to delve into the traits of one self and that of other members. When Miraje arrived as a pseudo monk in the monasteries and spent a number of days with the other monks adding a title *Aba* (father) to his name, we do not see any one attempting to define him except the conversation between two monks about the poem he kept reading since his arrival.

“አባ ሚራኸር ግን ለምንድን ነገር ሁልጊዜ በብራና ላይ የተጻፈ ግጥም ሲያነቡ የማያቸግዱ?”

“ግጥም ስለሚዎዱ ይሆናሉ!”

“አይደለም፡፡ አይደለም፡፡ አንድ ግጥም ብቻ ዘወትር እንደገና ማርያም መድኃኒት ግጥም መጻፈላቸውን አያረጋግጥም፡፡”

“Why do I always find Abba Miraje reading a poem written on a parchment?”  
[A monk said]

“Perhaps he loves poetry.”

“No! The fact that he reads a single poem everyday like a prayer doesn’t prove his love for poetry” replied another monk (p, 178).

Though their conversation was cut short, from what they were discussing we can speculate the monks’ desire to know Aba Miraje. However, they could not, as most of the monks they were unfamiliar to each other. The narrator’s words regarding what happened when monks started listening to the radio following the unrest in the country because of election 2005 explicates this fact.

በዚህ ገዳም ውስጥ ሬዲዮ ማዳመጥ ክልክል ቢሆንም አንድ መነኩሴ ግን አሻፈረኝ ብለው ባህር ዳር ከተማ በመሄድ ሬዲዮ ገዝተው መጡ። ትንሹዋን ሬዲዮ ከበው የሚያመሹ መነኮሳትም ተበራክተው ነበር። በየቀኑ ጥሩ ዜና አይሰሙም። መነኮሳቱ ዘመናዊ ትምህርት የቀሰሙ መሆናቸው ከመቸደም ጊዜ በላይ የተሳበቀባቸውም በዚህ ጊዜ ነበር። የወጭ ሃገር ሬዲዮዎች የሚያስተላልፉትን ዘገባ በእንግሊዝኛ እና በሌሎች ቋንቋዎች ያዳምጡ ነበር።

It was not allowed to listen to the radio in the monastery. But one of the monks went to the town reluctantly and brought a small radio. Day to day, the number of monks who sat around the radio in the evenings kept increasing. There was of course no good news. *Also it was a time that clearly brought to light the fact that most of the monks were academically efficient.* They were noticed tuning to the news broadcasted in English as well as in many other foreign languages (*My emphasis*) (P, 176).

This excerpt is a testimony for our speculation regarding the unfamiliarity of the monks to each other, which we can take as a reason for the unavailability of enough definitions of characters by characters in this group.

The second group of individuals in which Miraje was involved as a member is the one in the military camp. As the narration goes, after escaping from the monastery following the disappearance of Sippara, Miraje went to Bahirdar, a city situated at the edge of Lake Tana. While loitering there for a couple of days, government recruiters snatched him for a military training and after a short term training he became a soldier.

In military camps, as soldiers live in-group, we observe this in *Dertogada*; the narrator tells us that Miraje shared a room with his friend Xangida and other six soldiers (P, 69). In his stay as a member of this group, Miraje enjoyed his time with his friend, Xangida. The narrator tells us that this man was the one who brought major changes in Miraje's life (P, 68). However, we remain unaware of Miraje's relationship with other soldiers in the group until the unexpected happens in their room.

**በጦር ሰፈሩ ስምንት ሆነው በሚኖሩበት መጠለያ ውስጥ[...] አንድ ምሽት እንደቀድሞው ሚራዥና ገናኒዲዳ አፍ ለአፍ ገጥመው ያዎራሉ::ሌሎቹ ወጥ ቤቷን በጋራ ስለመዎሰብ እቅድ ነድፋሉ::**

One night Miraje and Xangida were as usual engaged in a deep conversation, inside their bedroom they shared with eight other soldiers[...]The remaining six were also preparing a wicked plan: Force the female cook into having sex with all of them-rape her, of course (P, 69).

The six soldiers could not accomplish their plan because of Miraje and Xangida who forcefully defended the cook. That incident motivated Miraje and Xangida to escape from the military camp. For us, it gives a glimpse into the nature of the group in which they were members. In here, we can deduce that even though they lived together and performed most of their activities as a group, the individuals in the military camp hardly knew each other. This seems to explain why Xangida says, “አሁን እነዚህ ደፋሪዎች ቅጥረኞች ላለመሆናቸው ምንም ማረጋገጫ የለንም::” “we do not have any proof if these rapists were not really traitors” (P, 71). They did

not know who these soldiers were and what their real personal trait was except as rapists. Since there is no familiarity among these individuals; therefore, we hardly see these characters defining each other. In the conversations they made among themselves, we get almost no characterization statement made by any character about himself or others. Even Miraje and Xangida, regardless of their intimacy, are not seen participating in the venture of character definition. Hence, in this military group, just like its monastic counterpart, there exists unfamiliarity among characters that consequently makes character definition by character(s) is rarely available.

The third large group in which we get Miraje as a member is the group of individuals participating in the science center. Miraje joined the science center after a long journey guided by a number of individuals who indicated him the direction without identifying themselves. He would learn upon arrival that the center was full of high ranked Ethiopian scientists and scholars gathered from different corners of the world.

From what we get in the story, we can say that life in the science center was so busy and swift; experts work day and night to advance their country in science and technology. It seems that every one was in a rash, and no one had enough time to chat. Consequently, we expect little familiarity among these individuals. That seems why when Xangida introduced Miraje with personalities in different sections of the science center, he was more interested in what they did than who they were. Certainly, the unfamiliarity that reigned at there is inevitable because of two reasons. One, most of them came from different parts of the world with different socio-cultural backgrounds and different expertise. Two, their coming to the center was made possible through strict secret missions, and they hardly had a chance to be acquainted with their fellows, as they had to be duty-bound as soon as they arrived. Miraje is an example.

After arriving in the same clandestine way, despite staying there for about a week, we do not see him communicating with anyone except his meeting with Xangida and Aba Jemberu the first day

of his arrival. Moreover, soon after his arrival, he was charged with a mission to bring Engineer Shagiz to Ethiopia (P, 179). This speedy ambiance in the science center, therefore, forced the individuals to focus on individual duties than on collective social activities. Consequently, just like the groups in the monastery and in the military camp, they rarely appear as characterization makers in the story world.

The unfamiliarity of individuals appears to persist in the fourth group as well where we get Miraje as a leader of the group composed of survivors of the fire blast that doomed the science center to ashes. It consists of six people: Miraje, Sippara, Meroda, Xangida, Gera and Diolla, the antagonist. The members of this group are slightly different from the members of the groups we discussed so far in two ways: they were few, and they spent a relatively longer time together that enables some of them to develop intimacy such as the one between Miraje and Sippara, and Meroda and Gera. However, the intimacy among some of the members cannot be taken as an evidence to conclude that they were well acquainted to each other, for when we examine the group what we get is almost the contrary.

Most of the members of this group spent a relatively longer time together; yet, the knowledge they had of each other was limited. As an example, Meroda had been with Miraje since his escape from the military camp, and she was, since then, his lifesaver whenever he ran into difficulties. She even ardently loved him. However, she had her own secrets. According to the narrator, throughout their friendship, Miraje had been wondering about the inconsistency of the beauty of her smile. Sometimes she showed him her genuine alluring smile (P, 93), and some other times, her smile became dry and unpleasant. Nonetheless, nobody except her knew the reason behind her sarcastic smile (P, 200). It is around the end of the story that we get her secret revealed.

According to the narration on page 269, while group members were rejoicing at their success in securing the map that indicates the whereabouts of the sunken ship, Meroda asked Sippara for a laptop. Sippara brought her laptop and handed it to her. After receiving the laptop,

ሜሮዳ አንደኛውን የፊት ጥርሷን ይዞ ስትጎትት ከጥርሷ በላይ የተደረበ ሌላ ጥርስ የሚመስል ነገር ወለቀ፡፡ ሁሉም በአግራሞት ተመለከቷት፡፡ ያወለቀችው ጥርሷን ከላፕቶፑ ጋር አገናኘችው እና ቁልፎቹን ስትጫን የኢንጅነር ሻጊዝ ፎቶግራፍ ስክሪኑ ላይ ወጣ...ስክሪኑ ላይ ሻጊዝን ሲያዩ ሁሉም አፋቸውን ከፍተው ቀሩ፡፡

“ይህ [...] ጥርስ አይደለም ሰውር ካሜራ ነው፡፡” አለች ሜሮዳ፡፡

“እስከዛሬ ድረቅ ፈገግታ የምታሳይን ለዛ ነበር ለካ!” ሚራጅ ራሱን እየነቀነቀ ተመለከታት

“ይህ የጥርስ ካሜራ ከኢንጅነር ሻጊዝ ጋር በቀጥታ የሚያገናኝ ሶፊትዌር የተገጠመለት ነው፡፡ እንደምታዩት በየደቂቃው ኢንጂነሩ የት እንዳለ የሚጠቁሙ መረጃዎችን እቀረጽ ይሰበስባል፡፡” [ሜሮዳ አክለች]

Meroda opened her mouth and pulled at her front teeth. All were looking at her in surprise. She detached something that fitted and looked alike her tooth. She detached the tiny thing to the laptop and turned it on. The photograph of engineer Shagiz filled the screen... All were hit by surprise as they watched Shagiz.

“This is not an artificial teeth but a camera receiver.” Meroda told them.

“So that is why you never really smiled.” Miraje said.

“This camera receiver has software that can connect us directly with Shagiz. You can see that it continuously following engineer Shagiz wherever he went” [Meroda added].

Concomitantly, we may wonder why she revealed her secret at this point after the science center had been demolished by the fire blast from the head of the replica of engineer Shagiz who was brought to the science center erroneously. If she had an access to know the whereabouts of the



real engineer, we can speculate that she knew the one that was brought to Ethiopia was the fake one. But why would she be engaged in the venture to bring pseudo-Shagiz to Ethiopia? Her words bellow unleashes the mystery:

**እስካሁን ተዋናይ ነበርኩ። ተፈኔቱን በደንብ እንደተጫወትኩት ተስፋ-  
አደርጋለሁ። ኢንጂነሩን ከሚከታተሉት የሲኦኤኤ ኤጀንቶች መካከል አንዷ  
ነበርኩ። ይህ ካሜራ ተተክሎልኝ እሱን ሳጠምድ ኑፊያለሁ።**

I was an actress until this moment. I hope I played it well. I was one of the CIA agents on a mission to spy on the engineer. I have used this camera [the camera on her tooth] to follow and trap. (Ibid)

This statement by Meroda further corroborates the unfamiliarity of the members in the present group. Miraje, despite his knowing Meroda for many years, did not suspect her espionage. The real self of this woman was unknown to him and that may be why we do not see him in the story world attempting to define her personal traits except his words of appreciation such as saying “**ሚሮዳ ወጥ ቤቷ ታምረኛ ሴት ነሽ።**” “Meroda the cook you are a miracle woman” (P, 88).

The other members in this group are also marked by their unfamiliarity to one other. If we see Sippara, the MOSAD agent, she came to the monastery charged with a mission of hijacking the engineer to Israel, but she changed her mind to stay in Ethiopia after she met Miraje. Though she could convince Miraje and others in the science center that she was really Sippara, as she was in the monastery masquerading as her father-Aba Finhas, we do not see her disclosing why she came to the monastery as a MOSAD agent. It seems that she preferred to with hold her secrets not to lose Miraje, whom she had been longing for throughout her life. If not, she might have told them about the bomb implanted inside the head of the imported fake engineer that later caused the fire blast, as she was kept posted (P, 232). Nonetheless, as soon as she met Miraje, she forgot both her mission and the ticking bomb. Her priority became not saving the science

center but undergoing a facial surgery to regain her real face. She neither remembered nor felt the urgency to warn Miraje and his fellows about the bomb. What she did and did not do vividly betrays her not caring about the awful fate of the center once she got her lost sweat heart. She sustained her hidden self even to the group that survived the tragedy of the blast, including Miraje. Hence, in this group like the ones seen before, the unfamiliarity among characters consequently makes the motive and capacity for reciprocal character definition absent.

Having the fact that in all of the four groups we discussed so far individuals are unfamiliar to each other and consequently they seldom involve in characterization making, one may speculate the difficulty of getting a clue about the personal traits of most of the characters in *Dertogada*. Theoretical discussions on the subject, however, back the contrary. As Margolin (2007:77) writes, “whenever one individual characterizes another (or himself), he himself gets indirectly characterized as regards mental and communicative properties such as knowledge, reliability, honesty, and so on”. Since, in our case, we rarely get characters involving in characterization process, due to the unfamiliarity existing as common denominator across the cliques, we may not tend to take Margolin’s words directly. However, we may fairly deduce that, if characterization by a character could tell us something about the personal traits of the characterizing character, then inactivity of characters, and keeping themselves mute or aloof in the characterization process should also tell us something about their personal traits. In our context, the rare availability of character definitions by characters indicates that individuals in *Dertogada* are interested in their private lives than in the collective social life. It almost certainly is the reason why we hardly see characters inquiring personal details of individuals they meet in the story world. That probably also should be why most of them are observed being reluctant to speak about themselves. In a nut shell, in *Dertogada*, what we get as a trait of most of the characters, which is motivated through the passive participation of characters in character definition is *individualism*.

This said, could we now comfortably conclude that there are no intermental thoughts in the groups we discussed above? It is too early to do so, for we need to inquire into the narrator as a characterization maker as this narrative agent is the one responsible to represent intermental or “interamental” thoughts in a narrative text (Palmer, 2004:69).

#### **5.4.2. Individualism Provoked: Characterization by an Authorial Narrator**

Since fictional individuals are understood as narrators present them in the story world, it is fair to say that narrators are the main, though not the only, narrative agents responsible for physical and behavioural portraiture of fictional individuals in narrative texts. Therefore, obviously, a discussion of characterization necessitates giving due attention to the narrator as a characterization maker. In the present section, therefore, we are going to approach the narrator in *Dertogada* as a characterization maker in view of unfolding the textual meaning concealed in his making. However, before delving into how characterization is made by the narrator, it is essential to start by discussing the textual nature of the narrator himself and his position in “the story space” (Chatman, 1978 :98 ), for these features of the narrator exert a significant influence on his physical and/or mental portraiture of the characters.

From the vantage point of narratology, the narrator in *Dertogada* is a hetrodiegetic one whose physical presence in the story is absent. However, a close examination of the position of the narrator in the said novel gives us an impression that he is not completely outside the story world. Through his narrations and through his ways of presentation of characters, incidents and events in the story, we sense his inconsistent cropping up in the story space. Sometimes we feel his presence and some other times we sense his deliberate distancing of himself from the story world. This narrator, therefore, falls into what Show (1995:98) refers to as “loose narrator” a

type that possesses two textual aspects: “one aspect of the narrator seems to enter the fictional world, while [the] other aspect remains well out of it, observing and judging from a height.” An appealing question at this juncture, therefore, is this: what are the circumstances that motivate his presence and/or his absence from the story world? In what follows, we endeavour to unravel these circumstances and the consequence thereof on the narrator as a characterization maker.

To start with, the self- distancing of the narrator from the story space is observed in his commentaries on the speeches and deeds of some of the characters. Amidst a conversation between Miraje and Shagiz (P, 19) for instance, we see the narrator using expressions such as “**ፊቱ በብዙ ጥያቄዎች መሃል እንዳለ ያሳብቀል**” “The expression on his face could not conceal the fact that his mind was filled with many unanswered questions”, “**ግራ መጋባት ይታይበታል**” “A noticeable look of puzzlement displayed all over him”, and “**እንደተጨነቀ ከፊቱ መገመት ይቻላል**” “Guessing from his facial expression, he seemed worried”, and Such expressions of uncertainty, which are not commonly expected of a heterodiegetic narrator who enjoys a conventional unrestricted access to the minds of characters, are spotted in considerable instances in the novel. The narrator in *Dertogada* often acts as if he did not know the characters, and he tends to tell us about them- judging and observing at distance. The point here is why he wants to detach himself from the characters. Though we may not be able to answer this question now, for our present discussion focuses on the characterization and not on the narration per se, we can speculate the effect of this act of the narrator on his definition of characters.

One of the observable effects of this act of the narrator is contradiction between the personal trait of the characters as defined by the narrator and the actual behaviour of the characters revealed through their actions and speeches. Miraje is a good example for this.

In his definition of Miraje, the narrator presents him as a man of perfection in his physique and behaviour. Apart from the extended glamorous descriptions of his allegedly faultless physique, the narrator presents Miraje as a man of solemn behaviour: “ሚራዥ ዝምታው ወቂያኖስ ነው፡፡ ነገር ሲጀምርም እንደ ጅረት፡፡ ብዙዎቹ የሚዎዱት ብዙ ስለሚያዳምጣቸው ነው፡፡”

“Miraje’s silence is like an ocean. If he must talk, his speech flows like a river. Many love him because he listens to them” (p, 66), he describes him. However, when we look at the actual behaviour of this character, it hardly goes along with the words of the narrator. Against the narrator’s claim, he is not a quite man with little desire to speak to people; we get him not only participating actively but also playing a leading role in the conversations with fellow characters. Sometimes, we even see him speaking a lot more than the situation demands. His conversation with Meroda, on page 67 of the novel, is worth quoting here.

“ቤትህ እኮ የደራሲ ቤት ነው ሚመስለው” ስትለው

“እኔ የሚታየውንና የሚጨበጠውን አካል ቀድጆ ስሰፋ መጸህፍት ደግሞ የማይታየውን አካሌን ቀድደው የሰፉልኛል፡፡ ሐኪሞች በሽተኞችን ብቻ ሲያክሙ ደራሲያን ደግሞ ሐኪሞችንና በሽተኞችን ያክማሉ፡፡ ደራሲያን እንደመልአክት ናቸው፡፡ መልአክት የሰውን ወደ አግዚአብሔር የእግዚአብሔርን ወደ ሰው ሲያደርሱ ደራሲያን ደግሞ የህዝቡን ወደመንግስት የመንግስትን ወደ ህዝብ ያደርሳሉ፡፡ እውነተኞች ደራሲያን የህዝብን ወደ መንግስት አድርሰው መንግስት ካልሰማ የመልአክትን ተግባር በማገዝ የህዝብን ወደ እግዚአብሔርም ያደርሳሉ፡፡ እውነተኞቹ ደራሲያን በህዝብና በመንግስት፣ በመንግስትና በመንግስት፣ በህዝብ እና በህዝብም መካከል የሚኖሩ የማይሰበሩ ድልድዮች ናቸው፡፡ እውነተኞቹ መልአክቱን በወቅቱ ሲደርሱ ሐሰተኞቹ ደራሲያን ደግሞ የነበረው ስርአት ካለፈ በኋላ ከምናምን አመት በፊት የጻፍኩት ያኔ ፈርቼ ያላሳተምኩት ብለው ህዝብን ያቆስላሉ፡፡ አንድ ስርአት ካለፈ በኋላ ተራ ሰውም ቢሆን ያንን ሥርአት ቢሳደብ አይታሰርም፡፡ ስላለፈው ስርአት አስቀያሚነት በወቅቱ አስቀያሚነቱን መዋጋት ፈርቶ ካለፈ በኋላ ህዝቡን የሚሸነግል ደራሲ እሱ ከሐሜተኞቹና ጅብ ካለፈ ከሚጮሁት ወሾች

ተራ ይመደባል። ያለፈውን ስርአት የሚከስ ደራሲ የሞተ ዉሻን ከሚደበድብ ሰዉ አይሻልም። የነበረበትን ስርዓት እንድሻሻል የሕዝብን ጩኸት ያሳስተጋባ ደራሲ ሥርዓቱ ካለፈ በኋላ ቢንተገተግ እሱ የሞተ ዉሻን ከሚደበድብ ቂል በምን ይሻላል። የህዝብን ብሶት ወደ መንግስት የማያደርሱ ደራሲያን የመንግስትና የህዝብ ጠላቶች ናቸው። መንግስትንም ህዝብንም ያሳስታሉና። መታተም ባለበት ዘመን ያለታተመ ድርሰትና ወቅቱን ያልጠበቀ ዝናብ አንድ ናቸው... እያለ ይመልስላታል።

“Your apartment seems like an author’s” she would say to him.

“I operate on the tangible body of human beings while my books operate on the intangible part of my body. Doctors treat only patients, but books treat patients as well as doctors. Authors are like angels. Angels are messengers between the people and the government. When the government ignored the messages delivered to it by true authors, these authors also deliver the messages from the people to God. The true and real authors deliver the message on time but pseudo-authors disappoint the people by saying that they were afraid to publish their scripts at the time of their greater importance. However, they claim that they were the ones who had already written it. No imprisonment would befall upon him if even an ordinary man criticized a regime after its fall. An author who was afraid to tell the truth about the ugliness of the regime and who tells about its viciousness after the regime had fallen off the throne shall be like a dog that barks after a hyena had already gone. Anyone who discriminates an order already fallen is not better than someone who assaults a dead offensive animal. An author should reflect the voices of a nation to the system that reigned at the time, not to the government that comes after its fall. Authors who are not delivering the ailing cries of the people to their kings and rulers are enemies of the people. They mislead both the nation and the rulers. A script which was not published by the time it should be is like an unseasonal rain that only destroys the crops.” He would reply fervently.

This extensive reply by Miraje to a brief question and/or comment by Meroda as to his apartment would help us sense his real trait. Normally, Meroda’s remark does not need an answer that long. She just draws a possible resemblance of his apartment with an author’s because of the

availability of a number of books in it; we just expect him to react only briefly if he were to live up to the introvert behaviour he was alleged to have by the narrator. What is seen above is the contrary, a response both unnecessarily extended and impertinent. Whereas the issue had to do with his apartment, he went to an off the track and drawn-out lecturing about authors. This sort of gibberish talk neither had anything to do with the question nor did it contribute to the causal relationship of events in the narration, thereby having no significant thematic and/or semantic relevance to the narration except exposing the real behaviour of the character that made it.

From what is mirrored through his speeches in the story world, it is not far-fetched to say that Miraje in the actual sense is not as collected as the narrator purports. He is a man easily lured to spinning yarns, fond of speaking emotionally and philosophically. But, from where does this contradiction between the narrator's take and that of the observable emanate? The distant position the narrator in the story space can be taken as one contributing factor.

As discussed earlier, while commenting on Miraje's speech, there is felt uncertainty in the commentaries of the narrator. This uncertainty happens because the narrator tends to detach himself from the story space far more than his conventional position. Being a heterodiegetic narrator with the unlimited access to the mind of characters, and thus able to tell us about the feelings and thoughts concealed in their minds, we expect him to act accordingly as per the convention. The narrator in *Dertogada*, however, often hesitates to exercise this conventional right entirely. Even though we can refer to a number of occasions in the novel in which he exactly tells us what is in the mind of the characters, in occasions such as our present example, we see him acting as if he did not know the characters. Consequently, we find characters such as Miraje with contradicting personal traits in the story world. Incidentally, why does the narrator want to detach himself from the minds of some of the characters?

We may speculate two possible reasons: One, the narrator may not be well acquainted with some of his characters such as Miraje; two, he may be deliberately offering a chance for these characters to exercise their individualism. Because narratological conceptions regarding the knowledge of a heterodiegetic narrator towards the characters in the story world do not support us, arguing in favour of the first reason may not take us that far. Therefore, we opt to argue for the second one, as it goes along with our point of discussion.

In the above section, where we investigated characters as characterization makers, we concluded that the dominant personal trait of most of the characters revealed through their act of character definition is individualism. A close examination of character definition by the narrator, as we are dealing with it presently, gives us the impression that the narrator is also in favour of this personal trait of the characters.

In *Dertogada* mostly characters appear in the story world as a group; however, most of them are zealous of their respective privacies. Miraje, for instance, loves to be in a silent and secluded situation. “**ገዳማዊው ሚረኝ ፀጥታ ነፍሱ ነው፡፡**” “Miraje, the Monastic, loves silence” (P, 90). Meroda also loves to be alone. “[**ሜሮዳ**] **ፍንትው ያለ ደማቅ ብርሃን አይመቻትም፡፡ ሁሌም ከብርሃን ስትሸሽ ነው የኖረችው [...]** **ጨለማ ለብሳ በጨለማ ዳብሳ በጨለማ ጎርሳ ትኖራለች፡፡**” “Meroda does not like intense light; she has always been avoiding the sun...she is perfectly all right with life in darkness” (P, 90). Though not found directly stated as the aforementioned examples, from what the narrator offers, it is reasonable to say that the fervour to privacy is a shared personal trait of most of the other characters. Conspicuously, the narrator seems well aware of this shared behaviour and he magnifies their individualism not only through his direct and indirect modes of definition but also through his conscious restriction of himself from intruding into their private worlds. His deliberate self-distancing from reporting the minds



of some of the characters while commenting on their speeches is one manifestation of this intention of the narrator. Based on this argument, therefore, the conclusion herewith cannot be just a would not lack cogency: the dominant personal trait of the characters in the present novel effected through the act of characterization of the narrator is the same as the output of characterization by characters seen in the previous section, i.e. individualism.

However, with individuals in *Dertogada* existing in the story world as a group, it seems that our analysis so far results in two slightly contradicting conclusions. One, these individuals exist in the story world as a group, and two, they are individualistic in their behaviours. If the individuals are individualistic in their behaviours, how can they act as a group? Answering these questions necessitates probing into the contextual features of the text that motivate the formation of the groups in it. To this end, we need to bring a narrative agent that may serve as a text-context bridge. Undoubtedly, this bridging role has to be attributed to the flesh and blood author.

#### **5.4.3. Individualism Legitimized: The Author as a Participant in Characterization**

For most scholars in the circle of contextualist narratology such as Goodman (2005:201) the real author is not only responsible for the textual existence of fictional individuals but also essential in the venture of understanding them within a certain socio-cultural context in which the novel is written. As he writes:

I believe that *if* fictional individuals exist, and *if* such individuals are the creations of the authors responsible for the works in which they are mentioned, then the author responsible for bringing a fictional individual into existence at a time is essential to the existence of that individual (Italics original).

Upholding this conception, we are going to investigate the role of the real author as a characterization maker in *Dertogada*. Before probing into this, however, there comes a major question: what aspects of characterization are likely to be attributed to the real author?

In the above two consecutive sections, we have attempted to investigate characterization as made by the characters and the narrator confining ourselves entirely to the text. Since these narrative agents are textual entities, we have investigated their act of characterization restricting them to what they could do within the sphere of the text. Nonetheless, we cannot claim that this delimited discussion on their role is exhaustive enough, for there are other features of fictional characters that we cannot understand through their acts of characterization. The name of the characters which “is the most significant feature marking most of fictional characters.” (Keen, 2003:65) falls into this category. However, who is the responsible agent in bringing names in to fictional texts? A number of theoretical discussions on names of fictional characters such as Margolin (2002) refer to the real author as a responsible body for such an act. If names are significant features in marking the personal traits of fictional characters, and if the real author is responsible to the existence of names in fictional texts, then in the course of taking this narrative agent as a participant in characterization, we need to give the due focus to names and naming. Therefore, this notion steers our discussion on the author of the present novel as a characterization maker.

On top of its many peculiar features *Dertogada* stands apart from other Amharic novels in the names of its characters. As we can observe from the story world of the novel, almost 90% of the characters have names that are not common in Ethiopian literary works. Therefore, as a reader, we may ask a number of questions regarding these names: What is their textual as well as contextual significance? Why does the author prefer to name his characters in this way? What is represented through these proper names? An attempt to answer these questions necessitates pertinent narratological discussions on fictional names, for it helps determine our perspective while analyzing names and naming in the selected novel.

Theoretical discussions on fictional names range in their conceptions from the ones that conceive them just as “empty” non-referring features (Alward, 2011:423) to the ones that emphasis their inescapable importance in magnifying the textual and contextual meaning of a narrative text

(Margolin, 2002:110). Of these two extremes, the later is apposite to our venture for it goes along with our conception of characters as individuals. Consequently, our analysis of names and naming in the selected novel mainly relays on Margolin's (Ibid) notion that conceives a proper name as "a label of a mental file we keep about someone." For him, "[a] PN [proper name] is like a social insurance number or an identifying tag that follows its referent wherever she goes and whatever happens."

A close observation of the names of characters in *Dertogada* in light of Margolin, gives us the impression that most of them are consciously chosen means of magnifying the personal traits of characters in the narration, both at its crust and core. Let us see the former first.

For classical narratologists such as Ewen (1980) and Rimmon-Kenan (1983), names at a text level depict personal traits of characters. *Dertogada* offers material to support this notion. There are names of characters that do not only magnify the personal traits of characters but also motivate the textual meaning of the novel, of which the name of the protagonist, Miraje, is an instance.

The name Miraje is derived from a word found in English dictionaries having at least two meanings: 1) an effect caused by hot air in deserts or on roads, that makes you think you can see something, such as water, which is not there, and 2) a hope or wish that you cannot make happen because it is not realistic (OLD, 2010:977).

Sticking to the second meaning because of its relation to a human trait, we can weave a semantic thread between the name of the protagonist and his personal trait. We may also anticipate a textual meaning motivated through this proper name.

The protagonist is portrayed as the embodiment of a number of virtues. He was well versed in both the religious and the secular sphere of knowledge. He has starkly contradictory experiences

of life: the monastic and the military; the needy and the affluent. Thanks to this enormous experience, he had a cultivated personality, as a result of which he exhibited a robust faith for his love, Sippara, throughout his life. He believed in truth and precision. More importantly, he loved his country and his people so passionately that he did not hesitate to scarify his personal pleasure and wellbeing for their sake. But, why would such a stalwart Ethiopian is named Miraje? It seems that the protagonist is a mirage as Meroda pronounced in her words: “እዉነትም ሚራዥ፤ የማትጨበጥ ሞገድ፡፡” “You are truly a mirage, an elusive wave” (P, 97). In so naming him, the author is apparently saying that somebody as virtuous as this protagonist is something a rarity.

The name Miraje not only invites association with the trait of the protagonist but also with the ultimate fate of Dertogada, the science center. In the story, Dertogada is described as a science center with the up-to-the-minute technology and with class scientists in which dreamy works such as Der 33, a road, sea, and air worthy vehicle are built. This center was taken as an icon for an Ethiopian way of scientific and economic development. That is why people in the story used to exuberantly chant extolling for the center as the soul for the country’s development aspired to come at any cost:

**ዴርቶጋዳ**

**ዴርቶጋዳ**

**ማንም ሰዉ ላይመጣ እኛን ለመለወጥ**

**አናፈገፍግም አናቅማማም ለለዉጥ**

**ዴርቶጋዳ**

**ዴርቶጋዳ**

**ያቀረቀርክበት አንገት ያስደፋህ ቀን**

**ነግቷል ብለህ ተነስ ፍዳና ሰቀቀን**

Dertogada

Dertogada

We don't wait for anyone to change us

We never hesitate nor shall we doubt to change.

Dertogada

Dertogada

The night of sadness is over

O Say, it is dawn and stand up (P, 270).

However, the people in *Dertogada* could not live to see the day they longed for. Dertogada was reduced to ashes before it brought the yearned bright day, but why? The answer is clear though not as such simple- Dertogada was simply a mirage. People in the story world managed to launch but not perpetuate it. The name accorded to the protagonist is thus a semantic tool to magnify the forecasted demise of the science center, which we could take as the overarching meaning of the text at least at the surface level.

Though we can also refer to other names of characters such as Jemberu and Gera that have semantic function in the text, it suffices to ponder over the parallels between the name of the protagonist and his personal trait to exemplify our point. However, we are left with one crucial post-mortem. Why does the author prefer to give a name of French origin<sup>15</sup> for the protagonist rather than an Amharic or other Ethiopian name? Exploring this question leads us to examining naming in the selected novel, which consequently leads us deep into the formation and meaning of the names in *Dertogada*.

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<sup>15</sup> According to Oxford Learners' Dictionary (2010) the word Mirage is originally derived from a French word *se mirer*.

From a contextualist narratology perspective, characters are artefacts of the real authors. As Goodman (2005:200) writes, “fictional individuals are abstracta that are brought into existence by the authors responsible for the fictional works in which those individuals are mentioned.” In this sense, the responsibility of real authors is not only to bring the characters into the realm of the story world but also to present them in a “plausible and believable” (Keen, 2003:58) manner. To this end, names serve as good mechanism, for they “can reflect ethnicity or other aspects of identity” (Ibid: 65) of the characters.

Consequently, with reference to his/her narrative text, an author can be considered as a “name giving person” that is “socially sanctioned to introduce a PN [Proper Name] usage practice into a community” (Margolin, 2002: 110). Here, it is obvious that, the term “community” in relation to narrative texts refers to the people in the story world and the readers that consume the texts. Therefore, the author as a name-giving person is expected to name fictional characters in conformity with the social psychology and cultural context out of which his/her text emerges. To put differently, if an author writes an Amharic novel whose socio cultural context is situated in Amharic speaking society, we expect him/her to present characters named under the philosophy and basis of naming in Amharic.

Hence, coming back to our novel, is the naming of characters made based on the philosophy and basis of naming in Amharic, as it is an Amharic novel whose setting is mainly situated in Amharic speaking society?

As we can observe from the story world of the selected novel, most of the names of the characters are originally not Amharic. Names of Major characters such as Miraje, Meroda, Sippara, Xangida, Shagiz and Diolla are all non-Amharic names. Names of minor characters such as Finhas, Dedimos, and Mormondino etc. are also alien to the Amharic lexicology. Hence, what does it tell us in relation to the naming practice in *Dertogada*? Can we conclude that these

names are not Ethiopian at all? True, most of the names of the characters are not derived from Amharic; yet, it is not possible to label them as non-Ethiopian if we are aware of the psychology of names and the basis of naming in Ethiopia. Incidentally, what is Ethiopian philosophy of names and naming?

As Elias Yemane (2004:1) in his seminal work entitled *Amharic and Ethiopic Onomastics: A Classic Ethiopian Legacy, Concept, And Ingenuity* writes, “[in] Ethiopia, naming a person is not taken lightly and takes into account many traditions, customs and rituals, because of the belief that the name equates with the person.” As rightly observed here, Ethiopians connect the name with the bearer’s psycho-physical makeup, for a name is believed to have a divine connection with the person who possesses it. ‘Semen Melak yawotawal’, ‘The Angle bestows the name [up on the bearer]’, so goes an Amharic saying revealing this broadly entertained mentality. Moreover, according to Elias (Ibid: 35-39), for Ethiopians a name “conveys the importance of (1) religious fervour, (2) national or territorial integrity; (3) kinship connections; and (4) cultural adherence.”

As clearly put, a proper name in an Ethiopian context constitutes an essential part of a person’s identity. Over and above, serving a shallow identification purpose, it plays a key role in designating one or more of the above-mentioned aspects that determine the bearer’s psycho-social makeup.

Inspecting names of characters in *Dertogada* in view of such a socio-cultural context of Amharic names give us an impression that most of them tend to reflect religious fervour since they are Biblical in their formation and meaning. Except few names such as Jemberu, literary means ‘the disc of the sun’ and Ayalew, means ‘the powerful’ that are taken from Amharic language, and

names such as Mormondino and Diolla that are probably<sup>16</sup> derived from Italy, we can say that most of the other names of characters are derived from the Bible.

The author employs two methods of bestowing Biblical names for his characters. For some of them he gives Biblical names as they appear in the Bible. We can take Finhas, Dedimos and Gera as examples. For others that are mostly major characters, he gives them names adopted from the Bible with slight phonetic modifications as shown below

| <b>Name in the text</b> | <b>Name in the Bible<sup>17</sup></b>           |
|-------------------------|---|
| Meroda                  | Merodach (Meaning, bitter contrition)           |
| Sippara                 | Zipporah (Meaning, beauty)                      |
| Shagiz                  | Shaashgaz (Meaning, he that presses the fleece) |

With this association in mind, one may wonder about the textual factor that has led us to this venture. We have one main reason to relate names of characters with names in the Bible: we do not get the names of characters listed above in Amharic and/or any other Ethiopian languages. While searching for their appropriate source(s), we ultimately arrive at the Bible since it helps us discuss their formations and meanings proper.

This said, we can, as per the associations above, construe that most of the names of the characters in *Dertogada* have Biblical features. Yet, we may not be eligible to ask why they possess such names because it is the author's preference to name his characters in whatever way

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<sup>16</sup> I use the term 'probably' to indicate that I could not get a reference to substantiate. However, from the textual fact that these two characters have an Italian background, we can guess that their names are derived from Italian language.

<sup>17</sup> While discussing the Biblical names my reference is Smith and Cornwell (1998).



he likes. We, still, inquire the textual and/or contextual factors that motivate the author to affix Biblical names to his characters.

A close observation on the author's statement at the introductory part of his novel is of much help to us in this inquiry. As he writes, **“የፈጠርኳቸዉ ጥቂት አምሳሌ ሰብዓት በዘመኔ ከማዉቃቸዉና የላይኛዉ ደራሲ ከፈጠራቸዉ ገፁ-ባህርያት ጋር በሰጋ በነፍስ ተዛመዱ፡፡”**

“Characters I created developed a strong likeness-in flesh and in soul-with the *characters* I knew from my generation and the *characters* created by the hands and breathe of the celestial author” (*emphasis mine*) (P, 5). It is clear that the word ‘character’ here connotes real people in the author's mind. Deductively, therefore, if the author brings his fictional characters from ‘characters’ of his generation, then the naming system he employs in his text is most likely derived from the naming tradition of the generation he belongs to. What is the naming tradition prevalent in the present day Ethiopia then?

Since we hardly get studies on present day Ethiopian names and naming practices, it may sound difficult to generalize. However, as a member of the present generation myself, I believe that religion is dominating the naming practice in the present generation. A web page named *Student of the world* ([www.Studentoftheworld.info/penpals](http://www.Studentoftheworld.info/penpals)), for instance, in its review of names of members of the pen-pal club, has listed one hundred most frequently used Ethiopian names of girls and boys. Of the hundred girls' names, the first five from top to bottom are Eden, Sara, Betty (short form of Bettelheim), Hiwot and Meron. Of these five, four are Biblical, non-Amharic names; whereas, only one, i.e. Hiwot (life) is Amharic. Similarly, when we look at the top five names of boys, we get Dawit (David) at the top following with Solomon, Daniel, Biruk and Henok respectively. Again here, only one name, i.e. Biruk (the blessed), is taken from Amharic, while all the rest are Biblical. This statistical data, therefore, reveals a fact that

religion, especially Christianity, is strongly influencing the naming tradition of the present Ethiopian generation.

It is not astonishing to note that Christianity is influencing the naming tradition of Ethiopians, for it had been practised for millennia since its introduction to the country. As Elias (2004:23) writes, in the previous times,

Christianity exerted a major influence up on the kingdom of Aksum and later became a corner stone of Ethiopian life and culture. Ethiopians believe their Christian faith to be uniquely Ethiopian, an expressive tradition that was inseparable from their identity and the survival of their nation.

This religious fervour, therefore, had been the main cause for Ethiopians to get acquainted with Biblical names. For a long period of time,

[They] adopted Biblical names of Hebrew and of Greek origin, either in the original or in variants adopted from the language's phonetic system. For instance, the Hebrew name *David* becomes *Dawit*, and the Roman name *Costantine* appears as *Q<sup>w</sup>äst.änt.inos*. For the most part, Ethiopians began immediately translating foreign names into the Ethiopic forms. This practice would explain the large pool of Ethiopic and Amharic personal names that emulated Biblical conventions (Ibid: 24).

However, the influence of religion in the naming tradition of Ethiopians started to decline because of the expansion of Amharic as a secular language since the early 14<sup>th</sup> C. Since then, becoming a *lingua franca* of the nation, it exerted its secular influence over the naming traditions of not only the Amharic speakers but also over those outside the indigenous Amhara regions. Consequently, proper names of Amharic origin started to flourish throughout the country and the influence is present even today.

Nonetheless, though local Amharic names are still rife, especially in rural areas, a rise is felt in the need for taking and giving Biblical names due to the revival of the zeal to religion,

reasserting the Bible “as the source of faith and moral guidance”(Ibid:14). The main question at this juncture is: why do Ethiopians in the present time show a renewed interest in religion.

In today's Ethiopia, religion is becoming not only charming for both the Christians and the Muslims but also their source of conflict. To illuminate, Klein (2012:4) deserves a long quote, for he reflects the current smouldering religious tension in the country. As he writes,

[in Ethiopia] post-1991 developments and the coming of the constitution not only opened the door to more religious freedom expressed publicly and privately, to more parity and encounters between the religious leaders and members, but also resulted in a growing influence of fundamentalist Christian and Muslim teachings with extreme positions shown also in an increase of polemics and extreme polarizing views. These Views influence, especially the youth, but at times also moderate adults towards provocations and aggression against the other, and could possibly culminate in violent conflicts. The impact of purist-reform and fundamentalist Islamic and Christian movements, often labelled as “Pentecostalisation” or “Islamization” has created new forms of antagonism. In its worst form, it practises the disrespectful downplay of the other. In its wilder form it seeks to prove oneself right and the other wrong.

Klein's observation on the current state of religion in the country reveals the real experience of the present generation that influences and/or changes the socio-cultural milieu of the present Ethiopia. Similarly, in his article *New Socio-Political Situation in Ethiopia and its Reflection in Literature and Theatre*, Balashova (2009:1317) contemplates: “The cultural paradigm of nowadays Ethiopian society arises from the conflict and synthesis of Islamic and Christian religion.” Because of this religious conflict, the people are experiencing a new culture of being on the lookout from a looming attack that is likely to be perpetrated by a group out of their religion. In this regard, Christian Ethiopians resort to the Bible and ancient religious thoughts as a shield from Islamic influence felt coming against them from within and from outside in full swing. One way of defending their identity from Islamic influence is “searching [for] [...]

cultural roots in the past centuries of Ethiopian history” (Ibid), is reflected, among others, in the naming preference of the present Christian generation that is very often going for Biblical names.

Being a cultural product of the present Ethiopia, and being a novel with especial interest in Christianity, as the overall textual features of the novel exhibit a somewhat fanatical adherence to Christianity, it is now possible to speculate that the author of *Dertogada* is influenced by this uplifted Christian mentality of his contemporaries while bestowing names for his characters. If not, why indulge into a difficult task of contextualizing Biblical names when he could use those readily available in the language of his novel, Amharic?

In addition, the naming practice employed by the author gives us the impression that he attempts to reveal a certain kind of communality among the major characters through religious names. Since most of them possess names derived from the Bible, we may conceive them as religious individuals, and based on this conception we may speculate that religious fervour is what brings them as a group. However, a close examination of their textual personality tells us the contrary.

Based on what we learn from the story world, religion is not the primary concern for most of the individuals in *Dertogada*. When Aba Jemberu, Aba Ayalew and Aba Finhas came to the monastery pretending as monks, their interest was the treasure in the sunken ship, not religion. Even though raised and educated in the monastery, Miraje does not sustain his religious devotions after he went to America. Meroda did not have any religious knowledge or background at all. She even is seen mocking religious thoughts (P, 97). After she went to Israel, Sippara forgot all the religious experience she had while she was in the monastery and declared “her new citizenship deep down in her soul and started saying ‘long live Israel’” (P, 63). The other characters such as Xangida and Gera are also hardly discussed in relation to religion. Hence, we can say that most of the characters in *Dertogada* are secular while their names are religious. Even though possessing a religious name does not necessarily brand a person religious,

from the vantage point of our discussion about the contextual factor that motivates the author to take the Bible as the source of the names of most of these characters, it is likely to speculate the religiousness of the bearers of the names. In *Dertogada*, as opposed to our speculation, we get secular individuals with religious names. Thus, what do we learn from this disparity between the names of the characters and their actual behaviour? If the author gives Biblical names for his characters being influenced by the sensitively Christian mentality of the present generation, then, why are the characters less interested in religion?

As often indicated in the above discussions, characters are artefacts of the real author. Therefore, while discussing the real author as a characterization maker, we are obliged to respect his conventional right to represent his characters the way he deems fit. The fact that characters in *Dertogada* are reluctant to religion while possessing religious names, therefore, can be taken as the deliberate act of the author through which he intends to depict a certain textual feature. What is depicted in this act of the author is his intentional distancing of himself from the personal lives of the characters. He deliberately pulls himself out from the life of the characters after he brings them in to the story world. That is what he declares at the outset:

**የላይኛው ደራሲ የፈጠራቸውን ገፀ-ባህርያት ይገድላቸዋል፡፡ እኔ ግን  
አልገድልም አላድንምም፡፡ ከሞቱም ራሳቸው ይሞታሉ እንጅ ከዳኑም  
ራሳቸው ይድናሉ እንጅ፡፡ እኔም ከነሱ ያልተሸልኩ ነኝና፡፡ ለመሞታቸውም  
ለመትረፋቸውም ተጠያቂ አለመሆኔን ስነግራቸው ፈነጠዙ፡፡**

I neither kill nor save my creatures; they were distained to die of their own accord or they shall be saved likewise, for I am not superior to them. That was why they had gone wild with joy, when I told them that, I will not be responsible for their demise for salvation (P, 5).

This deliberate self-distancing of the author from the textual life of the characters results in legitimizing their individualistic trait that we indicated as the dominant behaviour of the

characters in *Dertogada* through our analysis of the characters and the narrator as characterization makers in the above two sections. The author gives religious names for his characters because he was influenced by the social context in which he belongs. However, the characters appear to be less interested in religion because they were allowed to lead their own life in the world they belong to. Even though the story world in which the characters belong to was dominantly situated in religious settings such as in the monasteries, most of these individuals came to these settings with non-religious reasons. They existed in the story world with individual missions that the author allowed them to accomplish freely. Consequently, their individualistic behaviour persists to determine their personal trait. The act of characterization of the author, therefore, underscores individualism as the dominant personal trait of the characters in *Dertogada*.

### **5.5. Individualism as a social crisis: Conclusion**

Our attempt in this chapter has been to unfold the textual and contextual meaning of the selected novel as effect through characters and characterization as a narrative strategy. We have focused on the makers than the making, which enables us to scrutinize characterization as a textual and a contextual narrative element. Throughout our analysis what is revealed as a dominant personal trait of individuals in *Dertogada* is individualism that is magnified via the acts of characterization by the characters, the narrator and the author.

This discussion has put us in a position to determine the nature of most of the groups that the characters in *Dertogada* are involved in. It is repeatedly asserted that in the novel under study, characters exist as a group. Nonetheless, what brings them to the group they belong to is more often an individual desire than group interest. Worthy of a mention is the group of individuals in the science center that most of the major characters joined following their individual aspirations. Miraje came to the center with a curiosity to unravel the secret that he was rammed in to by other individuals such as Shagiz. Meroda finds herself in *Dertogada* due to the ardent love she had to

Miraje. Sippara was charged with a mission of abducting the engineer when she appeared in the center. Most of the other scientists were brought into this place with secrete operations so that we do not know whether they came to it with their consent. However, most of the major characters joined the center with different personal interests. Except Miraje who has vowed to devote himself to make all of the missions and visions of Dertogada come true “until selling his kidney” (P, 197), most of the other characters were not seen paying a heed either to accomplish the objective or to contribute to maintain its existence. With the egocentric behaviour of the characters such as Sippara and Meroda, obliteration became the fate of the science center. Therefore, albeit their physical togetherness, we hardly conceive most of the groups in *Dertogada* as intermental units of a shared commitment; most seem interamentally driven.

This dominance of interamentality within the groups in *Dertogada* matches the socio-cultural feature of the present Ethiopia. According to Nebiyu (2011: 349), in contemporary Ethiopia there is a moral crisis among the generation. One of the manifestations of this moral crisis, as to his contention, is the newly seen growing tendency of unhealthy individualism in the society. As he writes, “unlike in the past, the [present] Ethiopian society is becoming reluctant towards communal values in favour of self-aggrandizement aspired even at the expense of bulldozing the others fellow compatriots unscrupulously.”

If individualism is a strikingly dominant feature of the pertinent fictional and factual figures, we can fairly draw the reciprocal relationship that exists between the text and the context. The personal trait of the characters in *Dertogada*, which is dominantly characterized by individualism, reflects the egoism overrunning the present Ethiopian generation which must have influenced the real author to forge his characters with egocentric attributes. In the nutshell, the relationship among form, content and social milieu is thus exhibited in *Dertogada* by way of examining characterization as a narrative strategy.

## Chapter 6: Summary and Conclusions

The present chapter provides the summary of the study and conclusions drawn from the theoretical and analytical discussions held in the previous chapters. It also briefly recapitulates the research questions in the present study and briefly depicts how they are addressed in the previous chapters.

Being a universal phenomenon, narrative exists in every nation either in written or oral form. Ethiopia, one of the few nations in the world with age-old literary heritages, inscribed by its own orthography, is also rich in its written narratives. Of these, modern Amharic literature takes the lion share in edifying the modern literary history of the country. Following the emergence of the first novel published in the language, Amharic novel has been studied since a century ago. The mass of knowledge passed throughout these years, however, is mainly interested in the thematic preoccupation of the works and bibliographical descriptions of the authors, often considering Amharic literary texts as social documents, giving little attention and value to their artistic features.

Accepting the need to understand Amharic novels within their social context, for, as many other African novels do, its purpose and function cannot be out of the realm of the society in which and for whom it is produced, the present research proposes an alternative approach to study Amharic novels. As to my contention, Amharic literature in general and Amharic novel in particular is well understood when form and context are investigated intertwined, taking one as a product of the other. Dealing with this reciprocal relationship between form and context, I believe helps tackle, as Yonas (2001:25) writes “the problematic of getting an insight in to what we may call, in general terms, the ‘nature of narrative’ in Amharic [novels].” In so doing, the present research aspires to corroborate this contention by studying form as a narrative strategy in



Amharic novels published from 2000 until 2010 within the tenet of narratological conceptions of literary texts.

While formulating the blue print to study the selected Amharic novels, theoretical discussions and conceptual reorientations on narratology are made with the view of addressing the primary concern of the present research: whether a relationship exists among form, content and social milieu in determining the nature of a literary text, thereby contributing to the theoretical debate on the issue.

Though narratology plays a vital role not only in shaping theoretical perspectives but also in contributing analytical tools to study and understand literary narratives, it has been the field of debatable insights since its inception to the arena of literary scholarship. Contentious views on the relation between text and context, for instance, extend to the extent of dissecting the theory into two phases: classical and post-classical. While the former advocates the need to understand literary narratives within the text itself, the latter argues against detaching the text from its social context from which it emerges. As to post-classical narratology, a narrative text is understood in full when its textual components are entwined with and are made serviceable in understanding its contextual features.

Being indebted to post-classical views of narrative texts, the present research aspires to unravel the tripartite relationship among form, content and social milieu in the making of the artistic and thematic features of Amharic novels by accepting form as a narrative strategy. The term narrative strategy refers to the condition in which form exists in the text not only as a means to motivate textual meaning but also as an outcome of the social context in which the novel is produced. The basic question at this juncture, however, is that how can theoretical insights of post-classical narratology serve as guidelines to attain this goal. In what follows an attempt is made to recapitulate how it is made serviceable in the previous chapters.

## 6.1. The Relationship among Form, Content and Social milieu

Narratology, in the main, accepts narrative as an act of telling in which someone for someone else tells something in some manner. This general premise gives an impression that narrative is a communicative act in which a number of participants involve. For classical narratologists, these participants are textual entities such as characters, narrators, narratees, implied readers and implied author, whose role is restricted to the textual world. Appreciating the conception of classical narratology of textual entities and their individual role in the narrative world, post-classical narratology, however, extends the number of the participants in the communication sphere and comprises the out of text entities such as the real author and the real readers as significant narrative components. For post-classical narrative theories, therefore, narrative is a communication act, involving the real author, the narrator(s), the characters and the real readers; unlike their predecessor, they fervour less to the so called ‘implied’ author and readers.

The present research attempts to expose the tripartite relationship among form, content and social milieu in the selected Amharic novels based on the aforementioned post-classical view of narrative communication. While taking the real author, the narrator(s) and the characters as participants in the narrative act, it hypothesizes that it is possible to specify the textual and contextual components of the narrative texts based on the role of these participants as per the spatio-temporal position each owns in a narrative world. It is clear that in the narrative world the role and position of the narrator and the character(s) is different. Even in autodiegetic texts where the characters narrate their own stories, narratology recognizes the difference between the narrating self and the experiencing self of a character-narrator. Similarly, the role and spatio-temporal position of the real author in a narrative world is also different from the narrator and the character. Since the author is an agent with a conventional right to belong to both the textual and

contextual worlds, he/she mainly serves as a bridge between the two, accomplishing narratorial functions that the other two are incapable of doing.

Having this narratological conception of the role and position of the aforementioned narrative agents as a hub, in the present research an attempt is made to answer the major enquiry aforementioned. Let us see how it is made possible in the selected novels, starting from the characters.

*Characters as narrative agents determine the textual feature of a narrative form and the textual meaning motivated through it*

In *Burka's Silence*, the textual construction of the story of the novel reveals that the main story depicted in its deep structure is the failure story of Oromo farmers who reside in the village called Burka. The textual feature of this narrative form is, therefore, motivated by the role of the characters in the text in that the major character, an actant in the story world, is seen as a hoaxed person who is often tricked by the other characters which consequently leads him to acquire false belief about the Amhara-Oromo relationship. Consequently, he often fails to accomplish his roles as an actant, thereby contributing for the failure story of the Oromo farmers in the novel.

In *Grey Bells*, where focalization is investigated as a narrative strategy, a conclusion is made that this narrative form is depicted in the text having an inverted cone shape, i.e. it gets narrower in scope and perspective while the story develops to its end. The character that serves as a focalizer in the perceptual facet contributes for this textual appearance of focalization in the novel. As a child, the character used to perceive everything that comes to the scope of his eyes clearly and seriously, and he was interested in societal issues. While getting older, however, his perception becomes blurred and selective, focusing more on issues that are appealing to his personal desires being negligent to societal issues that he was fond of in his childhood. The textual feature of focalization in this novel, therefore, is motivated by the act of the character as focalizer.

In *Dertogada*, individualism is taken as a common trait of characters found in the story world. One of the means in which this personal trait of characters is revealed is through the act of characters as characterization makers. In narrative texts, characters can take part in the process of character definition through their speech or through their interaction to each other in the story world. In *Dertogada*, however, we do not see them participating in this venture. Most of them are reserved individuals who prefer not to express anything about themselves and/or other characters in the text. This reservation from participating in characterization making, consequently, reveals and motivates the egoistic trait of characters in *Dertogada*, thereby motivating individualism as a shared trait among characters in the novel.

*Narrators determine the textual feature of a narrative form and the textual meaning motivated through it*

Hetrodiegetic narrator, in the main, is accepted as a reliable one. The one we get in *Burka's Silence*, however, is loose and unreliable. His looseness is observed in his intrusion in to the minds of the characters and his felt existence as an active participant in the story world. While narrating, he often intrudes in to the mind of the characters and transmits his thoughts through the speeches and deeds of the characters. In some instances, especially while dealing with politically sensitive issues such as the real cause of the Amhara-Oromo ethnic conflict happened in recent times, he deliberately gives the task of narration to some other party and distances himself from the narrative world. As a hetrodiegetic narrator, more importantly, as a narrator in a novel whose story is woven around historical facts and real incidents, the narrator is expected to act in a reliable manner by presenting these facts as they exist in reality. Contrary to this expectation, the narrator in *Burka's Silence* involves in distortion of facts and misleading of his readers by imposing his personal interpretations to them. Because his presentation of the story of the Amhara-Oromo conflict in the story world is not based on the reality, which in most cases differ from what the narrator presents, the revolting farmers in the novel could not succeed in

avenging the Amhara ones that they believe, according to the narrator, snatched their prosperity and dignity long time ago. As the narrator is loose and unreliable, his distorted and misleading presentation of historical facts and realities contribute for the failure story of the Oromo farmers in the story world.

The narrator in *Grey Bells* contributes for the existence of an inverted-cone-shaped development of focalization in the novel. As the perceptual ability of the character-focalizer becomes more specific to personal issues while he gets older, the cognitive capacity of the narrator-focalizer also shrinks as per the physical development of the major character. When the narrating-I of the character-narrator narrates about his childhood, he remembers every detail of the surrounding in which the child experiencing –I lived in; the narrator presents it in a philosophical and critical manner. Whereas when he narrates about the experiencing self at his adolescent and adulthood times, his knowledge and understanding of the milieu in which the experiencing self involved in becomes loose and narrow. Differently put, the scope of understanding of the story world by the narrator-focalizer gets narrower while his narration progresses from the child to the adult experiencing self. This cognitive shrinkage of the narrator focalizer at the psychological facet, therefore, contributes for the downward development of focalization in *Grey Bells*.

The way characterization is made by the narrator in *Dertogada* provokes individualism as a common trait of characters in the text. Through his direct definition, the narrator portrays most of the characters as individuals who prefer loneliness and individuality, the same is observed in his indirect definition. As the narrator in this novel is a loose one, because he often gets himself in and out of the story world, contradiction is often observed between his definition of characters and the actual traits of the characters that are revealed through their speeches and deeds. Even though the narrator has a full conventional right to know and express the minds of his characters, as he is a heterodiegetic one, he reserves himself from practising this right by deliberately distancing himself from the life of the characters. This deliberate act, hence, implies the

narrator's intent to respect the private life of the characters. The traits of most characters motivated through the direct and indirect definition of characters by the narrator demonstrate this. The role of the narrator as a participant in the definition of characters, therefore, explicates individualism as a common trait of the characters in *Dertogada*.

*Real authors are influenced by their social milieu while constructing form in their novels*

Writing *Burka's Silence*, the author believes that he tells people about the cordial and virtuous Oromo people. In the contrary, what we get in the novel are Oromo farmers with a great zeal of retaliating against the Amhara people. A contradiction exists between the Oromos he has in his mind while writing his novel and the ones that are actually found in the story world; he thinks about the virtuous ones but writes about the brutal. We can take his contradiction as a result of two social influences imposed on the real author: his involvement in the political party and his limited knowledge about the historical facts and incidents incorporated in his novel. His involvement in the political party did not allow him to expose the real cause of the Amhara-Oromo ethnic conflicts happening in the recent history of the country as a consequence of the venomous teachings of ethnic based political parties in the country. He rather prefers to fabricate a false mythical history for the cause of the conflict and attempts to weave the story around this false belief. Consequently, he comes up with a novel with the failure story of Oromo farmers. Similarly, because his knowledge about the historical facts incorporated in his novel is insufficient, he presents them in a distorted and incomplete manner that, as a result, makes the story of the novel the failure story of Oromo farmers. Looking at these contextual influences, therefore, we can construe that the social context in which the novel is written, which we connect with the text through the role of the real author as a narrative agent, influences the construction of the narrative form in the text and the meaning motivated through it.

The agency of the real author in focalization in *Grey Bells* is seen through his usage of symbols in the text. Through personal symbols such as candy, he presents how personal freedom towards political and societal issues becomes loose starting from the monarchical period to the current one. Candy was available in a bargain price when the major character was a child, whereas when he grew up and came to Addis Ababa as a police constable, he was not able to find one. Late at his adulthood, he gets it but its purity was blemished by the marks of the gazette it was wrapped in, which symbolically represents the imperfection of the freedom the character gets in the political period that incident was situated in. By using this symbolic representation, the real author tries to compare the condition of personal freedom in relation to political and societal issues in the three consecutive political periods used as a setting in the novel: the monarchy, the military and the present one. As a participant in the ideological facet of focalization, therefore, the author's perspective towards these periods is portrayed through such kind of symbolic representations. In addition to portraying the author's perspective towards these periods, his extended manipulation of personal symbols indicates his state of being under the influence of the outlook of the society he belongs to towards politics. In reality, Ethiopians at the present time are less interested in political issues. If they should speak or write about it, they make it in an unfathomable manner. The author's preference to present the current political period as a setting in the novel through mud and gem metaphor indicates the existence of this influence, which in turn influences the way he constructs focalization in his novel and makes its structure in its ideological facet similar to the one seen in the perceptual and psychological facets.

In *Dertogada* the real author participates in character definition through naming. As a responsible narrative agent to name his characters, the author in this novel bestows names to his characters that mostly are not Amharic origin. Most of the names given to the characters are Biblical, which goes along with the dominant practice of naming in the present time Ethiopia that can be taken as one manifestation of Christian Ethiopians' resort to the Bible and ancient

religious thoughts as a shield from Islamic influence felt coming against them from within and from outside in full swing. It seems with this religious fervour that the real author gives Biblical names for most of his characters. Having religious names, however, most of the characters were not religious in their deeds and intentions. Most of the characters in the story world attempt to execute their personal plans that have no or little relation to religion. This divergence between the intention of the real author and the real trait of most of the characters reveals the former's decision to respect the individual freedom of the characters to live in their own world as per their own yearnings, which consequently expounds the author's contribution for individualism to be the dominant trait of the characters in *Dertogada*.

To generalize, the endeavour made in the above three subsections is to recapitulate the findings in the analysis made on form as a narrative strategy in the selected Amharic novels. The conclusions made above, I believe, depict two major findings: one, the possibility of exposing the text-context relationship in narrative texts from the vantage point of the participants in a narrative world, and two, the validity of the speculation made about the tripartite relationship among form, meaning and social milieu in the making of narrative texts. The exemplification made through the selected Amharic novels; in addition, helps answer two questions of the present research: how does form in the selected Amharic novels motivate their meaning? And, how does the social milieu in which the novels emerge influence the form of the selected Amharic novels? Answering all these questions concomitantly, we can say that dealing with form as a narrative strategy in the light of post-classical narratology is like hitting more than two birds by a stone.

## **6.2. Amharic Novels of the Present Time: A Generalization**

This section serves to answer the study's last question: what are the common literary features of present time Amharic novels? This question, though in passing, is addressed in the above discussions. Recapitulating what has already been said, however, we can answer it in two ways:



textually and contextually, focusing on the agents we accepted as active participants in the narrative world, i.e. the characters and the narrators and real authors.

We have already claimed and validated that the characters and the narrators have imperative roles in the making of the textual features of literary texts. The investigation made on the selected Amharic novels in the previous sections illuminates this proposition. However, what are the similarities observed in the role and identity of the characters and narrators in the selected Amharic novels?

Starting with the narrator, we can generalize that the narrators in all of the selected Amharic novels are loose ones, for they often indulge in the story world and/or distance themselves from the story world, as well as intrude in to the minds of their characters emotionally and/or intentionally. In *Burka's Silence* for instance, the looseness of the narrator is observed in his intentional intrusion in the mind of the major character, which makes him unreliable in his presentation of historical facts in the novel. His deliberate distancing of himself from narrating the true cause of the Amhara-Oromo conflict occurred in the contemporary history of the country also depicts his looseness. The same is true for *Grey Bells*. The focalization in the novel at the perceptual and psychological facets becomes more concerned to personal issues when the story goes to its end, because of the looseness of the narrator. The character at his childhood was too critical and full-fledged observer for his age. He was too critical of societal issues more than expected at his age. Commenting on the disparity between what is seen in the text and our expectation as a reader, Hiwot, (2012: 79) writes the following:

Mezgebu's [the character-narrator] thoughts seem to be that of an intellectual's even when we hear his stream-of-consciousness as a child in the countryside. The language that is used to simulate the stream-of-consciousness of Mezgebu and rendered in the novel has no idiolect of a child at the first part of the novel.

The looseness of the narrator contributes for such disparities to exist in the novel that consequently affects the construction of focalization in the novel to be in the way it is described earlier. In *Dertogada* also, the looseness of the narrator is identified in his deliberate distancing of himself from his characters' minds. He pretends to be unfamiliar to what the characters have in their mind while he is a heterodiegetic one with unlimited access to know about it. Based on this observation, hence, we can conclude that all of the narrators in the selected Amharic novels are loose ones.

In relation to the characters in the selected Amharic novels, we can generalize that egoism is the common trait. In all of the novels, the portraiture of the characters through their deeds and speeches illuminate this observation. If we take characters in *Burka's Silence*, Anole, the major character, for instance, no matter how he develops that personality, he is an egoist one. Regardless of his failure, he has struggled a lot to make his egoist dream a reality: avenging Amhara people. The major character in *Grey Bells* is also the same in his personality. Since his childhood, he used to do things alone, with no interest to share his secrets with anyone. He often defines himself as a man of unique quality and unadulterated personality. Through the structure of focalization that we identified as inverted-cone-shaped, what is made lucid is this individualistic behaviour of the protagonist. As the focalization grows thinner, the character becomes more individualistic. It is already indicated in the chapter where characterization is investigated as a narrative strategy that the characters in *Dertogada* are dominantly egoists. Generally, the individualistic behaviour of the characters denotes the second common feature of the selected Amharic novels at the textual level.

As observed in the textual level, similarity amongst the selected Amharic novels also exists at the contextual level, which is scrutinized through the role of the real author in the narrative world. In all of the three novels, the real authors write their novels being under the influence of their respective social contexts. While writing *Burka's Silence* the writer was under a political

influence which deters him from expressing the real cause of the Amhara-Oromo conflict that he takes as a hub in his story which is instigated as a result of venomous thoughts of ethnic based political parties in the country. The author of *Grey Bells* prefers to represent socio-political issues pertaining to the present political epoch in unfathomable manner through symbolic representations and opaque metaphors because he was influenced by ‘politics and electric city from afar’ social mentality of the present time Ethiopians. The influence of social milieu on the author is also seen in *Dertogada* in his intent to bestow Biblical names up on his characters. By naming his characters Biblically, the real author is under the influence of the practice of naming in the present time Ethiopia. Generally, all of the authors of the novels under discussion are, in one way or another, influenced by their respective social circumstances while writing their novels, which, consequently, affects the way they construct narrative forms in their novels. However, it is difficult to generalize that all of the authors of the selected Amharic novels are “socially committed Amharic writers” (Mantel-Niec’ko, 1985:320), for some of them, such as the author of *Burka’s Silence* represents social issues treacherously.

To summarize, taking the selected Amharic novels as reference, we can generalize that the present time Amharic novels are characterized by their egoistic characters, loose narrators and socially connected authors. If comparison and/or contrast between the features of the present time Amharic novels and their predecessors is needed, that will be my recommendation for the other researchers, for it is beyond the scope of my study.

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