

Dagnachew Worku: Experimenter and Innovator in Literary Style and Language

*By Reidulf K. Molvaer,
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Dannyacchew (Daññcchew) Werqu's story starts with his father perhaps in a deeper sense than it does for most people, at least in Dannyacchew's own view. His father, Werqu Bezzabbih, was adventurous in his youth and an extraordinary person in many respects, as Dannyacchew told me his story. In 1914 he went to France via Dire Dawa and Djibouti, and in France he was recruited into the army to fight the Germans during the First World War. He was slightly wounded three times, but he went on fighting until the end of the war, participating in battles in or around Paris and Marseilles and in Belgium. He became fluent in French during his stays abroad. He came from a simple peasant family, and he had no kind of (formal) education before he went to France. There he learned to read and write Amharic (in Paris!) and to speak and read French. He was born at Agam Berr in Yifat in 1897 G.C. In France and Belgium, he found employment in mines, and in France also in a liquor factory. Later he became a waiter, and when Ras Teferi (the later Emperor Hayle-Sillase I) visited Paris as Crown Prince and Regent, Werqu was one of the head waiters where the Crown Prince stayed. Among other things, he used to tie the ties for the Crown Prince and others accompanying him, as they did not know how to put on ties. Werqu himself was one of the first Ethiopians to wear ties, Dannyacchew said. Before this visit of Ras Teferi, at a time when Werqu was working in Marseilles, he had come across Asfaw Welde-Giyorgis, whom a French couple had brought there as a servant or "houseboy." Asfaw had run away from this couple when Werqu came across him, and he brought him with him to where he lived. They became friends and stayed together. Later they went to Paris, and when the Crown Prince, Ras Teferi, came to Paris, Werqu and Asfaw were also there. The Crown Prince offered to educate Werqu when he met him and came to know about him, but Werqu declined and suggested that the Crown Prince should help Asfaw to get an education instead, and this he did. Asfaw Welde-Giyorgis went to a military college and later became Ethiopia's first general. When Werqu refused to be educated at Ras Teferis expense, the Crown Prince asked him to return to Ethiopia, and he was promised titles, etc. Werqu also refused this, and to refuse such offers from such a person is very rude in Ethiopia. As a result, Werqu would suffer in later years. Others told him never to return to Ethiopia after such a refusal. When he later did return, he had to flee to the countryside to "hide from Ras Teferi." He was able to return in 1926 G.C. with the help of a

nobleman, Dejjazmach Wedaje, later Ligaba (which is a person whose help and permission are needed to approach the Emperor) and chief of the imperial guard. Werqu's protector wanted him to stay in Ethiopia, but Werqu wanted to return to France, and to do so he had to "run away" for the second time; this was in 1927. During his stay in Ethiopia, he had squandered all his money, living it up and enjoying himself. When he returned to Ethiopia again in 1929 or 1930 G.C., this time to stay for good, he brought with him about 1,000 silver Maria Teresa dollars. Again he went to the countryside. He "threw away" his fine European clothes and became a "barefoot farmer" in Wiha-Teggeb in 1930. Wiha-Teggeb is a village in a district called Abdilaq, c. 20 km south of the town of Debre-Sina, "but it is not as cold as Debre-Sina " (which is one of the coldest places in Ethiopia); actually, it has a good, warm, temperate climate. In Wiha-Teggeb he met Asseggedech Habte-Weld, whom he married in 1926 or 1927 Ethiopian Calendar (between 1933 and 1935 G.C.). After so many years in France, Werqu was considered an "apostate" and a Catholic, and he had to be "re-baptized" or "cleansed" by undergoing a purification ritual according to the ceremony of Qéder before he was allowed to marry Asseggedech. She was an illiterate daughter of farmers in the area, and she was alive at the time of our interviews in October 1986, living in Debre-Sina.

Dannyacchew's parents stayed in the village of Wiha-Teggeb until 1932 Ethiopian Calendar (1939/40 G.C.). Then they moved to Debre-Sina in order to educate Dannyacchew, who had been born on 16 Yekatit 1928 (February 23 1936) and given the Christian name of Kidane-Mariyam when he was baptized 40 days later. Werqu engaged in small trade -- salt, clothes, etc., and he opened up a small shop in town.

From his time in the village, Dannyacchew remembers the Italians (who had invaded Ethiopia in 1935 and 1936 and stayed until 1941). His father was suspected of being an "agent of the Emperor" and taken to Debre-Sina, but later he was released. Then he decided to move to Debre-Sina with his family. Dannyacchew was always restless and difficult to control, he said. Once he ran into the dirt road when an Italian came galloping north; the Italian grabbed Dannyacchew -- who was running into the way of the horse -- thus saving him from being run down. His father was called and beaten for not looking after his son, and Dannyacchew saw him being beaten. His mother was also kicked for letting her son out of her sight and into the road. At this time the family was living in one room beside a butcher's shop. After this incident with the Italian, Dannyacchew's father left for the countryside again for about a year, but the family stayed behind in Debre-Sina. Many features of Ato Weldu in Dannyacchew's main work, the novel Adefris, are reminiscent of his father.

Dannyacchew is the firstborn of five children -- he was followed by a girl, then two boys, and finally another girl. He was a herdsboy for a short time before moving to town at the age of four. In Debre-Sina, he "played" and had an easy time until he was six or seven years old, when he started school. He started directly in a government school and did not first go to a church school,

unlike most Ethiopian children, who used to go there if they wanted to learn to read. His father never cared for the church and never took Dannyacchew there; but his mother sometimes went to church and even allowed Dannyacchew to go to church school in the evenings to learn some Geez-but this never came to his father's notice, as he did not like church people. He went through the end of Grade 6 in the government school at Debre-Sina; then he joined the Hayle-Sillase I Secondary School at Kotebe in Addis Abeba from Grade 8 (skipping Grade 7).

Even earlier he had been to the capital for a few months. When he was in Grade 3 or 4, General Asfaw Welde-Giyorgis, who wanted to repay Dannyacchew's father for the help he had given him in France, took Dannyacchew to Addis Abeba and put him into the French school, the Lycee Guebre-Mariam; but Dannyacchew did not like "the atmosphere" in Asfaw's house, where he ate with the servants, so after about five months he ran away and went home to Debre-Sina and stayed there until the end of elementary school.

His parents had a strong influence over Dannyacchew during the first 12 years of his life, until he left home for further education. His father loved work and got up-with Dannyacchew-every morning at 6:30. His mother told folk-tales at home as long as Dannyacchew stayed there. This was probably a main reason why Dannyacchew started to write poems at an early age; he wrote many poems while still in elementary school, and he also wrote down folk-tales that his mother told-but he rewrote the endings according to his "fantasies". He tried to find a publisher for the tales, but later he "dropped the idea ". He read his poems for his fellow students, but they were never published. Once he was supposed to read for the Emperor, but then the Emperor's planned trip to Debre-Sina was cancelled and the reading never took place.

When Dannyacchew was about 13 years old, there was talk of a federation between Ethiopia and Eritrea, and Dannyacchew wrote a play on this theme, called Yalaccha gabiccha, terfo hazen biccha, "Only Grief Comes from a Mismatch." It contained many poems and was performed (only once) at Debre-Sina, with Dannyacchew acting "one or two parts. " "People liked it," Dannyacchew said. His father had bought the stage equipment (curtains, etc.).

In school, Dannyacchew read Kebede Mikael, who was a favourite (he learned Tarikinna missalé by heart), Mekonnin Indalkacchew and Hiruy Welde-Sillasé 1. These authors made him fond of literature, but he said that they did not influence him as a writer -- he maintained that he was "born a writer and started to write early." His parents encouraged him to be himself and did not try to influence him unduly in any direction.

Dannyacchew's parents were comparatively well off, he said, but Dannyacchew did not understand why there should be a difference between himself and other boys. He wanted his friends to stay with him, and once a friend stayed for three or four weeks and another for six to seven months; but his father would allow it only if they earned their keep. When his friends

proved lazy - and they were also a bad influence on Dannyacchew, and they stole, he said - his father objected. For this reason, Dannyacchew once ran away from home to the town of Debre-Birhan and stayed there for about six months "together with these kids," because he could not understand his father's attitude towards them. (This experience may be reflected in Dannyacchew's later play, *Sew alle biyyé*, "I thought that there were real men, or people (alive).") Otherwise his parents were "liberal and tolerant." He was allowed to catch and keep dogs and cats and other animals and keep them at home - and he liked "wild cats from the forest" rather than "tame cats." His mother was "simple and loving." His father had a gramophone and danced with him and "had some style".

..... His father insisted that Dannyacchew should have an education; he checked his exercise books and followed his progress. His mother objected to his teacher beating her son, "but the teacher did not care." If it had not been for his father, Dannyacchew thinks, that he might have "turned out someone else." His father lived until he was 78 years old and died three or four months after Hayle-Sillasé was deposed. He had stayed in hospital for over six months before he was brought home, and there he died four days later. His "motto" had been: "Unless you are subject to (or a servant of) yourself, you will be(come) a slave of others, or of someone else."

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Dannyacchew attended secondary school at Kotebe through the end of Grade 11. While there, he wrote poems about school life. At the end of 8 th grade, he stayed at the Teferi Mekonnin School during the holidays, and during three months there he wrote *Sew alle biyyé*, a play that was "not much changed" for the printed version which came out in 1950 Ethiopian Calendar (1957/8 G.C.). It has never been performed on stage.

Just before the end of the 11th grade, Dannyacchew got diphtheria and was severely ill for two or three months. He was brought to the Menilek II School clinic, but they did not have any medicine to cure him. His throat was totally blocked, and he could not take any food. His parents were called, and for about a month and a half, they expected him to die. He also expected to die - he "knew" he was dying, and this made a lasting impression on him. Nobody was allowed near him, and even his parents he could only see through a glass pane. Then new medicines were discovered and used for testing on critical cases. This cured Dannyacchew, and he survived. It was like coming "out as from a tomb," it was "like being born again," he commented. After he had got better, he spent another fortnight in bed at Kotebe, and then he went home to Debre-Sina. He did not want to return to Kotebe after this experience, and instead he joined a one-year teacher training course which a Mr. Carmichael had started at Kokebe-Sibah (along the "Kotebé road"). At the end of this year, he sat for both the exams of that course and for the 12th grade exams for completing secondary school at the same time; and he also sat for the London matriculation examination as a third series of exams, and he passed them all. He wanted to have

the teacher training course so as to be able to get a job, and when he started to teach Amharic in the top grades of the Medhane-Alem Secondary School in Harer, he was paid 225 birr a month, rather than the "normal" 180 birr. He taught for two years, and both years his graduating students obtained "top marks" in Amharic. During this time he wrote a play, *Seqeqenish isat*, which means approximately "Fire Is Consuming Me because I Have not Got You (Your Love)". (The word *seqeqen* signifies "days filled with futile hope.") He staged the play himself at the school where he was teaching, and he said that it was "very successful." The play was also staged at the Technical School in Addis Abeba where he taught Amharic next for another two years, and at the end of 1951 Ethiopian Calendar (1959 G.C.) it was shown at the Hayle-Sillase I Theatre. He used the money he earned from the performances of this play to get his previous play, *Sew alle biyyé*, printed; but *Seqeqenish isat* has never been published.

About this time he also started writing for the newspapers *Addis Zemen* (a daily) and *Yezareyitu İtyopiya* (a weekly paper). He wrote mostly about literature - about books he had read, plays he had seen, or about film shows that he had attended. He also took part in a "controversy about revenue" for authors, which went on in the papers then. His position was that authors should be paid better - which went against the current practice of theatres taking most of the profits for themselves.

Although he was working, he did not want to marry and take the responsibility for a family yet; he wanted rather to continue his education. He could satisfy his sexual needs without marriage. Even in this area *Danniyacchew* started early. At the age of 12, he started playing at love-making with a 14 year-old servant girl hired to look after the children ("a kind of governess"), but as neither he nor she knew how to make love, it amounted only to caresses and he lying on top of her but without "penetration" - although she wanted both that and a child from the experience, murmuring *lefré belew*, "let it be for fruit," i.e. a child. Due to "ignorance" in the field, his sex life "proper" did not start until he was 14; even that was perhaps a bit early compared to most Ethiopian boys - but not much so.

In 1953 Ethiopian Calendar (1960 G.C.) he joined University College (which was founded in 1950 G.C. and was renamed the Hayle- Sillase I University in (1960 G.C.). He studied for four years and obtained a "general" BA degree. First he studied "humanities" for two years, and then, when Ethiopian languages and literature started to be taught, he studied in this field (and it included Geez and Arabic) for another two years. The latter two years he appreciated particularly, because "it was part of my aspiration. "

At university, he started to write protest poems, and the poems in his published collection, *Ambwa belu*, were written during these four years; they are all "protest poems," he said. He was not the only one who wrote protest poems; actually, the protest poems produced by students caused that the "Emperor" closed , the boarding at the university, and from then on all

students became day students (but they received grants to cover additional expenses). Protest poems dealt with "social issues," such as (and especially) land reform ("land to the tiller"), "justice for the poor," "equal pay for equal work," "equal employment in government jobs" - giving the same chance to all irrespective of tribal background 2. Dannyacchew "grew up with all nationalities in Yifat," and he said he had "no tribal feelings." He thought that there is no pure tribe in Ethiopia, but tribal identity "goes by language." Most of his family "seems to be Amhara," but he said that his father's mother spoke the Oromo language fluently, although she was brought up in Gemu Gofa, and she may have been (wholly or partly) Oromo.

Students at the university also protested against the common boast of "3,000 years of history" among Ethiopian officials, because "no progress was made" during all this period. The protest poems were more "progressive" or "reformist" than "revolutionary," he said.

Dannyacchew's literary activity was mostly in the field of poetry at the university. He did research work on all forms of Geez poetry, and he wrote about it as a fourth year student and later as a university staff member. After graduation he became graduate assistant (the best students were usually thus employed), then assistant lecturer, and then lecturer.

In 1960 Ethiopian Calendar (1967/8 G.C.), about three years after he graduated, he wrote and staged a play called Tibelch, "You Are the Most Wanted, or the Best" (it is a girl's name, short for Tibelchallesh), after the heroine of the play. It was shown twice at the Hayle-Sillase I Theatre. He taught at the university already in his fourth year, as a student lecturer, and he taught for four or five years afterwards, until 1961 Ethiopian Calendar (1969 G.C.). Both his plays which had been staged in Addis Abeba, Seqqenish isat and Tibelch, were reviewed in newspapers in the capital.

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At the beginning of 1962 Ethiopian Calendar (1969 G.C.), Dannyacchew received a three-year scholarship to study creative writing at an "international writers' workshop" at Iowa University in the United States. It was a course for prospective professional writers ("not teachers"), and most of the students had English as their mother tongue, with only a few having it as their second language; among these latter was Dannyacchew. It led to a Master of Fine Arts degree, and part of the requirements was to write a manuscript that was publishable. Dannyacchew earned his Master's degree after two years in the English department, before passing on to the creative course proper. After he had completed his studies at the end of 1964 Ethiopian Calendar (1972 G.C.), he returned to Ethiopia. He had by then published two stories, "Mammite" and one other. His graduation work was a collection of eight short stories in English, but they had not been

published by the time of our talks as he wanted to add more stories to the collection. He thought that these stories could be published at "any time."

Back in Ethiopia, he taught at the university in Addis Abeba for a year , and then he "had a problem with university officials." The "problem" started when he discovered that a student who did not even attend classes, and particularly not Dannyacchew's fourth year classes, had been given "22 credits," to which Dannyacchew objected. The university officials "tried to compromise and drop the case," but Dannyacchew refused to leave the matter at that. He was accused of wanting to "destroy the name of the university," and he was given "six months' notice to leave," the time stipulated in his contract for dismissal. The student concerned was "a person of high family who still has a high job," but after this "case" he had to "study properly," and he earned his degree in the proper way "two years later ." Aklllu Habte, the university president, "was behind it," he said, and "after the Revolution he was very afraid" of Dannyacchew, "so he has now run out of the country and has an important job with the World Bank in the United States," he commented. He added that Aklllu got a "red carpet reception when he came here about four years ago because of the loans Ethiopia wants."

Four and a half years would pass before Dannyacchew Werqu worked for the government again. In about four or five months he got "used to being without work," and for the next year and a half he wrote Adefris, his most substantial literary creation. In our talks, Dannyacchew referred to himself as a "one work author. "Although this is not literally true, it shows the importance he attaches to this novel. He probably considers his previous production as a preparation for this book. It is written in very complicated Amharic, but he says that this is how Amharic is or was spoken in his home area. He got money from his parents and from friends to publish it, and he did all the proof-reading, etc., himself. Adefris was printed in 10,000 copies³, and it must have sold reasonably well as it is now hardly possible to obtain a copy, even a second-hand one.

His next book was written in English, because, he said, it was too critical of some aspects of traditional Ethiopian society to be published in Ethiopia, at least in Amharic. It was called The Thirteenth Sun⁴, and it was accepted by Heinemann for publication "at once" and came out in 1973 G.C.; it has been "reprinted several times." It was also translated into German in two versions, a hard-cover edition in West Germany and a East Germany and it has been translated into.....to obtain a copy of this last version.

Then he started writing for all the newspapers in the country, in Amharic and English. He wrote on the traditional church poetry called qiné, about the technique of novel writing 5, and he wrote reviews of books published - mostly "dime novels."

Next, he taught "literature and poetry" for about a year and a half at the École Normale Supérieure (which was later nationalized and converted into the Black Lion Secondary School). Although he read French in secondary school, Dannyacchew said that he knew little French and felt that he was getting "rusty" even in English "as I never use it much." At this time he also started working part-time in the Ethiopian Standards Institute, where he was still working when I interviewed him. That was also where I had met him for the first time in 1974, when he gave me my first copy of Adefris, a book that took me several months to read, and understand, in the process using a dictionary oftener than has been the case with any other book in any language 6.

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Then the Revolution came, and in Miyazya 1966 (April or May 1974) Dannyacchew started to work for the Ethiopian Standards Institute full- time. In the same year, he became external examiner for BA degree candidates (the first year he examined only one student), and four years later for MA degree candidates, at the Addis Abeba University. He held this assignment until the end of 1977 Ethiopian Calendar (1985 G.C.).

Dannyacchew Werqu told me that he took "a low profile during the Revolution." He had written some children's books, two of which had been published by the Ministry of Education on Children's Day in 1970 or 1971 Ethiopian Calendar; and he had edited two other books published on the same day. He wrote a "guide to creative fiction" (in complicated Amharic) which was published in 1977 Ethiopian Calendar (1984/5 G.C.). He also wrote a book on Amharic idioms together with Dr. Amsalu Aklilu, which he expected to be out a couple of months after I interviewed him. (When it eventually appeared, it was many months later - in July 1987 G.C.) He had also prepared and edited a dictionary of scientific and technical terms for the Ethiopian Standards Institute, but this was not available on the open market.

At the time of our talks, Dannyacchew was writing "but not publishing;" and he did "not plan to publish." He said that the pace of the Revolution was "faster than my writing," and the Revolution was becoming "more fictitious than my fiction." He did not think that that was a suitable time for publishing what he was writing. Almost as soon as he had written something, he found that what he had written had become reality - his creative imagination was overtaken by events. He felt certain that what he had written (but not published) would, "after the Revolution," become "historical documents." He said that he was always writing. "Once a writer, always a

writer," he quipped. Writing "is not something one can stop. "At that time he was deeply involved in "Studying society - the humanitarian rather than the political side of society." He was observing how society was becoming more totalitarian. Earlier, his dreams and fantasies had been "tangled up with reformist views" he then cherished. Now he wanted to "see people as they really are - as they think, live and feel." He said that at the time of our talks he was beginning to understand that "there is more to man than politics - he is much more than a political animal."

Dannyacchew says that what he wants to say in his books is that "we are together in this country, and being together we have our differences, and yet what guarantees our survival is the values we have accumulated through generations. And this (our values) we cannot just throw out overnight. We cannot overnight replace the values we have been experiencing and feeling throughout our lives. Those values that we have built up through generations are our driving force, and new driving forces take time to become part of our feeling and experience. This is the central thing or theme of my (literary) work."

Tribes do not matter to him. "We have created certain values and a certain society where all contributed and (their contributions) have become part of us - it is not the contribution of only one particular nation(ality) but of us all. This (culture?) is what makes me tick. Without this, life does not make sense to me. It takes time to make this part of our personal life and it cannot be done (created? or undone?) overnight. I wish it (the creation or change of values, etc.) could be done overnight, but no. We are still backward and developing, and we must change, but what we have achieved in 3,000 years cannot be replaced easily. Spiritually we have developed, but not otherwise. Artistically and aesthetically we have not yet opened our eyes. To become part of our life, we must integrate new ideas with our everyday life. We can make people observe and study; but even then, if they do not feel with these new things, they do not make use of them."

Then he talked about his main literary work, Adefris, whose chief character is also called Adefris. "Adefris is progressive - but he should be progressive with other people. He rationalizes too much. He is not a practical person. Instead of acting, he rationalizes. Rationalization is good but with limitations. He (Adefris) is like people we have today. The Revolution tries to awaken people overnight, but that cannot be done - although I wish it could be done. Even to be a nationalist one has to trust the masses, they say. But what does that mean? Does it mean that the masses can advance overnight? Our people can cope with change, but not too fast, not so fast. There was no other way (out) for Adefris than death - he was too superficial. He could not see reality around him - he speaks one language and people around him another, (when it concerns) who could do something about this country. That is why we fail during this Revolution - we are

like Adefris. Adefris is the superfluous man in the 1960s (G.C.). Old people had values - they died for their religion, their land, their country. Now we have no such values. If these (values) are ignored - what values are left? There is nothing that is really part of people's lives."

In Adefris, Dannyacchew Werqu tries to depict traditional and modern Ethiopia - the (two) ways of life in conflict, he said. "Those (old) people want to live because they have values as driving forces. What makes us want to live? We lack such values, or the values are not integrated and a driving force (in our lives) - it is only intellectualism but no more. Therefore Adefris dies - he is not whole, he is fragmented and divorced from society. Our forefathers were actively participating in practical things. (The main female character) Siwené (in Adefris) is traditional Ethiopia, and Adefris loves her in a way, but he loves Roman (the second main female character in Adefris) more - she is the type that came after the Italian invasion (and occupation of Ethiopia, 1935-1941); she is 'progressive' (in her way), and in spite of her prostitution he prefers her. She becomes his mistress. He wants (or feels attracted to) the purity of Siwené, but he prefers the fleshiness of modernity (represented by Roman), and he is suspended between the two. He cannot live without getting the two together. Therefore he is a tragic figure. Time was not ripe enough to unite the two trends in one person." Weldu in Adefris is a "forward-looking" merchant. He regards the feudal as backward. He can adopt and adapt. He knows people's drawbacks, and he sympathizes with Adefris, but he knows that his ideas cannot be realized overnight. Weldu sees the reality of both worlds, and he tries to and succeeds in uniting the old and the new. He is a whole personality but not forceful enough to bring about change. The Marxist-Leninists hate Weldu." As Dannyacchew is "not a Marxist," he can sympathize with Weldu, he said.

Dannyacchew became eager and absorbed in the problems he spoke about above. I have kept his words as closely as I got them down, even when he repeated himself. He talked about problems that are central to him and his writings, and they throw light on one of the more significant books in Amharic.

Dannyacchew Werqu was for some time chairman of the board of Kurraz, the government publishing press. During the "upheaval" after the publication of Oromay by Be'alu Girma (described in the biography of that author), he and the whole board were dismissed. He had advised Be'alu to make several changes in the book, but most of these suggestions were not accepted, with tragic consequences, he said. (Be'alu "vanished" a few months later.) He added that he considered Be'alu Girma as a "a kind of Adefris," who had lost his hopes and in the end also his fears. He wrote what was "common knowledge in Addis Abeba at the time, but perhaps he underestimated the power of the printed word," he speculated.

Dannyacchew Werku is married with two children (Seyfu and Alemshet), but he is a loner, and he said that he has few friends. He does "not trust people." He counted Mengistu Lemma as one of his close friends. Creativity can be a lonely business.

PS. Recently I was informed that Dannyacchew Werqu had retired from government service in 1983 E.C. (1991 G.C.). From late 1988 (or early 1989) until 1991 he worked for the Industrial Project Service, a state-owned consultancy without a government budget (it operated on the sale of its services), where his salary was higher and his pension arrangements better. He died of food poisoning at the Yekkatit 12 Hospital on 22 Hidar 1987 (December 1994) at 7:30 a.m. Two days earlier he had eaten canned tuna-fish and been admitted to and then sent home from the same hospital after he had been told that it was "nothing serious," only "a simple food poisoning." The next day he got worse and the doctors found that he had "intestinal perforation." They would operate the next day, but he died early next morning. He was buried at the Medhane-Alem church in Debre-Sina on 23 Hidar 1987 (December 1 1994). He left behind a completed manuscript of c. 650 typed pages entitled Shout It From the Mountain Top (which his son considers his "best work,"), and he had almost completed another.

Notes

1. He added that he did not read Tobbiya by Afewerq Gebre-Iyesus until much later.
2. At the time, tribal discrimination, giving advantages to Amhara, caused people to change their names from their original "tribal" ones to Amhara ones in order to sand a better chance to secure government employment. Mengistu Hayle-Mariyam's father changed his name (and was baptized) in order to be able to join the Ethiopian army in imperial days.
3. This was a high number for the times. Sew Alle biyye had been printed in 5,000 copies, and Ambwa belu in 2,000 copies. Dannyacchew's memory of dates have been faulty as Adefris came out in 1962 E.C)
4. The title hints at a common advertisement by the Ethiopian Tourist Organization, exolling Ethiopia as the country with "13 months of sunshine," as there are 13 months in the Ethiopian Calander - 12 of 30 days each and one of 5 days (6 in leap years).
5. Much later he was to write a (complicated manual on techniques of fiction writing.

6. I read it when I was writing my Ph.D. thesis on (the basis of) Amharic literature. Even with frequent recourse to the dictionary and with an understanding of the words (the only dictionary where I found nearly all of them was the one by Desta Tekle-Weld), I did not understand all. (Some words he has made up, e.g. fiddesa, which he says means "propaganda.") At the School of Oriental-and African Studies (SOAS), London University, Girma-Sillase Asfaw, was research assistant at the time. When he read the book, he did not understand it. When I gave him the dictionary definitions of unknown words, he was able to explain the cultural and social implications of the most difficult passages to me. All the other books I used as a basis for my thesis I could understand, but Adefris would have remained a closed book for me, and for Girma-Sillase Asfaw, had it not been for our close collaboration on it. Other Ethiopians have also told me that they have problems with the book and do not understand it.

7. It seems to me that "revolutionary," socialist or Marxist would fit the context better.

8. As mentioned already, Weldu is to some extent modelled on Dannyacchew's own father.